



Accessible and Responsive Literacy Instruction: Grade-Specific Recommendations for Multilingual Learners in Illinois

Grades K-2

Introduction

Kindergarten through second grade are foundational years for literacy development. In addition to establishing a firm foundation with the building blocks of literacy, this small window of time is essential for sparking the joy of reading and writing. For multilingual learners in the primary classroom, these goals are met by establishing a multilingual learning environment, including various communication methods and providing accessible literacy instruction in multiple languages. These guidelines provide educators with the tools they need to support their multilingual learners with literacy development across all their language backgrounds. This approach emphasizes the importance of reading and writing but also recognizes that the heart of literacy instruction is about navigating and understanding various forms of communication, including digital, visual, and oral literacies. These guidelines leverage all the essential components of literacy, in multiple languages and at developmentally appropriate levels, to build strong communicators and foster the joy of multilingual literacy.

Key Developmental Characteristics for Grade Levels K-2

Language and literacy development begin forming a strong foundation during the early elementary years, particularly in grades K–2. At this stage, students are learning how to read and write, while simultaneously developing the language needed to make sense of classroom experiences. For multilingual learners, this foundational period is shaped by the languages they bring from home and their early experiences in English.

Educators must work closely with families to understand each child’s language background—what languages are spoken at home, how they are used in daily life, and in which contexts they were learned. These insights help shape instruction that honors and builds upon students’ full linguistic identities.

In grades K–2, multilingual learners may be just beginning to develop proficiency in English while continuing to grow in their home language(s). It is important to recognize that young children often draw on all of their language knowledge as they learn to read, write, and speak. This includes transferring concepts and vocabulary between languages and using familiar language patterns to make meaning.

In these early grades, learning is enhanced when it builds upon student curiosity. Leveraging students’ natural curiosities through play and inquiry-based learning helps all young learners, regardless of language proficiency, make sense of new information. By providing opportunities for inquiry and play, literacy instruction is meaningful and accessible.



Age-Appropriate Teaching and Learning Practices for Grade Levels K-2

Effective instruction in K-2 weaves together language and literacy development in playful, meaningful, and interactive ways. Oral language is especially important at this stage, as students need many opportunities to talk, listen, and explore sounds, words, and stories in both English and their home language(s).

Effective instruction for multilingual learners in grades K–2 recognizes that literacy begins with oral language and is shaped by all the languages children know. Instruction should be joyful, inclusive, and grounded in students’ diverse language experiences.

To support early multiliteracy and biliteracy development in grades K–2:

- Use read-alouds, songs, and storytelling that reflect students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- Encourage translanguaging, inviting students to use all their languages to express understanding and participate in classroom activities.
- Create rich opportunities for oral language development through conversations, role-play, and shared reading experiences.
- Provide literacy experiences that connect to students’ lives, using visuals, hands-on materials, and routines that support meaning-making.
- Introduce foundational skills (such as phonological awareness, print concepts, and letter-sound knowledge) in ways that connect to students’ home language knowledge and are taught within meaningful and comprehensible contexts as much as possible.

Guidelines

Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Learning Environment

Social Emotional Well-Being

Students in kindergarten through second grade need rich learning environments to build confidence and skills through hands-on, playful learning experiences that capitalize on their natural curiosities and eagerness to learn. Students who are confident in school and see their identities represented in their learning are more engaged in literacy instruction. Setting up a learning environment that is responsive to the social-emotional needs of young multilingual students will provide space for them to explore and take risks as they gain essential literacy skills.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Elevate and Represent Student Identities in the Classroom: Create a meaningful learning environment for all students by systematically integrating students’ cultural backgrounds and literacies into teaching and</p>	<p>Diverse Texts Use culturally responsive diverse texts that reflect students’ languages and cultural backgrounds and experiences that include fiction, literature, non-fiction and informational texts</p> <p>Student Work Display multilingual student work on classroom and school walls</p> <p>Multilingual Print Display letters/characters and sound cards in multiple languages and for cross-linguistic connections</p>



