



More Strategies for Supporting Children in Superdiverse Settings

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This is the second of two articles offering strategies for teaching children in classrooms where a variety of home languages are spoken.

All across the country, teachers welcome to their classrooms children who speak a number of different languages and are just beginning to learn English. In these superdiverse classrooms, teachers need strategies to ensure the children experience *personalized oral language learning* (POLL).

Personalized oral language learning

In the December 2018/January 2019 issue of *TYC*, we provided POLL strategies for engaging families of young dual language learners and enriching the classroom environment with examples of the children's languages and cultures (see naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/dec2018). Here, we offer POLL strategies for fostering conversations and interactions with children.

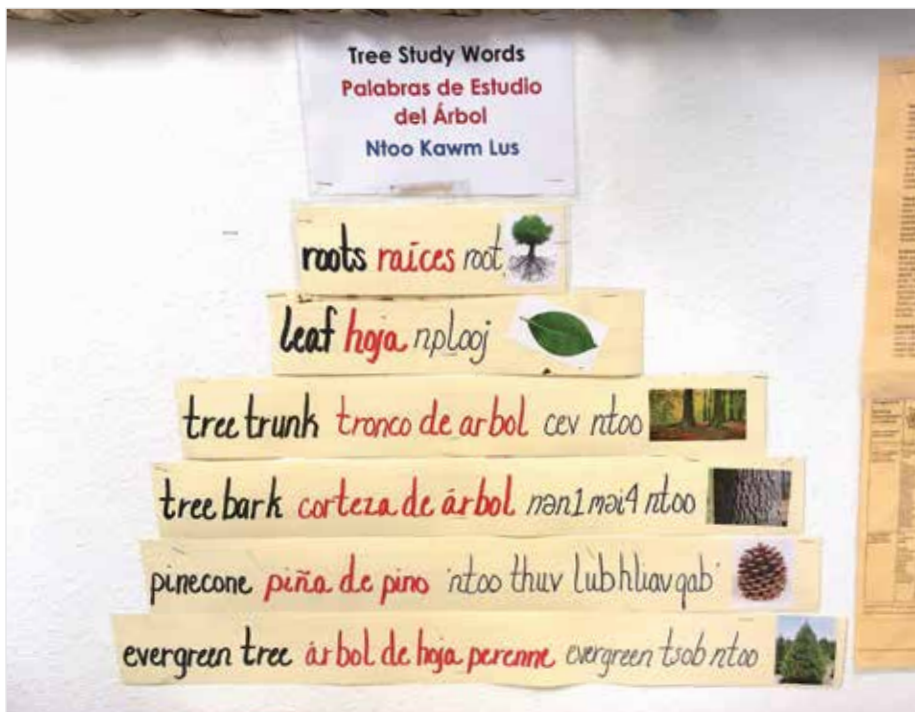
Conversation and interaction

Keep in mind that it's really important for children to see, hear, and speak their home languages throughout the day. They need to see books and environmental print in their languages

all through the classroom. They should hear teachers use key words and phrases in their home languages, even when the teachers don't speak the languages well—or at all!

All teachers can learn a few phrases in each child's home language to say hello and goodbye, ask children how they are feeling, and generally engage with them—for example, *please* and *thank you*, praise, encouragement, directions, and expressions of interest and surprise. The children also need opportunities to speak their home languages in conversations with fluent adults, say, family or community volunteers or staff members.

Using children's home languages for behavior management and emotional support seems to come most easily. But don't forget to ensure the languages are used intentionally for instructional purposes, like previewing and reviewing new concepts and key vocabulary words before introducing them in English. (These are activities that parents and volunteers can carry out.) Teaching in this way will improve dual language learners' comprehension of lessons presented in English, increase their ability to learn important preschool concepts, and help them bridge what they know in their home languages and what they need to learn in English.



Try these key strategies:

Preview materials and concepts in children’s home languages, when possible:

- Write and explain *intentional messages*—these help children to understand the purpose of each lesson or learning experience, and they incorporate content vocabulary.

Use new English vocabulary throughout the day and across all domains:

- Represent new vocabulary in multiple ways—pictures/photographs, diagrams, physical gestures, movement, drawings, etc.
- Schedule daily vocabulary activities in groups of no more than three to five children. They may include neighborhood walks, mealtime conversations, and targeted daily times focused on language activities.
- Lead the class in fun theme- and vocabulary-related chants, songs, and poems.
- Avoid simultaneously translating during instruction.
- Accept children’s language mixing—that is, their code switching.

