

Core Principles for Supporting Emergent Multilingual Learners (EMLLs)

Background

New York City is home to a diverse population of young children. Approximately 40% of children in pre-K come from a home where a language other than English is spoken.¹ The majority of early childhood programs in New York City are likely to serve children and families who speak languages other than English. As the number of linguistically diverse families increases, it is critical for educators to provide language supports for instruction and programming in response to the needs of the communities they serve.

There are several different terms that are used to describe children who are learning more than one language. The *Appendix* includes examples of different terms that you may come across in various publications and policy documents. Moving forward, the New York City Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Education will use the term **Emergent Multilingual Learner (EMLL)**, in accordance with New York State Education Department, to refer to preschool children before Kindergarten who are learning a language other than English and who have the opportunity to become bilingual or multilingual in school. The term is strengths-based and aims to build on the linguistic foundations of children who speak languages other than English at home.

The following Core Principles outline the beliefs and practices that support high-quality instruction for EMLLs. You and your staff are encouraged to review these core principles. The Core Principles are research-based and support instructional best practices.

Core Principle 1: A child's home language is an integral cultural asset that should be honored, sustained, and reflected in the classroom and program environment.

Core Principle 2: Introducing the home language for instruction and programming enriches learning, supports English language acquisition, and promotes multilingualism.

Core Principle 3: Programs encourage families to sustain their home language and use their home language for learning activities.

Core Principle 4: Lifelong multilingualism is beneficial and desirable for all individuals.

Core Principle 5: Everyone in the program environment makes a commitment to adopt multilingual approaches.

¹ Based on New York City student enrollment data for the 2017-18 school year.



Principle 1:
A child's home language is an integral cultural asset that should be honored, sustained, and reflected in the classroom and program environment.

The home language is a critical aspect of a child's identity and a significant resource for learning. Leveraging the use of the home language to support children's learning is necessary in supporting EMLLs. Program leadership and staff should honor, sustain, and reflect children's home languages in the classroom and program environment. This first principle sets the foundation for the vision and mission of the program.

How can I honor the diverse languages spoken in my classroom and program?

- Ensure that children's home languages are represented in the classroom and program environment, and that one language is not privileged over another.
- Whenever possible, teaching staff use children's home language in the classroom for instruction, so that language development is promoted for all languages represented.

Principle 2:
Introducing the home language for instruction and programming enriches learning, supports English language acquisition, and promotes multilingualism.

This principle is grounded in the belief that we honor the home language and maintain it as a central element in instruction. Research shows that there are many benefits associated with speaking more than one language, such as heightened executive function, greater ability to control and shift attention, enhanced problem-solving abilities, greater working memory, and increased ability to focus on pertinent information, ignore distracting information, and apply known concepts to new situations.²

There are three core areas to focus on when supporting EMLLs: instructional supports, environmental supports, and family & community supports. Program leadership and staff can use the strategies listed below as a way of enriching language learning and promoting multilingualism.

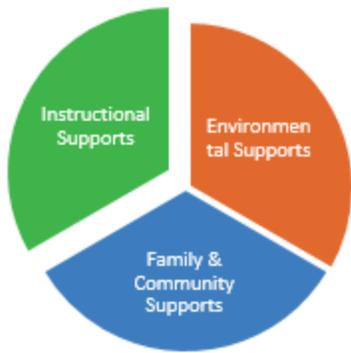
² As cited in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education. *Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children Who are Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Programs*. 2016. p 6.

Bialystok, E. (2015). Bilingualism and the development of executive function: The role of attention. *Child development perspectives*, 9(2), 117-121.

Espinosa, L. M. (2015). Challenges and Benefits of Early Bilingualism in the United States' Context. *Global Education Review*, 2(1), 40-53.

Tazi, Z. (2011). The effects of bilingual instruction on the English emergent literacy skills of Spanish-speaking preschool children.





Instructional Supports

There are a variety of instructional strategies that sustain the development of the home language as well as promote English language acquisition for EMLLs. Below are several evidence-based strategies that promote language development.³

How can I strengthen the instructional supports for EMLLs in my classroom?

- Learn and use key phrases in the home language of the children.
- Encourage children to speak to classmates who share their home language.
- Encourage counting in multiple languages.
- Sing songs, chants, rhymes, and finger plays in English and the home language to help children learn common phrases and words through music.
- Include visuals or movements when introducing words to help children develop an understanding of vocabulary.
- Provide explicit vocabulary instruction and define words in developmentally appropriate ways.
- Use pictures or visuals to introduce translations of target vocabulary.
- Repeat new concepts or vocabulary frequently across multiple settings and content areas. Provide children ample opportunities to practice explaining new concepts or using new vocabulary words.
- Identify a foundational text that corresponds with your curriculum, unit of study, or children's interests. Select key vocabulary words from the foundational text in English and translate vocabulary to the home language.
- Be intentional about which texts will be read-aloud multiple times. Plan connections from these texts to learning centers by selecting appropriate materials.
- Engage children in activities that align to their interests.
- Support, reinforce, and extend the learning in English as well as in the child's home language by using language modeling strategies (e.g., ask open-ended questions, use self & parallel talk, extend vocabulary).
- Use wait-time. After asking children a question, pause for at least three extra seconds to allow children time to think and respond.