<p>learning, including instruction, materials, and assessments.</p>	<p>Culturally Relevant Resources Incorporate cultural artifacts (approved by families, community liaisons), multilingual digital media, and multilingual resources into lessons.</p> <p>Accessible Assessment Include ample opportunities to showcase what students know at their level of proficiency in multimodal ways; encourage students to use individual strengths, interests, talents and abilities to demonstrate understanding.</p>
<p>Accessible Learning Environment: Provide a socially and emotionally safe learning environment by intentionally making meaningful and accessible opportunities for all students to connect to instruction.</p>	<p>Accessible Entry Points Provide accessible entry points into literacy development so students can use their background knowledge and linguistic resources they bring to learning.</p> <p>Multimodal Sharing Design activities that encourage students to create and share about their own experiences, their prior knowledge and facilitate learning about content in multiple formats (e.g., videos, posters, digital presentations).</p> <p>Interconnected Literacy Instruction Provide opportunities for students to engage with all four language domains (listening, speaking, reading & writing) and seven components of literacy (phonics, phonological awareness, oracy, vocabulary, fluency, reading comprehension, writing) in an integrated versus linear way. (ex: Students do not need to master phonics before engaging in comprehension work)</p> <p>Active Engagement Elevate active engagement so all students are active contributors in their own learning. Provide ways for students to interact and respond to content in non-linguistic ways and in their home languages.</p> <p>Visual Schedules Provide visual schedules in the room so that students can anticipate what may be coming next.</p> <p>Temporary Scaffolds Provide scaffolds (Ex. modeling, graphic organizers, illustrated bilingual word banks, visual prompts, partner work) that begin instruction and eventually move the students to small group work, partners and independent work. It's important to practice this gradual release of responsibility in each unit of study/content area topic so that students have the opportunity to work toward independence in each new topic/skill.</p>
<p>Explicit Instruction and Tools for Emotional Regulation: Provide students with language and tools to communicate and manage their feelings and needs</p>	<p>Feelings Vocabulary Explicitly teach students vocabulary related to their feelings/emotions. Provide instruction in English and home language whenever possible with opportunities to role play and use vocabulary.</p> <p>Feelings Visuals Provide students with visuals for feeling words so that they can accurately and quickly use their oral language in communicating their feelings to adults and peers. (Example of student-created book about feeling happy in English and Arabic)</p> <p>Emotional Regulation Strategies Explicitly teach tools to young learners for managing stress. This may include breathing techniques, use of calming sensory items, or other strategies to use when feeling elevated. (Example of teacher-created book about breathing in English and Arabic)</p> <p>Behavioral Expectations Ensure that behavioral expectations are clearly communicated so that all students know expected and unexpected behaviors across school settings. There may be cultural differences in expectations.</p>



	<p>Take time to learn what behaviors may be different in students' cultures and understand that students may be culturally code-switching when they come to school.</p> <p>Pragmatics Explicitly teach students how language is used appropriately in certain contexts and how to convey the intended meaning in peer and adult interactions. Model and provide opportunities for practice of social interactions.</p>
<p>Welcoming Routines: Provide consistent welcoming routines that help students transition into the academic environment and help them know that each student is essential to this learning space</p>	<p>Picture Welcome Display multiple pictures for students to see when they enter the classroom. Have them point to which one describes how they are feeling today. Display a homemade sign on your classroom door with the word Welcome in multiple languages.</p> <p>Routine Greeting Have a song, poem or chant that welcomes all students to the classroom and gets them reading to learn. Singing or chanting together builds a shared sense of community.</p> <p>Oracy-Based Community Time Begin the day with a time for community and sharing. Invite students to share with one another about recent experiences, thoughts about a class activity, or excitement about an upcoming event.</p>

