



## Listening

Active listening forms the foundation of a child's language development in any language. As young children first learn language, their receptive knowledge of the language exceeds their productive capabilities. This is also the case for children who are English learners as they begin learning a second language. They are often able to understand much more than they can produce. The ability to listen to the features of a language and process the meaning of the new sounds while applying relevant knowledge from the first language is a critical skill for preschool children who are English learners. Through listening, preschool English learners actively process the features of the English language including vocabulary, grammar, phonology, and pragmatics. Preschool English learners become familiar with English by making hypotheses about how the language works and testing them in conversation with others.

During the early stages of learning a second language, children who are English learners will utilize gestures, behaviors, and nonverbal responses to demonstrate their listening skills and indicate understanding of this new language.<sup>7</sup>

Modeling the English language requires deliberate and intentional instructional practices that help the young child to hear the sounds of the second language, such as speaking slowly, clearly, and often. Preschool English learners need time to adjust, feel safe, and be given opportunities to engage with others. When interacting with children who are English learners, teachers should use body language, gestures, and spoken language that is well pronounced and

utilizes clear referents (e.g., concrete representations and visual aids as appropriate). It is important to make sure young children who are English learners are included in a variety of activities

that promote listening and comprehension, because they may be relatively nonverbal when entering the classroom.





## 1.0 Children Listen with Understanding

**L**istening is an essential aspect of oral language development, and understanding what is heard is critical to the development of reading and writing skills. The development of good listening skills should be a goal of all

early childhood programs. Young children can learn good listening skills in any language; these skills will facilitate the ability to attend to and comprehend spoken English.

### Portrait of a Preschool English Learner

#### VIGNETTE

#### **Lonia**

*Lonia is a three-year-old child from a family who recently emigrated from the Republic of Sudan. She is quite thin for her age and appears withdrawn from the other children. Lonia rarely looks at any of the adults or responds in any way when asked to participate. Some trauma may have been associated with the immigration, but the family has not shared any details. Lonia appears somewhat fearful and mostly watches other children at first. However, she seems very interested in snack and lunch. She smiles at the teacher when he asks if she wants crackers and cheese. She always eagerly eats all types of food. She also constantly rubs a plastic bracelet that she wears high on her left arm. The teacher wonders if Lonia knows any English at all or if she is unusually timid and slow to warm up. Lonia is indirectly communicating many aspects of her development and learning needs that teachers will explore in more depth through detailed observations and careful curriculum planning.*

*When Lonia first entered Ms. Sarah's preschool classroom, she quietly stood next to the door looking uncertain about what to do after her mother kissed her and waved good-bye. Ms. Sarah knew that Lonia's family had just relocated to her community. Ms. Sarah observed that both Lonia and her mother seemed most comfortable speaking in a dialect of Arabic. That first day, Ms. Sarah took Lonia's hand, bent down, smiled directly at her, and said in a soothing voice, "Welcome, Lonia. We are very happy to have you in our classroom. It is circle time now. I will show you where to sit." Ms. Sarah then walked Lonia over to the rug and patted a small area next to the teacher's reading chair and pantomimed sitting down while saying "This is your spot. You can sit here during circle time."*

**TEACHABLE  
MOMENT**

Ms. Sarah was aware of Lonia's limited ability to comprehend English as well as her apprehension about entering a strange setting in which the language and customs were unfamiliar. Although Lonia may not have been able to understand the exact words, she could perceive a friendly tone and follow the physical cues from Ms. Sarah.

**PLANNING  
LEARNING  
OPPORTUNITIES**

Teachers of young English learners need to be aware of the stages of second-language development so they can anticipate the kind of individual attention preschool English learners may need. By paying attention to the behavior of children who are not fully proficient in English, teachers can help ease the transition into the new learning environment. In this case, Ms. Sarah was not certain how much English Lonia understood, so she used many gestures and nonverbal cues to help Lonia understand what was expected.

The following interactions and strategies support preschool children who are English learners:

**Model good listening skills.** All children know when adults are really listening to them; to promote good listening skills among preschool children who are English learners, teachers must first demonstrate good listening skills, especially for children who may have difficulty expressing themselves. As preschool English learners acquire the vocabulary to communicate in English, they may be hesitant to talk at all or they may use elements of both languages. During those stages, it is important to listen patiently, make eye contact, be at the eye level of the child, and respond positively, both verbally and nonverbally. If teachers convey the message that they are too preoccupied or uninterested in what the child is saying, preschool children who are English learners may become discouraged in their attempts to communicate in English.

**Use the home language for comprehension.** By stating common words and phrases in English and the home language (e.g., *papel*, paper; *bola*, ball; *adiós*, good-bye), teachers can help preschool children who are English learners make the connections between the language they know and the language they are learning. When a child who is learning English is in the early stage of comprehending spoken English, it may be necessary for a fluent speaker of the home language to provide interpretation. This support will promote acceptance and valuing of the child's home language, a means for the child to participate in the classroom activities, and opportunities for other children to learn a few words in a new language.

**Keep messages and directions short when talking with preschool children who are English learners.** Directions should be broken down into short, sequential steps that are supported



by pictures, visual cues, and graphic prompts whenever possible. By using simple, grammatically correct directions and by modeling language, teachers increase the chances that preschool English learners will understand what is being asked of them and will successfully adjust to the classroom. For example, the teacher says, “It is time to come to the rug” and then walks over and demonstrates where to sit. Gradually increase the use of complex vocabulary and grammatical structures as the children’s comprehension of English increases.

**Teach children how to listen, repeat messages, and ask questions.** Establish listening cues (e.g., a signal such as “freeze” or a timid puppet who needs a quiet classroom to enter) that communicate to children when they need to pay attention. It is always a good idea to check for understanding by having preschool English learners actively respond to messages (“If you are going to the block area, put your hands on your head”) and ask clarification questions. As many researchers have pointed out, all children need to learn how to restate, repeat, summarize, and reflect on classroom activities. Teachers can help preschool children who are English learners listen carefully by asking them



to talk about what has just happened and then listen patiently while accepting their language usage, which may include code switching.

**Have a listening library in the home language and in English.** In addition to the audiotapes, CDs, and DVDs available in English, have a parent or other fluent speaker of the child’s home language record favorite books, stories, songs, and poems. For instance, when reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* as part of a planned book reading, make sure there is a home-language version of the book in the listening area along with key vocabulary words in both languages.

**Summarize or provide key phrases of a story in a book, finger play, or song in the child’s home language before introducing it in English.** This step provides the child with the opportunity to use the home language as a basis for transferring concepts and understanding from the home language to English.

**Use language and literacy activities that contain repetitive refrains** so that the English learner can hear the idea or concept multiple times (e.g., *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*). By repeating a phrase and linking it to visual cues, teachers can promote the understanding of new English vocabulary.

**Use running commentary when the child is engaged in an activity.** For example, if the child is climbing up the ladder to the slide, the teacher might say, “You are going up the ladder and then you will go down the slide,” touching the object while naming it. Teachers can also emphasize key words such as *up* and *down* as part of the daily learning experiences. By talking about what she is doing while she is doing it (e.g., “I am putting your picture in your cubby”), the



teacher is connecting the language with the behavior and providing additional scaffolds for the child who is learning English.

**Use multiple methods for scaffolding communication depending on the stage of English-language development of the child.**

Combine words with some type of gesture, action, or directed gaze (e.g., picture cues, physical gestures, facial expressions, and pantomimes, props, and interpreters, if necessary). For example, in the book *The Three Bears*, it will aid in the child's comprehension if the teacher shows pictures from the book, displays flannel cutouts of the bears and Goldilocks, and acts out the expressions. (See PEL Resource Guide, pages 54–55, for more detail.)



**Target both the content and English-language development in every activity.**

Design activities with a dual purpose: understanding of the concept and the English label associated with it. For example, when working with a shape puzzle, demonstrate how a triangle has three corners and fits into the puzzle and that the word *triangle* is the name of this particular shape.

