

Working with Dual Language Learners



We realize that America is a culturally diverse country with many languages from around the world being spoken in homes. More and more, children are coming to preschool needing to acquire English as a second language. In addition to learning English, these children also need to be developing other important skills in the other domains (social emotional, cognitive, physical, creative art, etc.). Teaching these skills can be a challenge, especially in diverse communities where multiple home languages may be present.

To help address our dual language learners (DLLs), FunShine Express has added Dual Language Learners indicators to our Early Learning and Development Continuum. While it is important for DLLs to acquire English so they will be successful students once they reach kindergarten, it is also important to support language development in their home language. The end goals for our DLLs are for them to acquire the ability to comprehend and communicate in both languages by the time they reach kindergarten.

There are many ways to go about supporting DLLs in a classroom. On one end of the spectrum, content can be taught in both English and the home language with both languages being spoken equally in the classroom. There are several challenges that might arise from this approach, the most important being that you may not be fluent in the home language of a child. You may also live in an area where more than one home language is being represented in your classroom and community. On the other end of the spectrum, content is taught in English, but children would be exposed to vocabulary that would support the acquisition of the home language as well.

The FunShine Express Curriculum Team takes the second approach mentioned when planning and writing curriculum. Because we're writing curriculum to be implemented across the country and around the world, we chose one language, Spanish, to use as the model for teaching a second language. By including practical words and phrases in a second language (as well as sign language) in our materials, we are providing you with a foundation for helping DLLs acquire English by making the connections to their home language. Not only will these connections help your DLLs, but they will also help your English-speaking children begin to appreciate and acquire another language as well. We realize that Spanish may not be the home language being spoken by the families you are serving, so we encourage you to change the language to best suit the needs of children in your area.

Families in your classroom will be able to help support the goal of children maintaining and developing their home language as well as English, but you will need to meet with them to share the vision. In today's society, we need more and more people in the workforce who are multilingual, so we want your DLLs to excel in both English and their home languages. Families can help with translations, volunteer to read books aloud in the home language, etc. Plan to meet with families often to be sure both languages are being supported. You can also enlist the help of community volunteers. Be sure to spend time planning and learning vocabulary and phrases in the home language. Not only will you enrich your knowledge base, but you will be modeling how to learn another language for all of your children.

The Fireflies® curriculum teaches numbers, colors, shapes, months of the year, and practical words and phrases in English and Spanish. We have provided some ideas below to help you support growth in both languages. These ideas will benefit all of the children in your class as they work to build language skills.

Supporting DLLs in Your Environment:

- Label areas and things in your room in English and the second language.
- Label personal items/spaces with children's pictures and names (cubbies, sleep mats, etc.).
- Add word wall words in the second language.
- Provide picture books in languages other than English to help children see that each language has its own way of writing.
- Use picture cues and wording in both languages for printed materials displayed in classroom (rules, schedule, instructions for washing hands, etc.).

Supporting DLLs at Drop-Off Time:

- Greet the child and parent in English and their home language. (You may need to ask the parent to help you learn the appropriate greetings in the home language.)
- Point to the schedule and tell each child where to go for the first activity in English and the home language.
- Invite a parent with a home language other than English to come and share a book in the home language as children are arriving. (Ideally this book is related to the theme and contains vocabulary that will be taught in English.)

Working with Dual Language Learners



Supporting DLLs during Center Time:

- Provide and share books written in English and the home language in the Library Center. (You may even be able to make a recording of a family member sharing a picture book in a home language.)
- Provide a rich assortment of materials to explore and engage all children in conversations about them, being sure to use vocabulary being taught in both languages to describe the materials.
- Provide a wide assortment of music in English, the home language, and other languages and cultures.
- Provide musical instruments from other cultures and teach their names and how to play them.
- Provide a poster in the Dramatic Play Center with labels of English and home language names of clothing. (For example: pants and pantalones; shoes and zapatos; etc.). Ask children questions about the clothing they chose using both languages.
- Label items in the Art and STEAM Discovery Centers with picture labels with English and words from the home language. Talk to children using both languages as you ask questions.

Supporting DLLs during Transitions:

- Model use of the home language to reinforce vocabulary introduced in both languages during transitions. For example, say, “Everyone wearing zapatos rojo, red shoes, may go to the círculo, circle, on the alfombra, rug.”
- Play simple vocabulary games during transitions. For example, say the next number before going to the next center: “Uno, dos, _____.” Use both English and home language in everyday conversation: “What color is this apple, manzana?” or “If your nombre, name, begins with /d/, you may go to the next activity.”

Supporting DLLs during Music and Movement Activities:

- Learn and teach some songs, rhymes, fingerplays, etc. in both languages; be sure to utilize movements that help children understand the language of the music (pointing to body parts, stomping feet, etc.).
- Give instructions for movement activities using words from both languages. (Example: Put your mano derecha, right hand, in the círculo, circle, when the song says, “Put your right hand in.”)
- Make up vocabulary games to play with all children in the class to learn both languages.

Supporting DLLs in Play and Conversations:

- Speak slowly using vocabulary and motions (even sign language taught) to help a DLL understand what you are saying.
- Ask simple guiding questions using vocabulary in both languages and allow plenty of time for DLLs to answer.
- Talk to DLLs in English, describing what you see or what you are doing. Encourage DLLs to describe what they see or what they are doing in their home language.
- Ask the same question of different children before asking a DLL. It will give him a chance to hear the question several times and hear other responses before he answers. (How are you feeling today? What is your favorite animal? etc.)