Family and Community Connections

Families are children's first teachers. Parents/guardians, siblings, and extended families have spent the first five years of a child's life engaging in oral language development, which is the precursor to literacy. Engaging families in biliteracy and multiliteracy development builds on this prior work and creates a positive multilingual school and district community.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Home Literacy Support: Provide instruction for families on how to support literacy at home</p>	<p>Family Literacy Events Organize family literacy events that incorporate digital tools and multilingual resources.</p> <p>Family Workshops and Events Provide resources and workshops for families to support literacy development across languages and formats.</p> <p>Shared Literacy at Home Encourage parents to share stories and cultural traditions using bilingual books, digital tools and multimedia formats.</p>
<p>Family Expertise: Utilize the cultural and linguistic expertise of families to enhance literacy instruction in the classroom.</p>	<p>Be a Language Student Ask families to share common phrases, greetings, and other short phrases in their languages that you can use in these in school. Learn and post these languages around the room. Asking for these words and phrases during the intake process early in the school year sets a positive atmosphere for multilingualism in your classroom /school.</p> <p>Invite Families In Incorporate families' funds of knowledge by inviting them in to share their expertise, skills and talents with the classroom (invite them to read aloud to the class or share a game or art project).</p> <p>Partner in Creating a Print-Rich Classroom Ask families to send in print in their languages other than English (LOTEs) to display in the room</p>



<p>Community Involvement: Engaging with community organizations and agencies and creating community partnerships</p>	<p>Partner for Multicultural/Multilingual Support Partner with local community organizations such as the local library, park district, or cultural/arts organizations to provide resources or information for use at family events or in the classroom</p>
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Classroom Physical Space and Routines

Classroom environments that are reflective of their student population contribute positively to students’ learning. Collaborative learning environments and consistent structures encourage students to access help, self-advocate, and to become independent learners.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Print and Visual-Rich Learning Environment: Incorporate multilingual and print-rich resources, tools, and displays.</p>	<p>Multilingual Classroom Library Develop a classroom library with books, digital texts, and multimedia resources in multiple languages.</p> <p>Student Work Displays Display student work and multicultural materials in both English, their Languages Other Than English (LOTE), and across various media on classroom walls.</p> <p>Environmental Print Display pictures and realia with print in multiple languages related to the themes/content of instruction</p> <p>Visual Sound Wall Display a multilingual sound wall which includes visuals of vocabulary connected to the sound in multiple languages and depicts the appropriate mouth position for each sound.</p>
<p>Collaborative and multimodal learning environment: Learning environments that foster collaboration around learning experiences and allow for connections to be made to prior experiences build on the collective expertise of the classroom.</p>	<p>Interactive Learning Spaces Arrange the classroom to promote interaction using multiple languages and communication formats, with flexible seating and digital tools. Create spaces for collaborative projects and small-group instruction using digital tools, art and writing materials</p> <p>Multimodal Literacy Environment Use visual aids, digital displays, and student-created content to create a multimodal literacy environment.</p> <p>Literacy Centers Design literacy centers that offer hands-on activities, digital tools, and resources in both English and their Languages Other Than English (LOTE).</p>
<p>Routines and Structures: Classrooms that include predictable and easily understood encourage students to focus on new learning within an accessible format.</p>	<p>Visual Schedules Display visual schedules of literacy time so students know what to expect.</p> <p>Clear Expectations Establish clear expectations for appropriate behavior during literacy time.</p> <p>Predictable Routines and Practices Incorporate predictable routines as much as possible so that students can apply new learning within familiar contexts. Chants, songs, and repetition help bring context to new skills.</p>



