

Observing in Settings Serving Dual Language Learners, Birth to Five

All children benefit socially, emotionally, and academically from classrooms with high-quality teacher-child interactions, as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®). Children who are Dual Language Learners benefit from additional scaffolding and individual support to get the full benefit of high-quality teacher-child interactions. The purpose of this job aid is to increase observers' awareness of some of the unique characteristics they may observe in multilingual classrooms, which can vary based on the approach used by the program.

Recommended Best Practices for Observations

BEFORE THE OBSERVATION:

- Do not make assumptions about the children or teachers you will observe based on their language(s) or cultures.
- Collect information by asking the program
 - What languages do the children and adults speak?
 - Which teachers are bilingual or multilingual?
 - What is the classroom's language composition?
 - What language approach is used in the program? Is it balanced? Is it English Language Development with home language support?
 - If it is a balanced language approach, what percentage of instruction is in English versus the other language?
 - If it is an English Language Development approach, what percentage of instruction is in English and how is home language supported?
- Ensure a linguistic match between the observer and the primary language of instruction in the classroom.
- Be aware that some interactions may be influenced by cultural nuances.

DURING THE OBSERVATION:

- Pay attention to nonverbal communication:
 - Teachers may provide feedback to both verbal and nonverbal communication from children, keying into children's cues by inviting them to demonstrate their understanding by drawing pictures, pointing to a visual or prop, using gestures, or using their home language to make their thinking visible and understood. (These strategies exemplify effective teaching within the Toddler and Pre-K CLASS dimension of Quality of Feedback.)
 - Teachers may use exaggerated facial expressions, visuals, and concrete objects to illustrate an idea or concept. (These strategies exemplify effective teaching within the Pre-K dimension of Instructional Learning Formats and the Toddler and Pre-K dimension of Language Modeling.)
 - Do not assume that less responsive children have disengaged; they may be confused because they don't understand or may be taking additional time to process language.
- Watch for scaffolding and individualized support:
 - Teachers may need to provide additional wait time for children to process language, organize their thoughts, and respond to prompts. (This strategy exemplifies effective teaching within the dimension of Teacher Sensitivity.)
 - Teachers may interact one-on-one or in small groups for children to practice English and their home language through various activities, such as working together to complete a puzzle or brainstorming ideas about what they think will happen next in a storybook.
 - Teachers follow up on children's verbal and nonverbal communications to expand learning, understanding, and encourage continued participation. (This strategy exemplifies effective teaching within the dimension of Quality of Feedback.)
 - Follow interactions and include coding if you see the teacher demonstrating what a word means by showing pictures or real objects to help children make meaning or reinforce the meaning of the word. Remember, vocabulary that may seem basic for an English-speaking child may be advanced language for another child. (This strategy exemplifies effective teaching within the dimension of Language Modeling.)
- Listen for use of English and home languages:
 - Listen for back-and-forth conversations among children with and without the teacher, regardless of the language spoken. All children, even if they can only produce a limited number of words in English, should still be having conversations. (These interactions fall under the dimension of Language Modeling.)
 - Listen for the teacher to expand on children's language (both English and home language) and support the use of new words.
 - Note if teachers encourage children to use both their home language and English to explain their thinking and support children's efforts by affirming and extending it. (This strategy exemplifies effective teaching within the dimension of Language Modeling.)
 - Listen for whether teachers encourage language with various strategies, including questions that encourage more than a one-word response.
 - Try to understand the content and context of the communication even if you don't understand the language.

WHILE CODING:

- Frequently refer to the CLASS manual to ensure you're considering the correct indicators and behavioral markers when assigning codes.
- Remember, even if the teachers and children occasionally communicate in a language you don't understand, you can code the mere act of conversing as long as there was a continued verbal exchange between teacher and child.
- Remember that the descriptions in the CLASS manual provide examples of what interactions may look like for each dimension and indicator. However, these are not the only ways that interactions play out. Focus on the intent of the dimension and indicators by referring to the definition on the face page and the key words in the manual and asking yourself if the interactions meet that intent.