Add a translation step to your instructional planning:

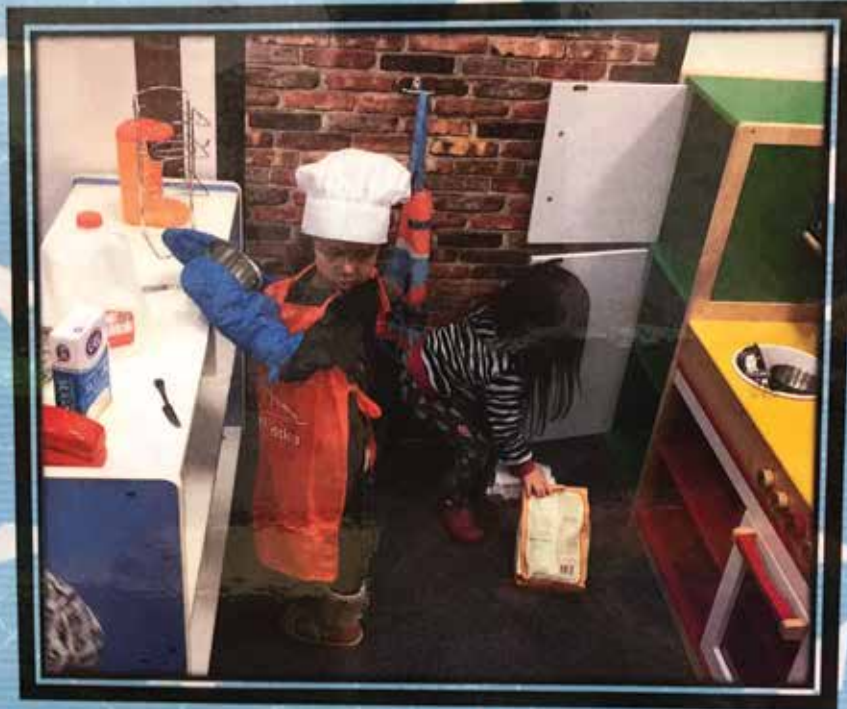
- Find fluent volunteers or use an online translation tool (like Google Translate), and practice the pronunciation of vocabulary in other languages.
- Ask the children to help translate and to teach key words for everyone to learn. This communicates the value of learning multiple languages. It also lets children feel pride in their home languages!

Try to provide fluent models for each home language—invite volunteers and family and community members who are fluent in the children’s languages to lead reading circles for new storybooks and to have informal conversations with children.

Read aloud books in English multiple times to give children several opportunities to understand and enjoy the story:

- Encourage the children to act out stories using English during repeated interactive readings.
- Lead a story walk (that is, flip through the book’s pages and illustrations and highlight key parts of the story) using words and phrases gathered from the children and their families in their home languages.





Dramatic Play
Khoom Ua Yeeb Yam

Área de Dramática
Rin Aebbthoamada

Manraj, a native Punjabi speaker fluent in English, is an assistant preschool teacher in a multilingual classroom. He selects *Little Owl Lost*, by Chris Haughton, for its short text and its simple but interesting vocabulary that aligns with the children's English language skills. He asks all the families to use and talk in their own languages about the key words from the book.

Later, Manraj takes a small group of five children on a story walk through the book. He holds up the book, reads the title, points to the cover picture, and asks, "What is an owl?" When no one answers, he asks, "I wonder what the word for owl is in Spanish? Or in Vietnamese?" Pablo whispers, "*Tecolote*," and Ahn calls out, "*Chim cú!*" Manraj responds, "Yes, owl means *chim cú* in Vietnamese and *tecolote* in Spanish. Let's all repeat: OWL." He continues in the same way with key words on the rest of the preselected pages.

Hold a daily dialogue with each child to stimulate frequent story-centered conversations, using questions at the child's language level. Offer prompts to support the child's responses, and accept mixed language use.

- Build on a child's responses using more complex grammar and unusual words in a way that follows and expands the child's interest and curiosity.
- Use repetitive phrases and use materials such as props, photographs, and illustrations to encourage peer-to-peer story retelling and the sequencing of essential plot elements in English. See an example of this strategy in action—children using a felt board—in this video: <https://bit.ly/2PMESf6>.

Plan the curriculum based on thematic units that immerse children in specific, related topics so they have time to grasp essential concepts and internalize and use key vocabulary.

- Use intentional messages, as you did in the preview, to reinforce the unit's big ideas and key vocabulary.

The teacher hears a child sharing that his uncle is coming to visit this week from Colombia. He is flying in a large airplane for many hours. The teacher asks the child to share his news with the group. Later she notices the children building airplanes in the block area. She develops a lesson focused on airplanes and displays the following intentional message: *Airplanes are powerful machines.*

- Schedule daily vocabulary activities during center time, neighborhood walks, and mealtime conversations, in small groups of no more than three to five children, using gestures, props, and photographs to convey meaning.

Conclusion

When you apply the POLL strategies as field-tested steps that lead to overall language development, you turn children's home languages into tools for learning (rather than obstacles to learning). Meeting the needs of dual language learners in superdiverse preschool settings becomes a welcome opportunity to promote activities and interactions that raise the quality of learning for all children!

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Note: This article builds on "Many Languages, One Teacher: Supporting Language and Literacy Development for Preschool Dual Language Learners," by Elizabeth S. Magruder, Whitcomb W. Hayslip, Linda M. Espinosa, and Carola Matera, in the March 2013 issue of *Young Children*. Based on feedback we received from teachers, we expanded the strategies we described in that article to more fully support young dual language learners in attaining the benefits of full bilingualism.

Photographs: Courtesy of Carola Oliva-Olson

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