Oracy Development and Linguistic Interaction

Emergent Relationship between Oral Language and Reading/Writing/Drawing

There is a strong connection between students’ oral language development and their reading and writing skills. Teachers can use students’ oral language skills as a springboard for literacy instruction. When students have in-depth discussions, they can develop academic vocabulary and longer, more complex oral utterances. This more complex oral language in English and their languages other than English (LOTE) supports their reading and writing development.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Develop oral language skills across languages and modes of communication to nurture the emergent relationship between oracy and text.</p>	<p>Oral Reflection Time Incorporate intentional time throughout the literacy block for oral reflection/processing time with peers.</p> <p>Creative Oracy Practice Encourage oral storytelling, songs, poetry, recitations, dramatizations, and presentations in both English and their Languages Other Than English (LOTE).</p> <p>Multimedia/Digital Resources Use multimedia resources like audio recordings and videos to enhance listening and speaking skills and/or to allow students to participate in comprehension activities with grade level text. Incorporate digital storytelling tools, voice-to-text devices that allow students to narrate, inform, and discuss using visuals and audio in multiple languages.</p> <p>Phoneme Instruction Connect instruction of English phonemes (how speech sounds are organized in a language) to other languages of the classroom. Utilize pronunciation visuals for both languages.</p> <p>Oracy Scaffolds Encourage discourse in English and their LOTE by providing scaffolds such as word banks and sentence starters that model English syntax (the order of words and phrases) and other languages.</p>
<p>Connect oracy to reading and writing by promoting activities that utilize multiple languages and communication modes, building students’ interpersonal confidence and skills.</p>	<p>Oracy into Reading Encourage interaction and structured discourse before reading, during reading and after reading a text. Use structured dialogue such as dialogue frames and cooperative structures to align talk to the reading standards.</p> <p>Oracy into Writing Structure activities and engagement for students to talk before they write, practicing the language of the writing modes. (Example: If students are writing a narrative, structuring the language so they can practice the language of narrative such as transition words, etc.)</p> <p>Written and Oral Projects Provide opportunities for students to present projects in various formats (e.g., oral, visual, digital) in both English and Language(s) Other Than English (LOTE)</p> <p>Digital Tools Encourage the use of digital tools to enhance presentations and express knowledge creatively. Use tools, like video presentations and digital portfolios, to capture student talk in multiple languages.</p> <p>Interactive Activities Implement interactive activities that encourage students to express ideas verbally, visually, and digitally.</p>



	<p>Literacy-Based Discussions Facilitate discussions that encourage students to use different languages and formats to convey their thoughts in relation to text that they have read; providing multiple opportunities to pause throughout the book to engage students in discussions and comprehension checks.</p> <p>Spoken Paragraphs Support students in orally composing sentences or paragraphs before writing them.</p> <p>Language Experience Approach Facilitate a shared writing piece by having students orally dictate sentences that the teacher writes in front of the class. Students may then practice reading the shared writing piece.</p>
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Engagement and Interaction

Students learn new concepts more easily if they have time to be introduced to their new learning in a relevant and authentic way. Giving students time to explore topics and how they relate to their own background is a way to incorporate diverse experiences in the classroom and create authentic curiosity about the topic. Thematic/concept-based teaching gives students opportunities to make connections between content areas and to their home culture, language, interests, and life experiences.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Integrate thematic/concept-based teaching into literacy instruction by organizing literacy units around common ideas and content area concepts</p>	<p>Thematic Instruction Organize stories and informational text into units that have a common theme or concept so that vocabulary and ideas are repeated recurrently throughout the lessons and unit. Anchoring foundational skills to meaningful, thematic vocabulary and ideas helps to contextualize the skill work and facilitates students' application in authentic contexts.</p> <p>Connected, Not Translated Instruction Teach the same concepts and themes across languages while avoiding direct translation or utilization of the same text in both languages. Utilizing the same vocabulary, themes, and ideas allows students to make connections without encouraging them to wait for a translation into their more proficient language.</p> <p>Pre-teach, Teach, Re-teach Connect instruction by teaching a skill in one language, and pre-teaching or re-teaching in a different way in another language. This fosters student understanding without providing direct translation.</p>
<p>Incorporate student agency by providing choice within the literacy block</p>	<p>Choice of Literacy Centers Provide students with choice in activities in how to practice reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Provide thematic center activities that reinforce skills.</p> <p>Accessible and Engaging Texts Provide a classroom library that incorporates all of the students' languages. Texts should include engaging picture books and wordless books as well as decodable readers.</p>
<p>Provide reflection/processing time for students to practice metacognition and solidify learning</p>	<p>Intentional Thinking Time Incorporate time throughout the day to pause and reflect on learning, individually and in small groups.</p> <p>Drawing or Journaling Provide time for students to respond to text through drawing and writing in journals or learning logs.</p>



