



Transcript for the [video](#):

Supporting Oral Language Development in Dual Language Learners

Voiceover (with music): Do you have children in your classroom who speak languages other than English at home? What do you know about their home languages? And how can you best support their oral language development in an English-speaking classroom?

Supporting Oral Language Development in Dual Language Learners

Luz Ramos, Host: There are many things to consider when children come from homes where English is their second language.

Teacher: Anda, con carro, una bicicleta?

Child: Bicicleta

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

Host: One important thing to know is that the language skills a child develops in their first language can be easily transferable to English. You can encourage families to continue speaking their first language at home, because developing proficiency in their first language helps children learn English more effectively.

Dr. Ann Anderberg, Eastern Connecticut State University: Too often people feel obligated to let go of that first culture, thinking they are doing the best thing. But many children learn English and lose that first language; they too frequently lose contact with other members of the family, particularly grandparents. I am always very confident that children will learn English. English is dominant here; their instruction is in English. But to try to maintain and to value that first language is critical for their development linguistically, socially, academically in every way.

Host: English language learners typically go through four stages as they acquire English. Initially, children attempt to communicate in their native language. Once they realize others don't understand them, they may enter a non-verbal period.

Ann Anderberg: It is 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. It's very important that there be routines that the children can connect to and that careful thought be given to pairing the children with a child who would be supportive, touching base with that child every day, doing the parallel talk and self-talk strategies that would support that child so they can understand what's happening, and just providing a warm and caring environment that would allow the child to begin to participate.

Host: In time, children feel ready to come out of the non-verbal period. They begin to attempt the new language, using what they've learned and expressing their needs with key words. Eventually and with practice, they can use their new language productively.

Ann Anderberg: The wonderful thing for preschool teachers is that the work that they do in language development is the work of second language development as well. So very good practice translates and transfers for these children.

Cynthia DeJesús, Preschool Teacher: Through my experience I noticed that English Language Learners learn through hands-on experiences, through gestures, visual cues, pictures, big books, repeated phrases—just repeating that will help them to listen and then respond.

Cynthia: What do you want to ask me? What do you want me to do?

Child: Open it.

Cynthia: Open it please, Miss Cynthia? Alright, where will you put your door?

Cynthia DeJesús: Sitting them closely during shared reading by me, when I'm reading a big book—actually sometimes reading the book to them beforehand so they can kind of have that background knowledge and know what to expect.

Host: When you have an English language learner in your classroom, you may find that it helps to learn a little of the child's first language.

Teacher: You look through it with your eye. With ojos. Muy bien, good job.

Cynthia DeJesús: One particular child I can think of would say a word, and she'd be afraid to say the word, but I said the word in Spanish.

Cynthia: Amarillo

Child: Amarillo

Cynthia DeJesús: So the fact that she knew that I spoke Spanish I thought helped her to be more comfortable, and then she began to speak more.

Cynthia: And where is the door here? Donde esta la puerta?

Child: Aqui!

Host: Knowing a bit about another language can help you understand its similarities and differences with English. You can then point these out to a child who is still acquiring English.

Ann Anderberg: Some languages may share cognates. True cognates are words that have the same meaning in both languages. That can be a very powerful tool for children to learn vocabulary. The word animal and animal in Spanish, same word, they are cognates, they have the same meaning. The word plan, plan (in Spanish), plan. So once children begin to understand that these cognates exist, they can begin to listen for them and look for them. However, often times 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.

Host: If you or another teacher is fluent in a child's first language, you can use the language frequently to support the child's understanding of what is happening in the classroom. Doing so will not slow down their acquisition of English.

Cynthia DeJesús: From my own culture, Puerto Rican culture, we do a lot of code switching, which is just, we will start talking Spanish and then all of a sudden there will be an English word in there, or speak English, and to know that that's ok.

Cynthia: How about starting from here. La casa? Which one are you looking for?

Host: You can also incorporate a child's first language into activities such as story time to benefit all learners in your classroom.

Niloufar: My title page says, "Freight Train by Donald Crews."

Cynthia: Tren de carga, escribo de Donald Crews.

Niloufar Rezai, Preschool Teacher: My co-teacher is Spanish-speaking, so it's very helpful for us to be able to take a text and alternate reading a sentence in English and then a sentence in Spanish.

Cynthia: Vagón de tolva amarillo.

Niloufar: Yellow hopper car.

Niloufar Rezai: And this benefits our English language learners, as well as our students who are native speakers, but can benefit again from that exposure, and it's becoming a part of our classroom culture where children will use Spanish terms for colors and numbers and so-forth.

Children: Azul, marado, negro.

Girl: Blanco.

Niloufar: Blanco. Where's blanco? Show me blanco.

Girl: It's white.

Niloufar: It's white. And there's no blanco car, but I see the page is very blanco; you're right.

Host: Children who are learning English can also learn a great deal from their peers during play. You might consider pairing a child with few English skills with a child with more advanced English skills for a while. Let's hear from a family to see how one teacher supported an English language learner in her room.

Voiceover: When Jennifer first arrived in Patty Gardner's preschool classroom, it was a new experience for her.

Jennifer's Father: My wife and I, we are both from China and we both speak China tongue native language. We were worried when Jennifer first got in here. Jennifer's speaking Chinese here in the daycare, but nobody understands.

Patty Gardner, Preschool Teacher: She did have a little bit of a hard time when she first came in to my room. Jennifer has her way of easing in to things and watching things and learning. She watches a lot; she observes a lot; that's how she learns things. We do find in a smaller group she's far more vocal and more verbal.

Voiceover: Jennifer's teacher supported Jennifer by providing her with many opportunities to observe and engage with her peers. She also modeled language for Jennifer.

Patty: Jennifer, do you see the ants crawling on the tray?

Jennifer: I think they're going to eat the orange.

Patty: Hoh! Jennifer thinks they're going to eat the orange!

Patty Gardner: There's parallel talk and there's the self-talk that we do with children in encouraging any kind of oral language. Talking about what Jennifer's doing. Those are definite strategies that we use in the classroom, but we would use that with any child that would need to develop their oral language.

Jennifer's Father: Jennifer loves singing songs, so her teacher did a wonderful job trying to teach Jennifer songs, and that's really helped her to learn English.

Patty and children: Willaby wallaby wennifer, an elephant sat on Jennifer.

Voiceover: Patty also included items from Jennifer's culture in her classroom, and made sure that there were opportunities for Jennifer to use her home language.

Jennifer's Father: They've been playing Chinese songs in Jennifer's classroom, and they have a Chinese book.

Patty Gardner: Jennifer's Dad sent me a video clip of a teacher singing a Chinese song, and

Jennifer knew the song, so after we watched the little video clip as a class on the big screen in our classroom, Jennifer sang it for us.

[Jennifer singing in Chinese]

Patty Gardner: I think for Jennifer it was something that she was excited about, because it was in her own language. And I think, too, most importantly, it was important to Dad. I think he felt that his culture was represented and talked about and appreciated and respected in our classroom.

Jennifer's Father: Sometimes it's really hard for Jennifer, you know, to learn two languages at the same time. I'm not trying to push her too much on the Chinese characters. I teach her how to sing several Chinese songs, and we have some Chinese books. Jennifer will be an English native speaker, for sure, because she grew up here. My goal for her is to know Chinese language. To be able to read it and to be able to speak it and write a little bit. And that's my ultimate goal for Jennifer.

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