**Observe preschool English learners during group time, storybook reading, and in small groups.**

Teachers will need to continually observe preschool children who are English learners to determine their progress in English comprehension and adjust expectations accordingly. As teachers engage the children in the focused listening activities described above, they observe preschool English learners' attention to the language used (e.g., are they looking at the speaker, do they respond nonverbally with facial expressions or gestures to speakers, do they follow along with other children when asked, do they respond appropriately to peers and adults when asked to complete a task?). The answers to these types of questions help inform teachers as they plan individualized activities for children.



## Flannel Board Activity: An Example of Building Listening Skills

OVERVIEW	
<b>DAY 1</b>	Read <i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i> in the home language and in English during different times of the day. The teacher can read it in the home language, have it taped in the child's home language, or have a parent or family member read it in the home language prior to reading it in English. Point out key vocabulary words in both the home language and then in English.
<b>DAY 2</b>	Review the book in English, emphasize key vocabulary words, and pass out flannel board pieces with images of story narrative. Summarize key events in the story with visual cues from the book. Then ask children to place pictures on the flannel board when the story so indicates.
<b>DAY 3</b>	Leave the flannel board for small groups and for free time when children choose their own activities. Read and retell the story only to Lonia, checking for comprehension. Ask her to place appropriate pictures of key events on the flannel board.
INDIVIDUAL ADAPTATIONS	
If Lonia has three plums and looks blank when asked, "Who has the plums?" the teacher could hold up a plum, look at her, and say, "Do you have this?" If she still does not respond, the teacher might ask her to show what she has and nonverbally indicate that she should hold it up, "This is a plum" and then ask her what she calls it. If a fluent speaker of Arabic were available, it would be useful to have the book read in Arabic and for key vocabulary to be translated into Arabic.	
OBSERVATION AND DOCUMENTATION	
Observation is part of this activity to learn more about Lonia's developmental level. From this interaction, the teacher begins to gather information about Lonia's ability to understand some English vocabulary words, whether she understands simple instructions, and which concepts she understands. The teacher would note her responses on this date and continue to observe her language and listening skills across other contexts, documenting her progress.	



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## Bringing It All Together

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*After Lonia had been in the classroom for several weeks, Ms. Sarah observed that Lonia was consistently following the routines of the classroom: moving to the rug, cleaning up, and sitting down, when asked. She also sat quietly and attended during circle time. However, Ms. Sarah was not sure if Lonia was merely imitating the behaviors of the other children or if she truly understood the English words. It was also evident that Lonia was forming friendships with two other girls, often playing with Mariela and Sheena in the dramatic play area. Lonia mostly interacted with the girls nonverbally; when she did speak, it was in single words that were softly spoken and not clearly understood.*

*One day Ms. Sarah sat down with Lonia for an extended conversation. "Lonia, tell me about what you are drawing." Lonia just looked at Ms. Sarah and kept drawing her picture. (The picture had human-like figures that appeared to be in the forest.) "Is this your family?" asked Ms. Sarah, Lonia nodded and muttered, "Um hum." "Do you have a big family?" Lonia nodded enthusiastically and said, "Lots of family." "Do you have any brothers and sisters?" asked Ms. Sarah. Lonia nodded and pointed to three small figures in the drawing. "What are their names?" asked Ms. Sarah. Lonia quickly said their names adding, "She's baby," pointing to the smallest figure.*

*Ms. Sarah then asked Lonia if she would hold the picture up so the other children could see it, which Lonia did.*

*Finally, Ms. Sarah asked Lonia if she wanted to take the picture home, and Lonia emphatically said, "Yes." "Be sure to put the picture in your cubby so you will remember to take it home today," said Ms. Sarah. Lonia suddenly ran over to her cubby and carefully put the picture away.*

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At this point in Lonia's development, Ms. Sarah wanted to probe Lonia's English comprehension in a more individual and specific interaction. Ms. Sarah carefully posed questions about Lonia's picture, starting with simple questions and ending with a request. Through this interaction, Ms. Sarah was able to determine more about Lonia's ability to listen, comprehend, and follow simple directions in English.

### Engaging Families

The following ideas may help families with children who are English learners to develop listening abilities:

- ✓ When working with families who have limited English-language proficiency, teachers will need to communicate in the parents' preferred language. Employing a bilingual interpreter may be necessary.
- ✓ Many of the recommended strategies in this chapter can be translated into a child's home language and provided as a take-home activity for families. For example, parents can be asked to record a native song or story in their home language and make this available both at home and in the classroom.



- ✓ Families with children who are English learners should be encouraged to continue family traditions (such as storytelling, family celebrations) and household routines in their native language. The ability to hear,

understand, and respond to directions, stories, and complex language can be developed in any language and will facilitate the development of those skills in English.

### *Questions for Reflection*

1. What would you do when the preschool English learner seems to follow directions in groups, possibly by imitating the behavior of their peers, but has difficulty with directions given to her individually?
2. How do you know if an English learner comprehends English and to what degree?
  - Does the child attend and follow along with a story read in English or does he tend to look away and appear uninterested?
  - Does the child show interest in and attend to books read in her home language?
  - Does the child actively engage with peers during dramatic play and respond to the English language conversations? Does the child spend more time on the fringes of groups, watching and listening to others?
3. Does the child comply with the mother's directions in her home language when she is dropped off, such as, "Come here and give me a kiss before I leave"?
4. How are you providing focused listening opportunities in the child's home language?





## Speaking

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**T**he Speaking strand focuses on children's use of both nonverbal and verbal means of communication. Most experts in the field agree that the development of oral English proficiency for children who are English learners is an essential first step for later reading development.<sup>8</sup> In early care and education settings, aspects of a language's phonology (i.e., the sounds of a language) and syntax (i.e., the order in which words occur) are revealed through both formal and informal listening and speaking activities. In addition, young children begin to use oral language as a means of gathering more information about their environments through the use of questions. While young children who are English learners are hearing the sounds of English, familiarizing themselves with words in English, and learning how words go together in phrases and short sentences, they will begin to try out

these new sounds, words, and phrases. For children to practice this new language, they need to be in a comfortable and welcoming environment that allows language experimentation and accepts children's efforts to communicate. Young children's first attempts to speak may be tentative and halting.





## 1.0 Children Use Nonverbal and Verbal Strategies to Communicate with Others

Young English learners rely heavily on nonverbal cues when trying to understand a second language. Thus, teachers must be conscious of the importance of combining the spoken word with nonverbal signs to assist the child. It is also

important for teachers to make an effort to learn key words and phrases in the child's home language as a way to communicate that they are interested in the child and his background.

### VIGNETTE

*It is the first day of preschool for Lai, a young girl who speaks Vietnamese. She is holding on tightly to the teacher's hand and is looking primarily at the floor. Ms. Linda, her teacher, holds Lai's hand as she tells all the other children to gather for circle time. As the children gather on the rug, Ms. Linda gently walks Lai to the rug and gestures to her to sit next to her. Ms. Linda begins to speak to the children as a group and introduces Lai by name to the children. Ms. Linda and Lai continue to hold hands. Ms. Linda does not expect Lai to say anything or to even to make eye contact with other children. After a few minutes, Lai begins to relax, and she pulls her hand away from the teacher. Lai continues to maintain close physical contact with Ms. Linda throughout the day while Ms. Linda communicates with smiles and gestures.*

### TEACHABLE MOMENT

Ms. Linda understands that Lai feels nervous and possibly does not understand much of anything that is being said. Ms. Linda uses this opportunity to communicate to Lai that she will help her begin to navigate an environment that she does not understand.