<p>Create an environment built on play-based learning to keep literacy instruction rooted in curiosity and inquiry</p>	<p>Manipulatives and Realia Utilize picture cut-outs and realia for students to manipulate letters, vocabulary, characters, etc to make sense of stories and/or new skills.</p> <p>Role Playing/Drama/Puppetry Provide opportunities for students to role play or act out stories. Students may become the characters themselves or utilize pictures of the characters on sticks to retell the stories.</p> <p>Music/Chants Incorporate songs and chants to practice sounds and to reinforce concepts.</p>
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Translanguaging Practices

Supporting translanguaging in the classroom means that students are able to utilize their full linguistic repertoires to learn and apply new content. When students switch between languages, or choose to utilize their home language, it is not a signal of low proficiency in English. Oftentimes, students are able to masterfully maneuver between the vocabulary and grammatical structures of the two languages, showing a competency that could not be fully displayed if they were limited to one language. Encouraging translanguaging will help students in K-2 build a firm foundation in literacy between both of their languages.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Leverage students’ full linguistic and multimodal abilities by making explicit connections between languages.</p>	<p>Welcome All Languages Invite students to use all their languages and literacy skills fluidly in various communication modes.</p> <p>Explicit Connections Explicitly teach the similarities and differences between English and the LOTE (Language other than English). Teach cognates and false cognates as well as sound similarities and differences between languages.</p> <p>Translanguaging Implement translanguaging practices in classroom discussions, activities, and projects across multiple formats. Encourage students to read and write in either language or in a combination of multiple languages, providing opportunities for students to use their full linguistic repertoire to make meaning of the content.</p> <p>Collaborate with EL Staff Collaborate with Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE), Dual Language, and Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI) programs to support multilingual and multiliteracy practices</p>



Literacy Instructional Practices, Curriculum, and Assessment

Kindergarten through second grade are foundational years for literacy development. When providing early literacy instruction, ensure that skills work is not isolated from other areas of learning. Students engaged in early literacy need explicit instruction to build foundational skills, but also meaningful context so that the new learning is meaningful and applicable.

By implementing these multiliteracy and biliteracy guidelines, educators can create a dynamic and supportive early learning environment that fosters bilingualism, biliteracy, and multiliteracy. This approach helps students develop as confident and competent communicators in English and their Languages Other Than English (**LOTE**) in various communication formats, preparing them for a diverse and digital future.

Key Concepts	Applications
<p>Provide contextual, connected phonics instruction.</p>	<p>Contextual Phonics Instruction Connect phonics skills to read-alouds, texts, and thematic/conceptual teaching</p> <p>Cross-linguistic Phonics Instruction Connect English phonics instruction to sounds, letters, and patterns in other languages. Identifying skills that will positively transfer between languages and explicitly teaching the skills that do not exist in the other language to minimize redundancy in teaching the same skill twice.</p> <p>Visuals Provide visuals for phonics concepts so that students are not learning skills without meaning; connecting phonics to students' names and the names of their classroom peers (photos connected to the letters) facilitates students learning the names and sounds of letters in English</p> <p>Simultaneous, not Sequential Instruction Teach all components of literacy in accessible ways, regardless of language proficiency level or mastery of phonics skills. Students should not have to wait to engage in reading comprehension and writing instruction until after they have mastered phonics.</p>
<p>Utilize interactive read alouds and multimodal representation to enhance comprehension.</p>	<p>Digital Read Alouds Conduct read-alouds using digital books, videos, and bilingual texts to support comprehension in both English and their Languages Other Than English (LOTE). Use visual aids, digital story maps, and multimedia presentations to support comprehension across languages.</p> <p>Interactive Read Alouds Utilize interactive read alouds, storytelling and plays to connect movement to stories.</p> <p>Multimodal Reading Responses Encourage students to create storyboards and visual summaries to demonstrate understanding. Encourage the use of technology to publish and share writing projects</p>
<p>Develop literacy skills in multiple languages and formats by providing opportunities to practice in each language and make connections.</p>	<p>Multilingual Instruction of Foundational Skills Implement phonics and foundational skills literacy instruction using print, digital tools, and multimedia resources in both English and their Languages Other Than English (LOTE).</p> <p>Multilingual Reading Provide bilingual text sets for content units. Teach students how to identify cognates and make a cognate wall in the classroom. Use bilingual read-alouds and shared reading.</p> <p>Multilingual Writing & Authoring Dual Language books Encourage students to integrate their LOTE in writing, even if the teacher does not speak the student's home language. Students may incorporate words and phrases into their writing to honor</p>



