

e-clips

Transcript for the [video](#):

Supporting English Language Learners in the Preschool Classroom

This video has captions. You can turn them on by clicking the captions icon at the bottom of the video.

Dr. Jeffrey Trawick-Smith (Host): Most classrooms include children who speak a language other than English. Preschool professionals are challenged to work effectively with young children who may not understand much English at all. How can teachers best support the English language learners in their classrooms? Bilingual education expert Dr. Ann Anderberg offers us great suggestions for working with English language learners and their families.

Dr. Ann Anderberg, Assistant Professor of Education, Eastern Connecticut State University: Teachers do not need to speak the native language in order to support its development and also to help transfer those skills to English. The underlying skills that children acquire in their first language are similar.

Beth Martin, Preschool Teacher, Windham Early Childhood Center: We have a lot of parents who speak a variety of languages other than English or Spanish in our school. For example, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Chinese. What I notice about the English language learners at the beginning of the school year is that they are nervous and scared, but as are all the rest of the children. They're probably a little more quiet, though, than the English speakers, and also very observant in watching what other kids are doing, so that they know what's coming next, and watching what I'm doing so that they can get any type of clue that they possibly can from my gestures, or from the picture schedules that I'm offering, so that they know what's coming next, and so that they can learn the routine.

Dr. Anderberg: It wouldn't be unusual for a child to arrive in a classroom not speaking any English in an all English environment. It's very natural for students to engage in a silent period. During that silent period, what's really happening is they are acquiring the sounds of that new language.

Teacher: That's how you go to the park? On a bicycle?

Child: Yeah.

Teacher: Yeah?

Dr. Anderberg: Most preschool teachers are very good at extending talk and trying to elicit conversations with children so that they draw out more and more information by asking questions, by finishing off sentences for children, by just helping them to create more language.

Teacher: These are different kind of scissors.

Child: Girls.

Teacher: They're girls'? What makes it a girl's scissor?

Dr. Anderberg: Ultimately what we want is for the children to be talking—talking to themselves, talking to us, talking to each other, and using the language themselves.

Child: It's a pizza de apple.

Teacher: It is. It's a pizza of apples, but you call that an apple pie.

Dr. Anderberg: Two strategies that are very powerful in oral language development are parallel talk and self-talk. Parallel talk is when I am sitting next to a child, and I am basically narrating what that child is doing—like a play-by-play description of their activity.

Teacher: You put that on top of the girl's head. And you put the legs under the girl's body.

Dr. Anderberg: Self talk is actually doing that for what I'm doing.

Teacher: Open, close. Open, close. Open, close, stop.

Dr. Anderberg: And by doing that, it makes a very tight link between the language and the actions.

Teacher: Pato amarillo. In English, yellow duck.

Beth Martin: We have different techniques that help—help them to use more of the English language, and also encouraging them to play together in the dramatic play area.

Narrator: Another effective strategy is what's called the Total Physical Response Technique.

Beth Martin: Total physical response strategies include using your body. If you're going to be teaching about verbs, do the actions that you want them to learn.

Narrator: Total Physical Response, or TPR, builds on the relationship between language and movement. Total physical response teaches children language in the same natural way that parents model language to their young children. As the teacher speaks, she acts out the language to make meaning clear, and expects no oral response from the child.

Narrator: Another helpful strategy for supporting English language learners is to learn a little about the children's native languages, including a few key words and phrases.

Teacher: This book is in English, and this book is in Spanish. What's happening on the cover of these books?

Child: They're giving besos.

Teacher: They're getting KISSES, right? Besos is kiss in Spanish?

Dr. Anderberg: Some languages may share cognates; that can be a very powerful tool for children to learn vocabulary. True cognates are words that have the same meaning in both languages and are basically the same. So for example, the word animal and animal in Spanish, same word; they're a cognate, they have the same meaning. However, often if we don't point it out to them, they don't make that connection. Once it's explicitly explained, the children can begin to make those connections for themselves.

Narrator: Teachers can support families in their understanding that their child's learning of their first language will build a solid foundation for learning English.

Dr. Anderberg: Native language proficiency is very important for children because they can transfer the skills that are involved in that to their second language. Families should be encouraged to support that first language and be assured that it will support the child's English language acquisition at the appropriate time.

[Girl and her father speak Chinese while reading.]

Narrator: Families are encouraged to engage in oral language and read to their child in whatever language is spoken in the home. One great way to encourage parents to do this is with rhymes and songs in their native language.

Class: Dos, tres...

Narrator: With support from her family and teachers, the child learns to speak both languages and is preparing to read and write in both languages.

Dr. Anderberg: At the end of the day, the most important thing or the best practices are very playful interactions with children around storytelling, storybook reading, rhyming, oral language, really rich conversations—those are the same things that will help second language learners in their first language as well.