**EDC** Education
Development
Center

# Supporting Emergent Bilingual Children in Early Learning

**CHECKLIST**

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Across the United States, young children's first learning experiences outside the home often happen in child-care settings, and many children come to school as emergent bilinguals (i.e., children who are exposed to two or more languages, also known as dual language learners). Research shows that learning multiple languages is very beneficial for development, yet few early child-care educators know best practices for supporting the learning of more than one language. This checklist, which is based on research, will help those who want to support children's bilingual learning within a rich literacy and language classroom environment.

You can use this checklist at any time; however, we suggest using it at the beginning of the school year as you prepare your classroom, which may include children who are emergent bilinguals. You also can review this checklist in collaboration with the other teachers in your classroom and school or center. Keep in mind that it may not be practical to apply every checklist item in all classrooms. **You know your children and your classroom best; use your judgement to pick what you want to incorporate into your classroom.** For materials in your children's home languages, you may need translation help from school staff, a parent volunteer, or a community member who knows the language, or you can use an online translation website.

# Overall Classroom Environment

☐ **Labels are used selectively throughout the classroom,** located at children's eye level, in large print, and in the languages of your children, to help children connect text and language to real objects and to lay a foundation for language and literacy development. Labels can be made initially for high-frequency or commonly used vocabulary words, such as *the* or *red*, gradually adding new words throughout the year. Each language can be color-coded.

☐ **Directions for actions, routines, and schedules are posted for children** with a short, clear line of text and a clear image. Examples include an illustrated job chart, an image of hands being washed posted above the sink, and a picture of the sun on a calendar to show the weather for that day.

☐ **Images and text reflecting different cultures and languages are visible to children,** such as a calendar of multicultural holidays, maps, flags, and photos of places and people in traditional clothing. You can highlight the cultures and languages of your children in these displays.

☐ **Rotating themes and key words are introduced regularly.** Themes such as "animals" and "community helpers" are used often throughout the classroom and in class activities to promote vocabulary development in English and in your children's languages.

☐ **Photos and objects relating to your children, their families, and their cultures are included throughout the room.** You might post photos of each child dressed in the traditional clothing of their culture, with the name underneath in English and in the home language, and have a "family shelf" where a different child shares objects from their home life and culture each week. You also can post children's work and label it in the home language as well as in English.

☐ **Parents are made to feel welcome through a bulletin board,** which greets them, invites their participation, and gives them class updates, in their home language if possible.

# Learning Centers in Your Classroom

☐ **Reading Center includes storybooks and informational books that are easy for young children to follow,** with pictures, rhymes, and repetition.

- ✓ Include books in different languages, especially in your children's home languages, and bilingual books when possible
- ✓ Include books from different cultures, not just translations of books written in English

☐ **Writing Center includes easily accessible writing materials,** such as pencils, crayons, markers, paper in different sizes and colors, foam letters, alphabet strips, and other items.

- ✓ Include cards with the names of the children in your classroom and other high-frequency words in children's home languages and in English
- ✓ Incorporate materials that include the alphabet of children's home languages and other written materials in the home language, if possible

## *Learning Centers in Your Classroom*

☐ **Math Center includes books, math words, math games, and manipulatives in English and in children's home languages.** For example, hang posters showing numbers from 1 to 10 in English, Spanish, or other languages used by your children.

☐ **Science Center includes hands-on science learning materials.** Examples include leaves collected by students and child-friendly equipment such as hand lenses, as well as books and labels in English and in children's home languages.

   ✓ Place art materials in the science center so children can express what they learn and observe about science in various ways, such as drawings, collages, gestures, and talking

☐ **Play Areas include items from different cultures or in different languages.** Here are some examples:

   ✓ Dress-up clothes from different cultures

   ✓ Dolls and puppets that are culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse and that combat stereotypes, such as female firefighters and black scientists

   ✓ Board games in various languages

# Classroom Materials and Resources

- ☐ **Art materials are multicultural. Here are some examples:**
  - ✓ Activities and materials from different countries/cultures, such as origami paper with traditional prints, or materials to make traditional masks from your children's cultures
  - ✓ People-shaped paper, crayons, markers, and colored pencils in a range of skin tones
  - ✓ Labels for materials and colors in English and in your children's home languages

- ☐ **Music materials include instruments, photos, and recordings of music, songs, and dances from various cultures,** such as maracas or photos of folk dancers. These can be labeled in English and in their native languages.

- ☐ **Technology and media resources are used to support development in English and children's home languages.**
  - ✓ Child-to-child conversations can be supported by pairing children to use media resources, with appropriate seating and headphone splitters, if necessary
  - ✓ Media resources, such as apps, videos, poems, songs, and stories, have content available in children's home languages
  - ✓ Devices can record and share audio, video, and pictures of children's home cultures and languages

- ☐ **Meals include ingredients and snacks from multiple cultures.** You also can have families bring in food from their cultures for birthdays, holidays, and other celebrations, if your school or center allows it.

# Where to Learn More

» **For detailed guidelines for creating a literacy-rich classroom environment:**
  **Learning Words for Life**
  https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusOn-EY-Dual-Language-Learners.pdf

» **For a classroom model of working with young emergent bilingual children and their families:**
  **Focus on the Early Years: Dual Language Learners**
  https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusOn-EY-Dual-Language-Learners.pdf

» **For a summary of general characteristics of young emergent bilingual children and essential instructional practices:**
  **Working with Young English Language Learners: Some Considerations**
  https://www.ericdigests.org/2004-2/young.html

» **For a PK–12 ELL guide with forms to track children's language development (reading, fluency, comprehension, etc.) and common classroom phrases in Spanish and cognates:**
  **ELL Starter Kit for Educators**
  http://www.colorincolorado.org/guide/ell-starter-kit-educators

» **For printable copies of this and other early learning resources, available in Chinese, Spanish, and English:**
  **Education Development Center**
  edc.org/early-ed-tools

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