	<p>their home language and culture. Provide opportunities to interact with text in both English and LOTEs.</p>
<p>Connect literacy with engaging content and multiple communication modes</p>	<p>Content Integrated Instruction Integrate literacy instruction with science, social studies, and math using bilingual and multimodal resources.</p> <p>Thematic Units Use thematic units that incorporate digital tools and bilingual materials to promote inquiry. Choose themes with high-interest, real-world relevance, and cross-curricular potential (e.g., families, community, animals).</p> <p>Project-Based Learning Encourage students to create projects using a mix of languages and formats (e.g., posters, murals, digital reports, bilingual videos).</p>
<p>Opportunities to Create and Authentically Share: Design activities for students to create and share content in multiple formats and languages. Structure sharing opportunities to build community.</p>	<p>Classroom Sharing Foster an environment in which students are able to share their creations openly with their peers. Provide sentence frames for students to be able to give productive compliments to their peers on their work.</p> <p>Family & Community Sharing Include family members and the community as a whole in celebrating the progress of students. Upload videos and projects to digital viewing platforms, provide bilingual descriptions for families to access, and host multilingual celebration days or unit showcases.</p>
<p>Diverse Assessment Methods: Assess biliteracy and multiliteracy development by differentiating for literacy and language levels</p>	<p>Bilingual Reading Assessments Use assessment approaches that measure skills in multiple languages and formats, considering language proficiency and content understanding. Assess foundational skills in both languages and take both into account when measuring progress.</p> <p>Differentiated Assessments Differentiate assessment to meet diverse linguistic, academic, and multimodal needs of students while ensuring that the targeted skill being assessed is at grade level while scaffolding is provided for skills that are not the targeted area of the assessment.</p> <p>Formative Assessments Use Assessment FOR Learning in both English and students’ Languages Other Than English (LOTE) to inform instruction and provide targeted support (Gottlieb, 2022).</p> <p>Oral Language Assessments Use sentence stems and academic talk protocols to gauge vocabulary use, complexity of ideas, ability to explain reasoning. Audio-record short discussions about readings, science investigations, or group projects.</p>



Materials

When choosing materials for the K-2nd grade literacy classroom, educators will want to rely on the research that shows that strong foundations in the home language transfer to literacy skills in English. For this reason, students should be surrounded by multilingual print and opportunities to interact in both languages. Explicit connections between languages will help to facilitate this transfer. Providing multilingual sound walls, read alouds, and thematic decodable texts foster an environment in which connections can be made easily.