### VIGNETTE

*Mr. Ralph gathers all the children around for a read-aloud. The book he is going to read is A Hat for Minerva. It is about a hen searching for warm things in the snow. Because Mr. Ralph has three children in his group whose primary language is Hmong, he did his research to find out how to pronounce some key words in the book such as garden hose, pot, hen, and snow. While he is reading the book to the group, the Hmong children are interested in looking at the pictures, but when Mr. Ralph gets to the word hen he says to all, "You know, the way you say hen in Hmong is poj qaib. When the Hmong children hear this, their eyes widen and they smile at each other.*



### PLANNING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Four different languages are spoken in Mr. Ralph's preschool group. He has made it a point to locate dictionaries in the children's home languages to check for pronunciation. Mr. Ralph asks other staff members who speak the children's home languages for help with the pronunciation of words. By working to pronounce key words correctly in Hmong, Mr. Ralph demonstrates to the children that he is interested in them by learning some key words in their home language. In addition, the children have a better understanding of the word in English since Mr. Ralph used their home language to make the connection.

### VIGNETTE

*All the children are playing outdoors, and the teachers have set up a board with openings in different shapes (e.g., circle, square, triangle, rectangle). Jasmine, a child who speaks Farsi, is looking toward the board and appears interested. Mr. Li gestures to Jasmine to come closer and picks up a beanbag. He models for Jasmine how to throw the beanbag toward the board at the different openings. While he throws the beanbag with an underhand motion, he simultaneously says, "Look, Jasmine, I swing my arm and throw the beanbag." Mr. Li repeats the physical action several times while simultaneously describing his actions. He then encourages Jasmine to try it. When Jasmine picks up the beanbag, Mr. Li smiles and repeats, "Swing your arm and throw. That's the way to do it, Jasmine!"*

### TEACHABLE MOMENT

Mr. Li saw that Jasmine was interested in the activity and used the opportunity to teach her some key vocabulary words in the activity. He combined both gestures and narration to get his points across.

The following interactions and strategies support preschool children who are English learners:

**Learn how to pronounce the child's name as accurately as possible.** Since a child's name is so closely linked to a sense of self, it is important to use the correct pronunciation. Teachers should ask for help from a native speaker and practice saying it aloud so that a native speaker can help with the pronunciation. Sometimes it may be helpful for the native speaker to record the child's name

on audiotape so the teacher can refer to the recording as a resource.

**Learn some key words or phrases in the child's home language.** Teachers can ask parents, siblings, other teachers or staff members who speak the child's home language to provide a few key words and phrases for *hello, goodbye, thank you, please, and sit down*. When the teacher makes an effort to learn the child's language, even a few words and phrases, it conveys the message that the child's home language is



important. When reading a story in English, the teacher may translate key words or phrases into the child's home language as a means of validating the importance of the child's home language as well as increasing the child's interest.

**Repeat common phrases slowly and clearly to the child** so he can begin to make the connection between the phrase and the action, (e.g., circle time or nap-time). Modify the rate of speech and pronounce each word clearly so that the child has time to hear good examples of the words and phrases in English. Combine gestures, pictures, and touching of objects.

**Allow the child to start slowly.** Children who are learning English need to have many opportunities to observe the classroom routine to begin to make sense of how things are done in the early childhood setting. The child needs ample time to watch and become comfortable before utilizing spoken English as a primary means of communication.

**Allow for wait time.** It is important to wait for children who are English learners to process information in English. Additional wait time benefits children not only for the development of English comprehension but also for verbalizing a response in a language that they are learning.

**Scaffold communication by combining English words with some type of body gesture or visual cue** such as pointing to an object or showing a picture. Make sure to include body gestures and visual cues to assist children who are English learners in understanding the concept of the word in English. For example, in reciting "Two Little Black Birds," use pictures of black birds or stuffed animals representing black birds to illustrate the concept. When reciting the word *flying*, act out a flapping motion to demonstrate a bird in flight.

**Be thoughtful about helping children understand what words mean** (e.g., explaining, defining, showing). Children who are learning English will need additional assistance in understanding not only the word or phrase presented in English, but also the concept to which it refers. It is important for adults to be deliberate in their teaching actions by clarifying, describing, or demonstrating what is meant.

**Plan for vocabulary development.** It is important to identify key vocabulary words and how those key vocabulary words will be used in both formal and informal activities prior to use. Connecting vocabulary words to a visual aid or a gesture helps to make a clearer association for children who are English learners. The intentional use of key vocabulary words throughout the day will assist English learners to make a connection between the word and its meaning.

**Expand and extend the child's language.** Once a child who is learning English begins to use words or phrases in English, catch them using English and extend and expand upon their language. For example, if the child says "car," the teacher could say, "Oh, you want the red car"; or if the child says "more" at the snack table, the teacher points to the milk and asks, "Do you want more *milk* or more *orange juice*?"

**Create small groups for book reading.** For children who are learning English, it is important to provide reading opportunities in small groups. Children who are learning English can have closer interactions with the material, and the teacher can slow the pace of reading and use words or phrases in the home language to assist with understanding and scaffold learning.



## 2.0 Children Begin to Understand and Use Social Conventions in English

**S**ocial conventions refer to what children should know about the use of English apart from the language itself in order to use the language in a socially acceptable manner. Social conventions are typically considered as the social

rules that govern language use such as eye contact, degree of proximity to the speaker, and when and who may initiate conversation. These social conventions are often learned through observation and trial-and-error learning.

### VIGNETTE

*Ms. Cathy has always had children call her by her first name. This year Ms. Cathy has Spanish-speaking children in her group. She noticed that some Spanish-speaking parents scold their child when he refers to her by her first name. Ms. Cathy asks her Spanish-speaking assistant, Ms. Maria, about the interaction. Ms. Maria mentions that Spanish-speaking parents view teachers as authority figures, requiring respect and deference. Children are accustomed to addressing the teacher by her last name.*

### TEACHABLE MOMENT

▶ Ms. Cathy learned that culture influences how children address adults, especially teachers. This moment is an example of how culture and language intersect in the daily life of children. Ms. Cathy may want to have a conversation with Spanish-speaking parents to discuss how children could address her respectfully in the program. Ms. Cathy needs to acknowledge parental preferences and work with parents to arrive at an acceptable approach.

The following interactions and strategies support preschool children who are English learners:

**Ask a family member or knowledgeable community resource to share appropriate social conventions for the child's language and culture.** Paraprofessionals and staff members who speak the child's home language can help explain to the teacher important social rules surrounding language. For example, a teacher might ask questions: How are children expected to talk to the teacher? Is it okay to use the teacher's first name? In the

home setting, do children initiate conversation with adults? Is there a formal versus an informal form of address in the home language? When the teacher and family members have discussions about specific social conventions, it becomes part of the ongoing dialogue that builds a partnership as the teacher and family work together to support the preschool English learner.

**Observe the child during drop-off and pick-up for cues** about how the parent or other family members interact with the child and how the child reacts



and behaves during those interactions. One way of figuring out social rules used in the home language is to observe parents and their children during these interactions. How do parents respond to the child? What is the physical proximity between the child and the parent? How animated is the parent when she is speaking? What is the child's reaction? Is the child more spontaneous in her speech or does she wait for a cue from the parent that it is time to talk? Although parental behaviors outside the home setting may be different from what may occur in the home, in many cases the behavior may reflect social conventions in the home language.

Through observation, teachers can learn about the ways that children have experienced communication and language interactions in their culture. Using that knowledge, teachers can think about how their communication and language styles are consistent with or different from the

children and their families. Teachers may want to modify their communication and language approaches to include styles that may be more familiar to children. For example, if communication usually takes place across a distance and not in proximity, the teacher may want to use this style when speaking with the children. Or if children are expected to speak only when spoken to, the teacher can make sure to ask questions of the individual child and not pose questions to the group, expecting the individual child to respond.

**During circle time or small-group time, talk to children about the different ways they greet adults and other children in their families.** Ask children how they say hello and good-bye to adults. The explanation can be role-played through the use of finger puppets or figures of a family. Are there differences in the ways children interact with adults versus peers?

### 3.0 Children Use Language to Create Oral Narratives About Their Personal Experiences

This substrand relates to the development of a child's use of narrative to describe both personal and fictional stories. The oral language that children hear is the basis for the development of their discourse skills. Focusing on

stories about themselves and their families is an appropriate first step for teachers encouraging children's narrative development. Talking about one's own personal experience is often easier than talking about imaginary events.