³ As cited in Espinosa, L. & Magruder, E. (2010). *Practical and Proven Strategies for Teaching Young Dual Language Learners*. In getting it right for young children from diverse backgrounds: Applying research to improve practice. Prentice Hall.

Morell, Z., Aponte, A. (April 2016). Right from the start: A protocol for identifying and planning instruction for emergent bilinguals in Universal Prekindergarten. *Educator's Voice* ix, PP. 12-15.



- Use cognates to support language learning. Cognates are words that sound the same in both English and the home language and mean the same thing.
- Allow children to use Translanguaging.⁴ Translanguaging is when children use their home language and English interchangeably. Children should be encouraged to access all language available to them.



Environmental Supports

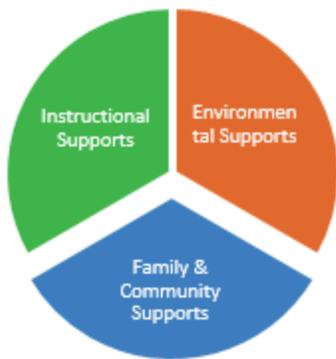
The classroom environment plays an important role in helping EMLL children engage in meaningful activities. In addition to honoring and promoting children’s home languages, incorporate customs, traditions and items reflective of the children’s culture in the classroom. When children can draw on their prior knowledge, it is easier to make connections and learn a concept in a new language.

How can I ensure my classroom materials and structures support learning for EMLLs?

- Set up your library with books in multiple languages.
- Label objects purposefully in both English and children’s home languages. You can use translation websites/software, collaborate with families, or use other resources to translate.
- Display children’s authentic work, including dictations and labels, in children’s home languages.
- Rotate charts and materials periodically to ensure the environment is relevant and engaging for children.
- Incorporate familiar objects from children’s cultures and communities in the classroom (i.e. instruments, household items, clothing, toys, etc.) and encourage children to talk about and use them.
- Use audio and visuals in multiple languages.
- Use songs and narrations in children’s home languages. Print the words on charts and place them around the classroom at children’s eye level so they can see and interact with them.
- Record children telling stories in their home language; ask them to interpret and translate their stories to English.
- Encourage children to act out stories they have “written” or read in their home language or in English.
- Make a picture communication board to help all children communicate their needs and feelings

⁴ García, O., & Lin, A. M. (2017). *Translanguaging in bilingual education*. In *Bilingual and multilingual education* (pp. 117-130). Springer, Cham.





Family and Community Supports

It is important to honor families' culture and language, and to recognize that the family is the child's first teacher. EMLLs bring a wealth of cultural and linguistic background knowledge to the classroom that should be leveraged in instruction. In order to meet the needs of EMLLs, program leadership and staff should learn about families' interests, and collaborate to promote the development of children's home language in the classroom, program, and home environment.

How can I create a welcoming environment for all families in my classroom and program?

- Learn a few simple words, especially greetings, in families' home language to welcome them into the classroom.
- Invite family members to the classroom to read books in multiple languages.
- Ask families to send in photos of things that are meaningful to each child, such as foods, celebrations, and family activities. Use pictures to make personalized posters, displays, and class books that children can relate to.
- Ask families to bring familiar objects from their home, such as music, instruments, household items, clothing, toys, and encourage children to talk about and use them in the classroom.
- Record families telling stories in their home language and include them as part of your listening center/library.
- Encourage families to engage in play-based learning activities in their home language.
- Have families read familiar classroom books at home in children's home language.
- Invite families and community members to write children's narrations of their drawings in the home language.
- Partner with families and community members who can aid in translation and interpretation.
- Bridge connections. Ensure that families have knowledge of what their children are learning to build a strong home-school connection.
- Recognize that each family is unique. Ask families about their language, culture, and traditions, and be careful not to promote stereotypes or make assumptions.





Principle 3:
Programs encourage families to sustain their home language and use their home language for learning activities.

As educators, we have an opportunity to clarify the misconception that home language is less valuable than English. Several research studies highlight the importance of building the child's first language. One study found that when mothers used Spanish at home, it did not negatively affect their children's ability to learn English. On the contrary, when mothers introduced more English in the home environment, it slowed the growth of children's Spanish vocabulary without increasing English vocabulary.⁵ Given this important research, it is essential to listen to families' priorities and reassure them that home language development will support English language acquisition and be beneficial for their children.

How can I support families in sustaining their child's home language?

