

Supporting Emergent Multilingual Learners

Best Practices for Prekindergarten Classrooms and Programs



A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR PREKINDERGARTEN
ADMINISTRATORS & TEACHERS

Office of Early Learning



Best Practices for Supporting EMLs in Prekindergarten Programs

In New York State, there is a growing number of prekindergarten students who are considered Emergent Multilingual Learners (EML), bringing with them a diversity of language, culture, and experiences that can enrich the programs and schools they attend. EML students benefit from differentiated, responsive, and culturally affirming practices to support their development as they enter the world of school. As educators, we can connect these previous experiences to the learning that takes place in classrooms. According to NAEYC, "Early childhood education settings are often among children's first communities beyond their families. These settings offer important contexts for children's learning and fostering the development of positive social identities" (NAEYC, 2024). Language and culture are significant elements of one's identity and children at this age are establishing who they are. This guide is created to support programs and classrooms in implementing practices grounded in evidence for developing language and literacy through culturally responsive approaches, especially as it is defined in the Culturally Sustaining Education Framework (CR-S).



Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Classroom Environments

Like all students, EML students benefit from environments that are culturally and linguistically welcoming, affirming, and responsive to their identities and learning needs. Classrooms that establish a warm and welcoming tone communicate to learners that they belong and that their language efforts and errors are recognized as approximations, rather than mistakes to be corrected. These classrooms also recognize that learners who are early in their English language learning may not produce language and will not insist that language output occurs, honoring what is known as a "silent period," a span of time when the child may not yet produce language but is building a comprehensive base of language (Krashen, 1982, p. 26). The EML student is indeed absorbing the new language from their environment and building their receptive language skills.

Best Practices for Supporting EMLs in Prekindergarten Programs



Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Communication with Parents & Families

Building relationships and establishing regular communication with parents and families is a necessary building block to the success of all students. It is important for educators to remember that places of learning are a meeting point for cultures, where adults too bring multiple facets of identity, along with unique experiences and perspectives. When communicating with multilingual families, it is important to provide equitable access to information, updates, and avenues for two-way communication that positions families to receive and share important details and questions about their child. Technology, translators, and most importantly, an asset-based perspective will support efforts in engaging with families. When we strengthen our communication with families, we affirm that we care about all languages and cultures and celebrate diversity in our school community.



Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Curriculum & Instruction

Supporting EML students through curriculum and instruction recognizes that language and literacy development requires intentional scaffolding and adjustments in the classroom to increase access for learning. Prekindergarten is a highly play-based, social setting, and by focusing on students' strengths and developing rich language environments, EML students can experience language growth across the school year. "Research shows that continued use of the home language actually facilitates acquisition of subsequent languages, including English" (Pandey, 2012a). Therefore, leveraging the use of students' home languages and cultures will serve as a resource for language development and building conceptual understandings. A strong oral language, in any language, lays the foundation for strong literacy skills to emerge; therefore, all social interactions using home languages should be encouraged.

Best Practices for Administrators

Supporting EML Students Through the Classroom and School Environment



Ensure the utilization of the EML Language Profile for home language screening upon registration

- Share information with all necessary staff members
- Retain a copy in the student's file



Create a welcoming climate that affirms multilingualism and multiculturalism

- Provide professional learning for all staff, including office and support staff that supports their ability to be inclusive of all families
- Guarantee accessibility for parents to relevant classroom and program information available in the students' home languages



Create a culturally and linguistically diverse school and classroom environment that encourages all languages to be used and spoken

- Learn different vocabulary in students' home languages and incorporate this language into the program environment
- Promote multilingual and multicultural displays by using multilingual signage with visuals



Recognize the current and emerging diversity within the school and local community and view it as a resource for learning and expanding students' educational experiences

- Review the school, district, and community demographic data to identify the student population
- Build relationships with community organizations that support school programming and curriculum
- Create opportunities to center student, family, and community voices

Best Practices for Teachers

Supporting EML Students Through the Classroom and School Environment



Familiarize yourself with the students' language and cultural background and experiences

- Converse with parents/families throughout the year at conferences, meetings, events, etc.



Encourage all students to be accepting, nurturing, and inclusive of the use of all languages in the classroom by modelling appreciation and curiosity for languages

- Use culturally relevant texts, visuals, and encourage students to ask questions
- Use role-play scenarios or problem-solving circles to help students connect to one another
- Have personal conversations to understand the student's perspective and to support students in developing empathy and an open mind



Learn different vocabulary in students' home languages and incorporate them into the daily classroom routines

- Morning meeting, transitions, dismissal routines, etc.



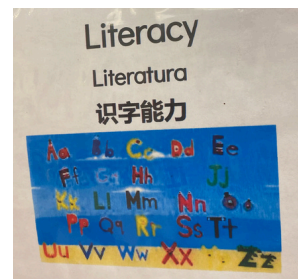
Create an atmosphere that accepts mistakes and views them as learning experiences and indicators of students' development

- Promote a growth mindset so teachers and students feel safe to experiment with their language repertoire and learn new skills in different contexts and activities (e.g., individual, small group, whole group)



Label all materials, centers, furniture pieces, and supplies with a word and a clear picture

- Add students' home languages to these labels to reflect the language diversity in the classroom



Best Practices for Teachers

Supporting EML Students Through the Classroom and School Environment



Use visuals and keywords to teach classroom-related vocabulary and expressions within the classroom

- Use a daily schedule with visuals. Consider using an arrow or marker to show what part of the day it is and to support transitions
- Create portable visuals for directions that could be attached to a lanyard
- Place visuals and language expressions around the room to aid with communication



Establish concrete routines and explicitly teach them to students, supporting EML students with visuals of directions or steps along the way



Incorporate materials throughout the classroom that reflect the languages and cultures of students