Key Concepts	Applications
Materials for Contextual Phonics Instruction	Resources for teaching phonics need to include visuals and connections to vocabulary. Skills should not be taught in isolation. For multilingual learners, phonics materials should include opportunities to connect their Language Other Than English (LOTE) and to a meaningful visual. Consider a multilingual sound wall to make connections between languages.
Flexible Materials for Simultaneous, not Sequential Literacy Development	Materials should be flexible to be able to be used with students who are not yet proficient in English. Students should be able to engage in meaningful comprehension work while still acquiring the English Language and not yet knowing all of their letters and sounds in English.
Thematic Teaching Materials	Texts and materials for units of study should center around concepts or themes.
Realia for Play-Based Learning	Ample realia and manipulatives should be available in the primary literacy classroom. Opportunities for imaginative play and role playing should also be incorporated. Music and chants also help young students play with language.
Multilingual Texts and Environmental Print	Primary literacy classrooms should have texts in multiple languages as well as print displayed on the walls in all of the students' languages. Realia (magazine clippings, food wrappers, etc) and student work make this meaningful for young learners. Color coding to identify the different languages represented helps students to discern between the different languages. For example, green can be used for Spanish and blue for English.
Various Kinds of Texts	Student texts should include rich, engaging picture books as well as decodable readers.

Materials to Enhance Biliteracy Development and Crosslinguistic Connections

Key Materials	Applications
Multilingual Sound Wall	Provide visual representations of sounds between languages.
Cognate Board	Explicitly teach cognates and invite students to post cognates as they discover them in texts.
Multilingual Reflection Journals	Provide opportunities for reflection for students to think about and connect what they have learned between languages.
Representative Classroom Materials	Ensure that texts and visuals are representative of the cultures and languages represented in the class/school. <i>See the Book Awards links</i> in the Resource section of this document.



Multilingual Curricular Resources to Build Strong Foundation in Both Languages	Build literacy skills in both English and the home language to the greatest extent possible. Make sure that literacy curricula in both languages meet the requirements set forth by the state for research-based literacy instruction. Ensure that students do not miss literacy instruction for other supports.
Materials Rooted in research on Language Acquisition	Provide ample opportunities to develop comprehension and oracy in both languages. Avoid intervening in ways that isolate and decontextualize skills for students who are still developing language.

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FAQs

Common Literacy and Teaching Related Questions at the K-2 level

Is phonics instruction the most important building block for emergent readers?

With a renewed national focus on foundational skills in Kindergarten through 2nd grade, this question often comes up for multilingual learners. If phonics and phonemic awareness are the most important parts of reading, shouldn't instruction look the same for multilinguals and monolinguals, alike?

Answer: Phonics instruction is an essential component for young learners as they begin to learn the building blocks of reading. However, for multilingual learners, it is essential that phonemic awareness and phonics instruction are rooted in meaning. Teaching these skills in isolation will slow the progress of emergent bilingual students. Educators should focus on connecting foundational skills with meaning by providing instruction that incorporates familiar vocabulary, home language, and visuals as much as possible.

If multilingual learners cannot decode yet, shouldn't they focus on that before moving on ?

This question often prompts young multilingual learners to be placed in interventions before they may need to be. Literacy instruction for multilingual learners is not sequential; they do not need to master letter names and sounds before being exposed to other literacy skills. On the contrary, it is essential that these skills are integrated.

Answer: Multilingual students who have not yet mastered foundational skills that allow them to decode, do not need to be held back from other literacy instruction. These skills are best taught when integrated with meaningful stories and texts. Students who are not yet proficient in English benefit from engaging in vocabulary instruction and comprehension activities and should not be removed from this instruction in order to have more time to focus on

How do I teach in a culturally responsive way when I have so many cultures represented in my classroom?

It may be hard to learn about the backgrounds and cultures of a diverse classroom. Many schools do not have one dominant culture and struggle to know how to respond to many diverse languages and backgrounds.

Answer: Talking with families, regardless of whether your students share a similar background culture, is the best way to get to know the cultural contexts that your students have experienced. Additionally, Zaretta Hammond (2015) acknowledges two main distinctions in cultures that can help classrooms be more culturally responsive: individual vs community-based cultures and written vs oral traditions. Incorporating opportunities for collaboration honor cultures in which group achievement is valued over individual success. Additionally, providing instruction that includes storytelling, song, and discussion honors cultures in which oracy is a valued way to pass knowledge. This practice will also help boost English learners' language development.

I don't speak another language. How can I provide multilingual support?