- Partner with families to sustain children's home language in the home environment, as families play a crucial role in their child's learning. Encourage families to engage in play-based learning activities, such as reading, singing, learning letters, and using vocabulary, in the home language.
- Empower families with limited English to use their home language with their children at home. Share with families that high-quality language interactions in their home language provide a strong foundation for learning English.
- Learn from families about children's language background. Ask families what languages the child speaks and understands, what language the child speaks to their siblings, in what language the child pretend plays in, and the child's exposure to English. Use this information to inform instruction for the child.
- Build on families' funds of knowledge.⁶ Funds of knowledge are collections of knowledge based in cultural practices that are a part of families' inner culture. Tap into families' knowledge and expertise to support use of the home language during instruction.

⁵ Hammer, C. (2009). Dual-Language Learners' Early Language Development and Academic Outcomes. Paper prepared for the Workshop on the Role of Language in School Learning: Implications for Closing the Achievement Gap, Hewlett Foundation, Menlo Park. CA, October, 15-16.

Barnett, W. S., Yarosz, D. J., Thomas, J., Jung, K., & Blanco, D. (2007). Two-way and monolingual English immersion in preschool education: An experimental comparison. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22(3), 277-293.

Melzi, G., Schick, A. R., & Escobar, K. (2017). Early Bilingualism Through the Looking Glass: Latino Preschool Children's Language and Self-Regulation Skills. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 37, 93-109.

⁶ Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). *Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms*. *Theory into practice*, 31(2), 132-141.





Principle 4:
Lifelong multilingualism is beneficial and desirable for all individuals.

This core principle calls for early childhood educators to advocate for and promote multilingualism for young children. Research has found that there are lifelong advantages associated with speaking more than one language. Studies highlight differences in cognitive functioning skills in children who are monolingual as compared to children who are bilingual/multilingual.⁷ Because research shows that the most significant enhancements to learning language occur in the early childhood years, it is critical for early childhood educators to sustain and promote multilingualism. Program leadership and staff can create a love for learning and set children on the path for lifelong multilingualism by honoring and supporting children’s home language. In doing so, program leadership and staff will strengthen language development in children’s home language, while supporting language acquisition in English.

How can I promote the value of multilingualism?

- Program leadership and staff can openly state the value of multilingualism in their vision/mission statements.
- Program leadership and staff can use the instructional, environmental, and family support strategies listed above to introduce the home language during instruction and programming.
- Program leadership and staff engage in two-way communication with families, and partner with families to sustain children’s home language in the classroom, program, and home environment.

Principle 5:
Everyone in the program environment makes a commitment to adopt multilingual approaches.

Everyone in the program – school leaders, teachers, and all other program staff – should see themselves as the individuals who support multilingual approaches. This requires a program-wide commitment to developing competencies that support a multilingual program environment. Everyone is a language learner, and everyone can work to support greater comprehension and vocabulary in children’s home languages.

⁷ Bialystok, E. (2015). Bilingualism and the development of executive function: The role of attention. *Child development perspectives*, 9(2), 117-121.





How can I support all program staff in adopting multilingual approaches?

- Leadership teams commit to creating a program culture that is strengths-based and celebrates multilingualism- one that allows, supports, and promotes multilingualism.
- Programs provide training for staff to unpack biases, address fears and concerns, and provide research that supports a multilingual approach.
- Programs hold information sessions or discussion forums for families and provide research-based materials and information that highlight the value of a multilingual approach. Families may need information to debunk common misconceptions regarding English-only instruction.
- Programs foster a culture that promotes ongoing conversations about what is working well and address common challenges that may arise throughout the year.

This document was prepared by Zoila Morell, Ph.D. and Cristina Medellin, Ph.D. as part of their consulting work for the NYC Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Education. The core principles referenced here are currently in preparation for a peer-review journal.



Appendix

Terms	Definition	Terminology Context
Emergent Multilingual Learner (EMLL)	EMLLs are preschool children before Kindergarten whose home or primary language is a language other than English and who have the potential to become bilingual or multilingual in school.	Adopted by the NYC Department of Education’s Division of Early Childhood Education to refer to children whose home language is a language other than English. New York State Board of Regents approved this new term for all New York children under the age of 5.
Dual Language Learner (DLL)	DLLs are young children from birth to 5 years old who are learning more than one language at the same time as well as those learning a second language while continuing to develop their first (or home) language.	Head Start uses this term to refer to any child who is learning more than one language.
Emergent Bilingual (EB)	This term refers to any individual learning two or more languages.	This term is mostly commonly found in academic literature. It conveys a strong message about the cognitive and social benefits of bilingualism.
Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE)	Early childhood programs that provide language instruction in two or more languages with the goal of enabling all children to become bilingual and biliterate over the course of their education.	New York City Early Childhood programs, including Dual Language programs, and all programs that serve EMLLs. Utilizing the Core Principles referenced in this document will support the movement towards a DLBE for all programs.



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