#### VIGNETTE

*Soon-hui, a child who speaks Korean, is looking at a wordless picture book in the library area. James, an English-speaking child, is sitting next to her looking at another picture book. Mr. Luis observes that Soon-hui begins to say a few words in English while pointing to the pictures. Mr. Luis approaches and sits down on the floor next to Soon-hui and James. Soon-hui looks up and smiles at the teacher. Mr. Luis says, "Soon-hui, you are using your English words." Soon-hui smiles and looks at James.*

**TEACHABLE  
MOMENT**

As Mr. Luis was scanning the room to see how children were working with various materials, he noticed that Soon-hui was using some English vocabulary. Mr. Luis had observed that Soon-hui understands much of the English that is spoken to her but does not speak much English. Mr. Luis remembered reading about the continuum of development for English learners and decided to make a note about Soon-hui's language use to reflect on and consider later when documenting her progress. When he heard Soon-hui speaking English, he approached her to provide some positive reinforcement. Not only did Mr. Luis provide some encouragement to Soon-hui, but he did it in the presence of a peer, which provided additional value.

**VIGNETTE**

*Lorena and Fermin, two children who speak Spanish, are playing together in the dramatic play area. The children found the doctor's kit and appeared to be playing doctor. Fermin lay on the bed saying, "Me sick, me sick."*

*Lorena, with a worried look on her face, bent over Fermin and touched his face, then shook her head, and said, "Muy sick, mucho sick. Let's go al hospital," and "Al hospital."*

**PLANNING  
LEARNING  
OPPORTUNITIES**

The dramatic play area had different types of props for the children to use. Lorena and Fermin played with them, incorporating in conversation some of the English words that they were learning. Providing children who are English learners with environments in which they can experiment with language is extremely important.

**VIGNETTE**

*Ms. Amy approaches Jose and Jaime, two children who speak Spanish, who are using only the rectangular blocks to build a tower together. Ms. Amy says to the boys, "That is a great looking tower." She points to a set of triangle-shaped blocks and says, "How can you use those blocks in your tower?" Jaime looks at her and shrugs his shoulders, suggesting that he does not know. Ms. Amy says, "Why don't you try it? She hands Jaime a block and says, "Try it."*

*Jaime takes the block and puts it on the top of the tower and says, "I try it." Seeing this, Jose grabs one of the triangle blocks and places it on top of the tower, which begins to lean and falls down in a crash.*

*"What happened?" says Ms. Amy.*

*Jose responds, "It falled."*

*"Oh, no," says Jaime.*



### TEACHABLE MOMENT

Ms. Amy used some open-ended questions to stimulate conversation using different blocks in the tower construction. Even though Jose and Jaime had limited English for their response, Ms. Amy continued the conversation and provided opportunities for Jose and Jaime to talk about what they were doing.

The following interactions and strategies support preschool children who are English learners:

**Listen appreciatively to children's stories.** When children begin to provide narrative in English, they may do so in a tentative manner and possibly mix English with their home language. When this occurs, it is important to provide the child with as much undivided attention as possible. During these interactions, it is helpful to provide positive reinforcement about their attempts to relate a story to the teacher.

**Ask open-ended questions and sustain the conversation over a number of turns.** Provide opportunities for the child to practice English. For example, during circle time, small-group time, or snack time, ask the child what she did over the weekend or during the holiday break. Teachers need to provide time for daily sharing that moves beyond one-word responses.

**Help children understand idioms.** English, like all languages, has specific idiomatic phrases that need to be pointed out to all children but particularly to second-language learners who may never have heard the idiom before. Phrases such as “it is raining cats and dogs,” “two peas in a pod,” or “Mommy is going to be

late because she's tied up at work” need to be explained to young children. When preparing book-reading presentations, finger plays, or singing songs, make sure to note where idiomatic expressions occur and plan to add an explanation.

**Provide materials that help stimulate talking (or oral narratives as used in the *California Preschool Learning Foundations*, page 122).** The dramatic play area or an area where puppets, dolls, and miniature figures are easily available will encourage children to express themselves in more spontaneous ways. In those scenarios, the child pretends to be someone or something else, and the burden of language performance is lessened. The use of tape recorders to hear her own speech, the sight of photographs of herself, and the presence of other children in the setting may help elicit oral language development.

**Provide wordless picture books.** Wordless picture books give the child an opportunity to make up his own stories. Children may begin telling a story in their home language and, as time goes on, begin incorporating words or phrases in English. Wordless picture books also permit parents who do not speak English to interact with their children in their home language.





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## Bringing It All Together

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*Enrique and Bernardo are cutting pictures out of catalogs and newspaper circulars. Ms. Jane has asked that they glue the cutout pictures grouped by color, that is the reds with the reds, the yellows with the yellows, and so forth. Ms. Jane tries to pronounce each child's name correctly as she asks, "Enrique, how many colors do you have?" Enrique responds by pointing at the three colors he has been concentrating on: red, blue, and orange, slowly saying the color names in Spanish. "That's right, in Spanish it is rojo, azul, and naranja. In English it is red, blue, and orange," responds Ms. Jane. "Which color do you like the best?" Enrique points to red. Ms. Jane says, "Why do you like that color?" Enrique says, "I dunno." "I like."*

In this vignette, Ms. Jane recognizes the importance of correctly pronouncing the children's names as a means of validating their cultural identity. She also demonstrates that the colors have different labels in Spanish and in English. She also tries to move from closed-ended questions to more open-ended questions even in the face of no verbal responses. Ms. Jane understands that it is important to move conversation from one-word answers to more extended and elaborated speech.

### Engaging Families

The following ideas may help families with children who are English learners:

- ✓ Invite parents and other family members of preschool English learners to share some of their cultural practices. Sharing may include a cooking activity in which a dish characteristic of their nationality can be made, a music or dance activity highlighting particular sounds or movements that are used in their homelands, or a craft activity characteristic of the culture. Take photographs of the presentations, and place them in a photo album. Later, the teacher can ask the child to describe or recount the activity to her or the child's peers.
- ✓ Encourage parents and other family members to continue to use the home language during family activities while also encouraging early literacy skill development in the primary language. Communicate with parents on an individual basis, during parent meetings, through bulletin boards, or newsletters in their home language regarding the importance of speaking to their children in their home language. Parents may welcome suggestions about how to engage their young children in conversation during everyday activities such as walking in the neighborhood or shopping at the supermarket. Stress the importance of concept formation (e.g., colors, numbers, and shapes) in verbal interactions with their children. After a parent meeting



focused on how to read a book with a young child, provide the parents with books written in their home language and suggest that the parent or a family member read to their child.

If books are not available in the home language, send wordless picture books home that can be discussed in the family's language.

### *Questions for Reflection*

1. What activities best encourage open-ended conversations with young children who are learning English?
2. How could Ms. Jane have structured the conversation differently to elicit more verbal responses from the children?
3. Why did Ms. Jane use both Spanish and English in her communication with the children?
4. How can teachers help parents encourage oral language development in their children?



## Reading

**E**arly literacy in the preschool classroom is based on strong oral language abilities, knowledge of how print works, phonological awareness, and a personal desire to become a skilled reader. The Reading strand comprises six substrands that have been identified as critical for preschool English learners:

- Appreciation and enjoyment of reading and literature
- An increasing understanding of book reading
- An understanding of print conventions
- An awareness that print carries meaning
- Progress in knowledge of the English alphabet
- Phonological awareness



It is important to remember that children who are English learners may have already learned some of these early literacy skills in their home language. For example, Lonia, the young girl from Sudan described in the Listening section (page 189), may have a keen interest in books that were read to her in Arabic by her mother and have age-appropriate phonological awareness in her home language. To fully understand Lonia's abilities and needs, program staff will need to determine which language and literacy skills Lonia has mastered in her home language by using skilled interpreters who can interview the family and observe Lonia across different contexts, as well as her level of English proficiency.