- Include texts within the classroom in multiple languages
- Include diverse toys, dolls, manipulatives, and other materials



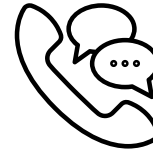
Best Practices for Administrators

Communicating with Parents & Families



Learn about the languages your students' families use and ask which language and method of communication they are most comfortable using

- Keep in mind that families may have varying levels of literacy in their home languages, so providing a written translation may not always be supportive



Learn about the students' culture to identify the most respectful ways of interacting with families based on awareness of communication norms and preferences



Utilize the same communication platforms across classrooms and/or all district and CBO-operated sites to ensure consistent parent communication



Provide the use of translation services for families for all communication, especially, but not limited to:

- Open house
- School events
- Parent/teacher conferences
- One-on-one meetings
- Calls from the nurse or health office to communicate any health concerns
- Communication from the principal or any other staff member



Ensure families feel safe and empowered to contact the school with questions, ideas, concerns, etc., about their child



Best Practices for Teachers

Communicating with Parents & Families



Learn about the languages your students' families use and ask which language and method of communication they are most comfortable using

- Keep in mind that families may have varying levels of literacy in their home languages, so providing a written translation may not always be supportive
- Use the information gathered from families regarding their language and communication style to ensure any and all class communication is provided



When planning for family meetings, conferences, and classroom events, coordinate with administration for the provision of translation services or apps to aid in communication with families



Learn about the students' cultures to identify the most respectful ways of interacting with families. Build an understanding of communication norms, traditions, and celebrations



Communicate with families about instructional themes, units, and learning experiences to support conversations about school at home

- Share copies of the schedule with families in their preferred language to support conversations at home and build familiarity for the student
- Share vocabulary words and pictures related to the unit of study

Best Practices for Administrators

Curriculum and Instruction



Establish a PLC that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the overall performance of students



Provide teachers with ongoing opportunities to collaborate and plan lessons and units that incorporate scaffolds for language development



Provide all teaching staff with appropriate professional development opportunities that directly support language development



Allow all teaching staff to observe one another to strengthen their knowledge of best practices for supporting EMLs in the classroom

- Consider consulting with the district's ENL Department for assistance in best practices for supporting EMLs in the classroom



Ensure the curriculum has rich knowledge-building opportunities for EML students and promotes interaction to support language development



Best Practices for Teachers

Curriculum and Instruction



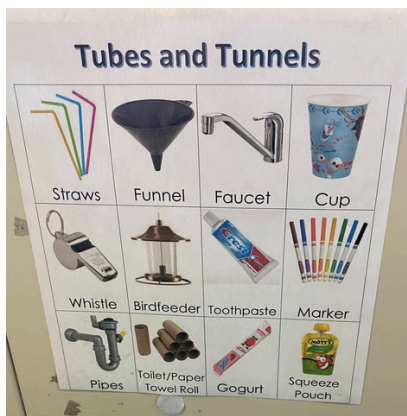
Incorporate visuals, gestures, dramatizing language, shared experiences, tiered questioning, and real-life materials to develop language development

- Use either-or questions to aid in students' understanding
- Use follow-up questions to elicit more language



Incorporate academic vocabulary in the student's home language throughout all content areas to bridge prior knowledge to new language and concepts

- Counting in Math
- Vocabulary related to Math, Science, Social Studies, ELA etc.
- Vocabulary related to special areas such as Physical Education, Music, Art, STEAM, Library etc. if applicable



Use wait-time and be mindful your rate of speech is appropriately paced

- After asking students a question, pause for at least three extra seconds to allow students time to think and respond
- Sufficient wait time allows EMLs to process new language and information



Best Practices for Teachers

Curriculum and Instruction



Use read-alouds to intentionally strengthen and develop language

- Carefully consider which texts will be read aloud multiple times
- Plan connections from these texts to learning centers by selecting appropriate materials that reinforce language and unit concepts
- Make text sets around units of study, concepts, ideas, content, etc.
- When possible, have texts available in the students' home languages
- Intentionally name objects within the text to reinforce key vocabulary and introduce new vocabulary to strengthen the students' English development
- Create routines for students to share their thinking during the read-aloud



To support oral language development, provide an abundance of opportunities for students to interact and talk across different instructional settings

- Explicitly teach daily classroom language
- Encourage students to use their home languages whenever possible
- Repeat new concepts or vocabulary frequently across multiple settings and content areas
- Provide students opportunities to practice explaining new concepts or using new vocabulary words
- Consider which words will need to be explicitly taught as it relates to the theme
- Integrate vocabulary and language expressions into centers with pictures, words, and text



Sample Resources for Supporting EML Students

Bilingual Education & English as a
New Language



**NYSED Office of Bilingual
Education and World Languages
(OBEWL)**



**Understanding, Validating, and
Building on the Language Practices
of Emergent Multilingual Learners
(EMLs) in Prekindergarten - A Guide
for PLCs**

Resources (Birth - Grade 3)



NYSED Office of Early Learning



Reading Rockets Book Finder Page



**National Association for Bilingual
Education**

A Protocol for Emergent Multilingual Learners



**NYSED Emergent Multilingual
Learners in PreK programs**



8 Strategies for Preschool ELLs



**The Office of
English Language Acquisition**



**Professional Learning Guides to
Support DLLs**



NAEYC Dual Language Learners Page

References



Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Statement. (April 2019). NAEYC. Retrieved April 2024, from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity-position>



Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press Inc.



Pandey, A. (2014). What is the role of home language learning and maintenance in supporting successful outcomes in English language learning and literacy? In *Young Dual Language Learners: A Guide for PreK-3 Leaders* (pp. 64-65). essay, Caslon Publishing.