When students can receive bilingual literacy instruction from a bilingual educator, it allows them to access their prior linguistic skills and transfer them to English literacy instruction. However, a monolingual teacher can also provide beneficial home language support without knowing the students' home languages.

Answer: Monolingual teachers can incorporate home language support into the classroom in a variety of ways. They can work with multilingual educators to learn more about the language and ways they can support it. They can also post bilingual word walls, either by looking up translations or by asking students or families to provide the word in their home languages. Teachers can provide texts in languages that are representative of their classrooms and ask families to send in print from boxes, magazines, or flyers that they may have at home. Surrounding students with print



in their home languages validates that their language is a part of literacy instruction and honors the experiences they have had prior to school.

How can I help multilingual learners with academic vocabulary when they don't have basic English skills?

This is a common concern, especially with newcomer students. The key is to provide explicit vocabulary instruction while also leveraging their existing knowledge. Don't assume they don't know a concept just because they don't have the English word for it. Middle school multilingual learners often have a deep understanding of academic topics in their home language.

Answer: Research shows that explicit vocabulary instruction is crucial for multilingual learners. This includes directly teaching discipline-specific words (e.g., “photosynthesis”) and high-utility words (e.g., “analyze,” “interpret”) that appear across content areas (Digital Promise, 2023). Use a multimodal approach with visuals, real-world examples, and opportunities for students to practice the new words orally and in writing. Encourage them to connect new English words to cognates and concepts they already know in their home language.

Won't allowing students to use their home language in class prevent them from learning English?

This is a persistent myth rooted in a monolingual mindset. In reality, a student's home language is a powerful tool for learning.

Answer: Research on translanguaging shows that it's a powerful pedagogical practice. Rather than viewing languages as separate, this approach recognizes that multilingual individuals have a single, integrated linguistic repertoire (García & Li, 2014; Ofelia García, 2019). Inviting students to use their home language to brainstorm, discuss ideas with peers, or clarify a concept doesn't hinder English acquisition; it supports it. Translanguaging is a “strategic, meaning-making tool” that helps students access and understand complex content, which in turn strengthens their English skills.

Resources

Dialogic Reading: An effective way to read aloud with children.

<https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/early-literacy-development/articles/dialogic-reading-effective-way-read-aloud-young-children>

Ruiz, N. & Sanchez-Boyce, M., (2022), *ABC OLE Instructional Resource Guide: Foundational Biliteracy Skills Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 2*.

<https://www.amazon.com/ABC-OLE-Instructional-Resource-Guide-Pre-Kindergarten/dp/B09YQKKDRN>

Ruiz, N. & Sanchez-Boyce, M., (2022). *ABC-OLE Instructional Resource Guide: Foundational Biliteracy Skills Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 2*

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360291497_ABC-OLE_Instructional_Resource_Guide_Foundational_Biliteracy_Skills_Pre-Kindergarten_though_Grade_2

Unite For Literacy: free online portal with nonfiction books in English, audio in English and audio in many languages to preview book; site includes a library of books written in Ukrainian with audio in Ukrainian, and books written in Spanish with audio in Spanish.

<https://www.uniteforliteracy.com/>



World Stories- digital library of multilingual books

<http://worldstories.org.uk/>

Book Awards

American Indian Youth Literature Award

<https://ailanet.org/activities/american-indian-youth-literature-award/>

Asian Pacific American Award for Literature (APAAL)

<https://www.apalaweb.org/awards/literature-awards/>

Coretta Scott King Book Awards for African American authors and illustrators

<https://www.ala.org/awards/books-media/coretta-scott-king-book-awards>

The International Literacy Association (ILA) Children's and Young Adult Book Awards

<https://www.literacyworldwide.org/get-involved/awards-recognition/awards-grants/ila-children's-and-young-adults'-book-awards>

Pura Belpre Award (Latin American authors and illustrators)

<https://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpre>

Walter Dean Myers Award Outstanding Children's Literature

<https://www.diversebooks.org/programs/walterawards>