Phonological awareness, letter knowledge, and discourse skills in the home language appear to provide the necessary background for learning these skills in English. However, the claims for transfer of skills from the home language to a second language are primarily based

on research in transfer of Spanish to English and speakers of other European languages. There is little current research on how readily certain literacy skills in Asian languages are transferred to English. Nevertheless, each child's existing knowledge about language, the structure of language, vocabulary levels, and literacy skills should be understood as important prior knowledge that children who are English learners can build upon. Once a teacher knows that a child has already learned age-appropriate skills in a home language, the teacher can expect that this English learner will be able to use these existing skills to develop proficiency in English.

Attention to the bridging of the home language and English, strategic use of the home language, and connecting content to preschool English learners' cultural knowledge will help to foster their motivation to learn the specific literacy skills addressed in the English-language development foundations.



## 1.0 Children Demonstrate Appreciation and Enjoyment of Reading and Literature

To stay motivated to learn the complex skills required of fluent readers, young children need repeated opportunities to associate reading with pleasure, positive feelings, and interesting

learning. Learning to read is promoted by close and nurturing relationships with adults who foster interactions with interesting and engaging print.

### VIGNETTE

*During a conference with Mrs. Kim, Yeon's mother, Ms. Maria described Yeon's preferred activities in the preschool classroom. Yeon almost always played in the block area and rarely participated in group literacy activities. He seemed to enjoy pushing trucks up and down the block roads, but Ms. Maria could not remember a single time that he picked up a book or joined her when she read to a small group. Maria asked Mrs. Kim if they read books together at home. At this point, Mrs. Kim looked uncomfortable and said, "Not much." She explained that they did not have any books in Korean, and she could not read English books. Ms. Maria then suggested that Mrs. Kim borrow a classroom picture book on transportation and sit with Yeon and make up stories in Korean about the pictures. Ms. Maria encouraged Mrs. Kim to use Korean to tell Yeon stories, sing songs with him, look at magazines together, and point out signs. Mrs. Kim asked, "Won't this confuse Yeon?" Maria reassured Mrs. Kim that the important thing was for her to expose Yeon to lots of experiences with print and books in a playful and engaging way and that speaking to Yeon in Korean would not confuse him.*

### TEACHABLE MOMENT

Ms. Maria was uncertain how much exposure to print Yeon received at home. She was able to encourage Yeon's mother to engage in appropriate literacy activities while also promoting continued use of the home language.

The following interactions and strategies support preschool children who are English learners:

**Expose children enthusiastically to all types of print** (e.g., magazines, billboard signs, books, posters). When teachers and other adults create a warm and positive climate for individual and small-group book reading and storytelling, chil-

dren respond by increased motivation to learn to read. As adults show enthusiasm for the content of the story in a nurturing setting, preschool English learners learn to value these activities and associate the act of reading with positive feelings. This creates an interest in books and print and the desire to know how the squiggles on a page are connected to the



words of the story. For preschool English learners, it is important for them to hear stories repeatedly in their home language, which will help them understand the story narrative once it is read in English. Reading to children in their primary language also provides opportunities to build background knowledge, promote concept development, and expand vocabulary comprehension in the home language. Skilled storybook reading and storytelling in English will help build English skills in language and literacy that are critical to young English learners' future school success.

**Connect literacy to the home culture and community.** Knowing as much as possible about the children's home life, family activities, personal interests, and familiar settings will help teachers identify books, stories, and strategies that naturally build on the children's background. By inviting storytellers from the community into the classroom and by reading or telling stories in the home language, the program is helping preschool children who are English learners connect literacy activities to family customs and history.

Story packs with quality books translated into the child's home language, CD players, and audio recordings in English and



the home language can be sent home periodically. This practice promotes family literacy time when parents engage in reading, storytelling, and sharing a love of print in their home language.

**Build on existing strengths.** All children have areas of development where they show strength and perhaps an unusual amount of background knowledge. For example, a young girl from Korea might display well-developed physical agility and interest in the performing arts. For this child who is learning English, opportunities to "move like the wind," "run like a river," or be "silent as a cat" may help her learn new English vocabulary while demonstrating her own unique talents. Many children of recent immigrant families have been shown to have exceptional skills in social relations. If a child who is an English learner shows strengths in forming peer relationships, teachers can systematically arrange small groups so that English learners have opportunities to both learn English and learn through their home language with peers.

**Use read-alouds.** For preschool children who are English learners, **read-alouds**, or book-reading activities, are best conducted in small groups. Choosing books that are of high interest to preschool English learners and authentically reflect their home culture will help engage their attention. Teachers introduce key concepts and vocabulary words in the children's home language and English before reading the book. Skillful interactive reading of the text will enhance the child's development of new vocabulary. By pointing out key vocabulary words, providing expanded definitions with visual aids, and using the new vocabulary in multiple contexts, teachers will facilitate understanding of the text and English-language development. See the "Research Highlight" on page 186.



## 2.0 Children Show an Increasing Understanding of Book Reading

As children have many experiences with print of all types, they gradually come to understand that all books share common elements. The knowledge that print in books is organized in specific ways for specific purposes is

important for children's development of reading skills. Adults promote this skill development by pointing out the features of books, engaging in skillful storybook reading, and helping children to create books of their own.

### VIGNETTE

*During morning circle time, Alonzo was quite excited and wanted to share an outing he had taken with his family over the weekend. Alonzo's home language was Spanish, and he kept repeating certain phrases in Spanish at such a rapid pace that Ms. Sheila could not understand him. Ms. Sheila asked her assistant, who was fluent in Spanish and English, to help interpret. Alonzo then described the wedding of his Aunt Lucinda. He went into great detail about who was there, what they had to eat, and the special clothes everyone had to wear. Ms. Sheila then asked the assistant to help Alonzo make a book with pictures of the wedding. During small-group time, she wrote the words in Spanish as Alonzo dictated the events of the wedding. They made a cover page identifying Alonzo as the author, made up a title (Aunt Lucinda's Wedding), then numbered the pages, and bound them together. The next day Alonzo proudly read the book to the class, very carefully turning each page after showing everyone the pictures and narrating the sequence of events.*

### TEACHABLE MOMENT

Ms. Sheila was able to capitalize on Alonzo's strong feelings about an important family event and direct them to a rich book-making activity. All children get excited about sharing family news and, with some skilled help, can be energized to create narratives in book format. See the "Research Highlight" on page 179.

The following interactions and strategies support preschool children who are English learners:

**Connect print material to children's interests.** All young children have personal interests, cherished family members, and familiar activities. These inter-

ests can be brought into the classroom to help connect what the child knows and is motivated to learn more about to curricular content and skill building. Because the routines and language of the classroom may be unfamiliar to a child who is learning English, the teacher needs to



find out the interests of preschool English learners in the classroom, and use this information to build a comfortable and motivating context for learning.

**Invite children to discuss and react to story narratives.** After reading a book to an English learner in the home language, the teacher can check for comprehension of meaning by asking the child simple questions about the story (e.g., *Who was your favorite character? Has anything like this ever happened to you? What do you think will happen next? Which pig was the smartest? Why would you want Goldilocks to be your friend?*). During the beginning stages of English-language development, it will be important to read and discuss the books in the child's home language. By using the child's home language initially, the teacher will be able to assess

the child's understanding of story narrative and ability to make personal connections to events in the story. After this has happened in the home language, the teacher can then read the same book in English to a mixed group of children who are native speakers of English and children who are English learners.

**Encourage children to dictate, retell, and create their own books.** One of the best ways to help children comprehend story structure is to have them tell personally meaningful stories that are written down by adults. Simple story narration and recording, having children retell stories that have been read to them, or asking children to write or dictate stories from their personal lives can accomplish this.

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### 3.0 Children Demonstrate an Understanding of Print Conventions

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**D**uring the preschool years, children begin to understand that print may be organized in different ways depending on the purpose of the writing. They also learn that English print follows certain predictable rules (e.g., read from left to

right, starts at the top of the page, book pages turn from right to left). These understandings support their ability to track print and learn the English alphabet.

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#### VIGNETTE

*Right after sharing and posting the morning message, Ms. Sarah noticed two young girls, Ping Shu and I-Chun, staring at the daily schedule and having an animated conversation in Chinese. She deduced that they were talking about the field trip to the local farmers market planned for later in the day. It also seemed that they were confused about what they were supposed to be doing before going on the field trip. Ms. Sarah moved to the girls and pointed to the morning schedule of times and events, illustrated both in writing and with pictures. Ms. Sarah bent down, carefully pronounced each girl's name, and said, "This message tells us what we will be doing today. Later we will be going to the farmers market." She pointed to*



*the picture of the market. Then she read the message slowly while pointing to each word, linking it to the picture. By pointing to each picture and orally linking it to its corresponding word in the order they were written, left to right, and top to bottom, Ms. Sarah was helping the girls understand print conventions and the meaning of the morning message.*

### TEACHABLE MOMENT

Ms. Sarah could see the girls were puzzled over the timing of the day's field trip and used this as an opportunity to reinforce the day's schedule. She carefully used the pictures that accompanied the print to enhance the girls' understanding of the message.

The following interactions and strategies support preschool children who are English learners:

**Point out print features during shared reading** (shared reading can include all types of print, not just storybooks). While reading a morning message, big books, daily schedules, and other shared reading activities, teachers indicate each word—emphasizing the direction (i.e., from left to right), the way print is organized on pages (i.e., from top to bottom), and how the author is identified.

**Point out print features during shared writing.** While recording dictated messages, teachers can say things such as, “We start at the top of the page when we write and go across the page, left to right.” Teachers can also point out the way a piece of writing begins and ends (e.g., Once upon a time, The End).

**Equip all learning areas with books and writing materials.** When preschool English learners have the opportunity to explore the properties of books individually and with small groups, they get to

practice and share their knowledge in low-demand settings. Books and other forms of print, along with colored chalk and other writing tools, can also be placed in outside areas. Provide adaptations as appropriate, if the child has a disability. (See Appendix D.)

**Help children create their own books.** Have preschool children who are English learners dictate and illustrate their own “All About Me and My Family” books. The children can collaborate with family members, friends, caregivers, and teachers to create these small books in which the children themselves are the main characters. By talking about, writing about, reading about, and publicly sharing their personal life histories, preschool English learners will develop pride in their cultural identity, create a positive orientation to literacy, and create meaningful and engaging text. Teachers can then have these “All About Me and My Family” books printed, laminated, and shared in the classroom. Children eventually take the books home to share with their families.





## 4.0 Children Demonstrate Awareness That Print Carries Meaning

An important precursor to fluent reading is the understanding that certain symbols (e.g., signs and print) have deliberate and consistent meanings attached to them. The knowledge that the letters of

their name always spell their name even if it is next to a picture of a different child is developed during the preschool years. This knowledge is critical to the development of early literacy skills.

### VIGNETTE

*Marcela was looking intently at Ting's family pictures on the bulletin board. The Chinese characters in the captions seemed to fascinate Marcela. When Ms. Lucinda came over, Marcela asked her in Spanish, "What are those marks?" Ms. Lucinda replied in Spanish, "These are the names of Ting's family written in Chinese. Chinese is the language Ting's family speaks at home." Ms. Lucinda then pointed to the names written in English and said in English, as she pointed to each name, "This says, Ning Liu, Ting's mother, and this one says, Jun Chan, Ting's father." Ms. Lucinda continued, "This writing tells us the names of the people in the picture. On the first line the names are written in Chinese characters, and on the second line the names are written in the English alphabet."*

### TEACHABLE MOMENT

When young children show an interest in print or another child's family or language, this is a good time to point out that different forms of print can carry the same meaning. A child's name can be represented in multiple ways and still mean the same thing.

The following interactions and strategies support preschool children who are English learners:

#### **Point out the meaning of print around the classroom and in the community.**

Young children often start the process of linking printed letters to sounds of words by learning the printed versions of their own names. An English learner should have a personal storage space (e.g., cubby) labeled with his name in both English and his home language if the alphabet is different. Consistently repeat-

ing the names of words used in labeling (e.g., art area, block area, and book area) will also help preschool children who are English learners associate specific printed forms with meaningful words. On neighborhood walks, teachers can point out signs and repeat their meaning; it is especially helpful if the teacher can find signs in multiple languages so the children start to see that different print can represent the same meaning.

**Have lots of clear print in multiple languages in the environment.** The



sight of posters, pictures, and signs with print will allow preschool children to begin learning individual letter names and connecting print with specific meaning. Teachers should ensure that the environmental print displayed in the classroom represents both English and children's home languages; many have found it useful to color-code each language so children and teachers have a way of distinguishing the languages. Teachers will need to find out about the writing systems of their preschool English learners so they can use it in the classroom. Then English learners can understand that print can look and sound a lot of different ways but carry similar meanings about the world.

### **Engage children in purposeful writing.**

Young preschool children who are English learners can write notes and letters to important people in their lives for authentic purposes (e.g., a thank-you note to Grandma for a birthday present or a letter to an aunt about a trip to the pumpkin patch). Often they will write letters and words using both the home language and English, which is a normal part of early literacy for preschool English learners. Teachers can point out the sounds and meanings of each word and watch for the child's ability to understand print in the classroom in both English and the home language.

## 5.0 Children Demonstrate Progress in Their Knowledge of the Alphabet in English

**K**nowledge of the English alphabet is especially important for young children as they are learning to decode English print. Much research has found a strong relationship between children's ability to recognize letters of the English

alphabet and their later reading success. This skill is important to the decoding and recognition of words and seems to be connected to the ability to remember the sounds associated with letters.

### **VIGNETTE**

*Yeon Ha rapidly used the alphabet stamp to print letters onto a big piece of construction paper. She seemed to be printing them at random: S, P, B, D, A. Because Yeon Ha had not been in the classroom very long, Ms. Laura was not sure how much English she understood. Ms. Laura gently asked Yeon Ha if she was writing her name. Yeon Ha looked at Ms. Laura but did not respond. Ms. Laura then picked out a piece of paper and started printing out the letters of her own name while saying to Yeon Ha, "I am going to make my own name with these letters." She stamped an L and said, "My name starts with the letter L" and made the /l/ sound. Ms. Laura named each letter of her name and then held up the paper and said to Yeon Ha, "These are the letters in my name: Laura."*



*Yeon Ha smiled broadly at Ms. Laura and said, “My name is Yeon Ha.” Ms. Laura then repeated the name and helped Yeon Ha identify, call out, and stamp the letters of her name.*

### TEACHABLE MOMENT

Ms. Laura was able to take Yeon Ha’s interest in letters and focus it deliberately toward an activity to identify the letters in her name. Ms. Laura approached the activity indirectly, engaging Yeon Ha first in the letters of her own name (Laura), then helping Yeon Ha stamp the letters of her own name.

The following interactions and strategies support preschool children who are English learners:

#### **Have children identify the letters of their own names in any language.**

During morning circle time, teachers can hold up name cards for each child and point out the first letter of each name. Teachers should also make sure the name is represented in both English and the home language when the languages have different writing systems.

**Provide English alphabet letters in multiple forms** (e.g., magnetic letters, wooden letters, paper tracing letters, letter stamps, and alphabet charts) throughout the classroom. While

preschool English learners are playing with and manipulating alphabet puzzles, stamps, or magnets, teachers can point out and reinforce the names of the letters in an engaging manner.

**Read alphabet books in multiple languages.** There are many colorful and culturally appropriate alphabet books available in multiple languages that can be used to emphasize letters in both English and the home language (e.g., *Gathering the Sun*, by Alma Flor Ada). The non-English version can be read one day, and the English version can be read another day. (Additional suggestions are listed in the PEL Resource Guide, pages 77–79.)

## 6.0 Children Demonstrate Phonological Awareness

Children’s ability to hear and understand how the specific sounds in their language are organized is critical to the process of learning to read. Complex interrelated skills include the child’s ability to hear and manipulate the individual sound units in the home language. Although phonological awareness can and should be taught through age-appropriate activities, preschool children

do not begin to learn some components of phonological awareness, such as syllable segmentation (e.g., “What word do you get when you take the *tur* away from *turkey?*”), until late in the preschool years or in kindergarten. Phonological awareness can be promoted in preschool English learners through singing, chanting, sound and word play, and storybook reading in both their home language and



English. During those activities, teachers should help children who are English learners attend to, discriminate among, and identify the sounds of language. The skills and strategies described in Chapter 4, “Language and Literacy,” are also important to the literacy development of preschool English learners. However, the progress of English phonological aware-

ness may look different for children who are English learners because of the following factors: the similarity of their home language to English, the amount of exposure they have to English, the extent of early language and literacy learning in their home language, and the intensity of their English preschool experiences.

#### VIGNETTE

*Mr. Aaron had noticed that the children who spoke Spanish were singing songs and rhymes in Spanish on the playground. Because he did not know these songs, Mr. Aaron asked Lucinda, who was fluent in Spanish, to translate them for him. One of the songs, “Arroz con Leche (Rice Pudding),” was included in the book *Pío Peep*. Mr. Aaron ordered a copy of the book, which contains traditional nursery rhymes in Spanish and English, and the CD with accompanying songs in both languages. He then read one song or rhyme each day and played the corresponding music, alternating between Spanish and English.*

#### TEACHABLE MOMENT

Many books, tapes, and CDs are available in multiple languages. Mr. Aaron recognized preschool English learners’ knowledge and interest in rhymes and songs in their home language and was able to use the children’s language abilities in their home language to build English-language skills.

The following interactions and strategies support preschool children who are English learners:

**Sing silly English songs that can be phonetically manipulated.** Songs such as “Apples and Bananas” that allow preschool children who are English learners to hear, repeat, and make up their own sounds help them to learn and manipulate the sounds of English. Since these skills transfer across languages, rhyming songs can also be sung in home languages whenever possible.

**Sing songs, recite poems, clap rhythms, and do finger plays that emphasize rhymes daily.** Many preschool songs and poems emphasize the sounds of language, which is an important aspect of phonological awareness. By hearing these sounds and participating in the activity, preschool English learners will start to learn the way sounds go together to make up words in this new language. Even though the children may not understand the meaning of the words and may be imitating their English-speaking peers, those activities



will help preschool English learners to perceive and eventually produce the unique sounds of English.

Rhyming does appear to be a skill that transfers across languages (e.g., Spanish, French, and other alphabetic languages as well as Chinese), so these activities can be conducted in the home language as well. Some books contain songs, rhymes, and poems in more than one language and can be used to strengthen these skills in both languages. A good example of such a book in Spanish and English is *Pío Peep! Traditional Spanish Nursery*

### Research Highlight

“Building on a child’s language abilities in his or her L1 [home language] will not only help the child fully master that language, but provide him or her with the tools to deconstruct the L2 [English]. Early development of language skills, such as semantics, syntax, narrative discourse, and morphology, as well as phonological awareness, will provide the child with a ‘meta’ understanding of language that he or she can apply to language development and literacy skills in the L2.”<sup>9</sup>

*Note: L1 refers to home language, and L2 refers to English. “Meta” understanding of language refers to the ability to think and talk about the features of language (e.g., when speaking about something that happened in the past, you must change the verb, “She is here,” to “She was here”).*

*Rhymes.*<sup>10</sup> For preschool English learners, it is appropriate to expect rhyme detection and repetition; however, rhyme production is a complex skill that often requires advanced vocabulary (see pages 133–135 in Chapter 4, “Language and Literacy”). See the “Research Highlight” on page 138.

#### **Identify and practice English sounds that do not exist in the home language.**

Use common English words with sounds that are not found in the child’s home language throughout the day (e.g., emphasize the *sh* sound in *shoes* when helping a child who is Spanish-speaking tie his shoelaces, or point out the “little ladybug” in the insect book to children who speak Japanese).

**Use real objects and emphasize syllables and phonemes.** As preschool English learners learn the English vocabulary words for common objects and actions, they often find something around the classroom and ask how to say it (e.g., “Teacher, what is this?” while holding up a plastic bowl. This is an opportunity to say *bowl*, emphasizing the /b/ sound).

**Play games that emphasize the first sound of common words** (e.g., letter bingo, body freeze). Teachers play simple games that ask the child to name words that begin with the same sound as the first sound of her name, such as *Maria*, *mama*, *meat*. “What other words start with the same sound?” Games help preschool children who are English learners recognize similar onsets or the first consonant or consonant cluster in a syllable.



## Bringing It All Together

*Ms. Lucinda's preschool class was studying a unit on families during the first month of the school year. She had carefully selected books about different aspects of family life; she had found bilingual staff and volunteers who read each story to English learners in their home language, pointing out the key vocabulary words before reading the book in English to the whole class. After reading *Abuela* in English during story time, Ms. Lucinda asked the children about their grandmothers. All of the children were excited to share something about their grandmothers.*

*Ms. Lucinda set out paper with writing and coloring materials on small tables. The children went to different tables during the course of the day. She, or her co-teacher, talked with each child about their grandmother and with the help of the teacher, each child made a book with pictures and print. Ms. Lucinda then laminated each book and had the author invite their grandmother to the class and read the story during circle time. Finally, all the children took their books home to share with their families.*

The topic of families has a high level of interest for all children and yields many possibilities for supplementary books, materials, and activities. Family members may be invited to the classroom to share details from their lives and honor the culture and languages of the children. Young children who are English

learners are able to learn critical English literacy skills while deepening their pride and knowledge of their own family.

### Engaging Families

The following ideas may engage families in helping a child who is an English learner:

- ✓ Families that are not literate may be reluctant to read to their child in their native language. Parents should always be encouraged to read storybooks in their home language and, if they are not able to read their home language, they can tell stories orally, “read” wordless picture books, and say rhymes and sing songs.

### Research Highlight

The conclusions from recent studies suggest that young children may gain important metalinguistic skills from learning more than one language, that they are quite capable of learning early literacy and language skills in two languages, and that many early language and literacy skills learned in the home language (L1) contributed positively to the development of English (L2) language and literacy.<sup>11, 12, 13</sup>

*Note:* In this research, *metalinguistic* skills refer to the ability to reflect upon and manipulate the structural features of spoken language such as the morphology, sentence structure, and pragmatics of language.



- ✓ Parents can also be shown how to make an early literacy activity interactive by having their children make predictions, add to stories, or make up their own.
- ✓ Most communities in California have a public library that can be a wonder-

ful resource for families of children who are learning English. Parents can be helped to locate the public library, apply for a free library card, and introduced to all the books, materials, and learning opportunities that are often available in Spanish and English.

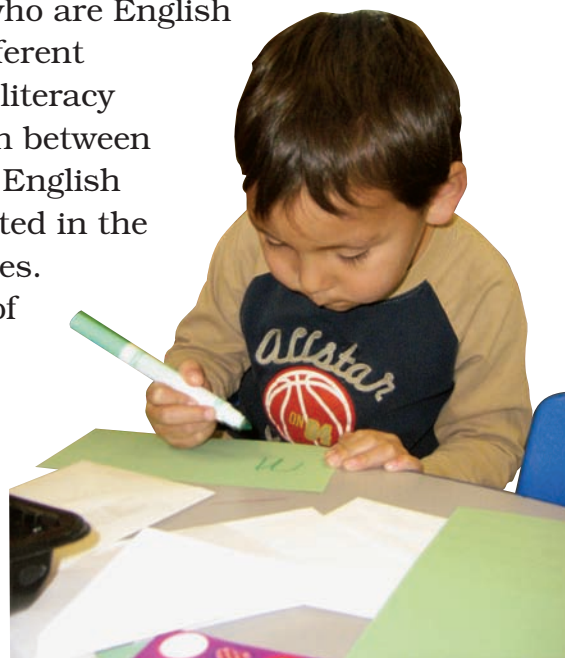
### *Questions for Reflection*

1. How does a child who is an English learner demonstrate early reading skills (e.g., appreciation of literacy activities, print awareness, phonological awareness) in her home language?
2. What strategies are you using that incorporate the home language in classroom routines and materials?
3. How are community volunteers who are fluent in the children's home languages and who can read to the children who are English learners encouraged to come to the preschool?



## Writing

**T**he Writing strand for children who are English learners is not substantially different in focus from the language and literacy Writing strand. The primary distinction between the two sets of foundations is that the English learner's home language may be reflected in the development of the child's writing stages. For children who are native speakers of English and children who are English learners, writing is a process of active discovery about a language's symbol system as visually represented. These foundations emphasize writing as a means of communication, the beginning of writing forms, and writing to represent their names.



Young children are attempting to gain control over a language's symbol system by figuring out what symbols mean while trying to make marks on paper that approximate those symbols.<sup>14</sup> Environments that encourage writing should first and foremost view children as capable of making these connections regardless of home language.<sup>15, 16</sup> According to Sulzby and Teale,<sup>17</sup> it is important for teachers to engage children

as socially competent participants through adult-child and peer-peer interaction around books. When this occurs, opportunities for writing emerge that may provide children with practice in writing. To the extent possible, it is important to provide children with a rich oral language environment in both their home language and English, because emerging writing skills are linked to a child's oral language development.





## 1.0 Children Use Writing to Communicate Their Ideas

Through exposure to writing as a means of communication, children begin to learn that writing has many purposes, such as the provision of information, entertainment, and describing and remembering an event that has already occurred. When children make the connection between the written symbol and its meaning, cognitive growth ensues. “When children write, they have a fixed

representation of oral language. They can explore it, as it doesn’t vanish like the spoken word.”<sup>18</sup> For children who are English learners, more instructional support is needed in other language areas, such as listening and speaking, to become successful writers. Children who are English learners benefit from opportunities to write in their home language.<sup>19</sup>

### VIGNETTE

*Jaime and Sarita are playing in the dramatic play area, which has been supplied with food props (e.g., plastic fruits and vegetables) and writing materials. Jaime is carefully looking at the fruits and vegetables when Sarita says, “Por qué no jugamos restaurante?” (Why don’t we play restaurant?) as she pulls Jaime’s arm to make him sit down in the nearby chair. Jaime goes along with the play and sits down. In the meantime Sarita grabs some paper and markers that are located in the dramatic play area and quickly scribbles some lines on a piece of paper and hands it to Jaime. Sarita says, “¿Qué gustarias?” (What would you like?) “Gustarias un banana, un apple?” Jaime smiles at Sarita and says, “Un apple, por favor.”*

### PLANNING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

▶ A supportive environment for writing includes materials available for this purpose. Paper and markers in the dramatic play area enable these English learners to incorporate writing into their play in a spontaneous way.

The following interactions and strategies support children who are preschool English learners:

**Look for opportunities for adult- and peer-mediated conversation about writing by using the child’s home language to initiate this discussion.**

When children are engaged in writing, it is important for the teacher to ask what they are writing about. For children who are English learners, the teacher needs

to know the child’s level of second-language development before structuring a question (e.g., in the home language or with key words in the home language). Ask for clarification or elaboration of concepts. For example, if the child is writing about the animals he saw at the zoo over the weekend, the teacher asks questions about the outing. This type of interaction may provide opportunities to reinforce words and phrases in English



and build vocabulary. The teacher may also provide opportunities in the classroom where the children can interact with others and discuss what they are writing. In the writing area children have paper, markers, crayons, and letter stamps.

**Link writing to listening and speaking so preschool children who are English learners can draw from other language strengths.**

The classroom environment should be rich with printed materials, including books in the child's home language, and wordless picture books that children can use as a basis of discussion in their home language and then move on to writing activities. For example, teachers may read *The Little Red Hen* and then discuss with the children why the other animals in the story did not want to help the little red hen. For children learning English, it is recommended that the story be read to them in their home language. See the "Research Highlight" on page 216. If this is not possible, it is recommended that program staff or other adults who speak the child's home language read the book in the home language and stress key concepts. Afterwards, when the book is read in English, the child who is an English learner will be better able to understand the story line and words in English that may correspond to words in her home language. In related follow-up activities, teachers provide finger-puppet facsimiles of farm animals in the block area so that English learners have an opportunity to play with the finger puppets and act out the story in their home language. Later, the children draw the red hen or some of the other animals in the story and dictate a story or passage to

accompany the drawing. Teachers should allow code switching in children's dictated stories.

**Focus writing activities on literature.**

It is helpful to connect writing to stories that are being used in the classroom and are available in the book area. This strategy will provide the child with opportunities to revisit the story multiple times to strengthen their understanding of specific words and concepts in both their home language and English.

**Supply learning areas with writing materials**

(e.g., dramatic play, science, and cooking). Children will have the tools to incorporate writing into their dramatic play. They can create such things as menus, personal letters, grocery lists, and charts. For children who are learning English, having access to writing material in interest areas means there is no pressure for them to perform and provides them with opportunities to experiment with their second language both in written form and orally.

**Have children dictate their own short stories.**

Dictated stories are a good way to introduce the child to writing as a means of description. Teachers may encourage the child to share her stories and, if the child uses her home language, adults who understand and can write the home language write down what the child is saying. These adults then read the child's words back to her. Teachers should allow for code switching in children's dictation. If no adult is available who can understand and write the child's home language, a peer might be engaged to interpret the description for the teacher and child.



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## Bringing It All Together

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The recent topic of study has been ocean life, and Mr. Jason has been reading related stories to the children. Throughout the month, the storybooks have been placed in the writing area, and children have been asked to dictate the story to an adult who then writes it down. Children can then draw pictures about their story, and it is placed on the wall near the writing area.

Gustavo, a Spanish speaker, is sitting at a table with a large piece of chart paper with lines for writing text and space for drawing a picture. Ms. Adelaida, a bilingual teacher assistant, sits next to him and asks in English, “What story do you want to write about?” She sees that Gustavo looks at her quizzically, and she then says in Spanish, “¿De cual de los cuentos quieres escribir?” Gustavo replies, “Swimmy” and points to the book on the shelf. Ms. Adelaida picks up a marker and says to Gustavo in Spanish, “Okay, ¿Gustavo, qué gustarías decir sobre el cuento?” (Okay, Gustavo, what would you like to say about the story?) Gustavo begins by saying, “Este es un cuento de un fish, Swimmy. Swimmy swims fast.” As Gustavo speaks, Ms. Adelaida repeats exactly what Gustavo says and writes it down on the paper. Gustavo goes on to describe the story using a combination of Spanish and English.

Later in the week, Gustavo points to his story, which is displayed on the wall, as Ms. Adelaida stands nearby. Gustavo begins to recount the story he had previously dictated using both

Spanish and English vocabulary. Ms. Adelaida smiles and then repeats his story, pointing to each word as she speaks. Gustavo asks Ms. Adelaida how to say the word *negro* (black) in English because Swimmy is a little black fish.

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Mr. Jason and Ms. Adelaida know that children who are beginning to learn vocabulary in English may mix the two languages (i.e., code switch), and that is typical. These teachers know that the primary goal of the writing activity is the connection between the written word and a particular concept or idea. They also know that children who are English learners will use their home language to transfer concepts or ideas to English, as is the case when Gustavo asks how to say the word *negro* in English. See the “Research Highlight” on page 216.

### Engaging Families

The following ideas may engage families in helping their child who is an English learner:

- ✓ Encourage parents to provide opportunities for their children to draw and scribble “stories” at home. If needed, send home writing material. Encourage parents to work with their child to write a story about their family or a special family celebration that they attended. These stories can be in either the home language or English or a combination of the two.
- ✓ Encourage parents to draw children’s attention to print during daily routines.



As parents go about their day, they can point out the print that is in their environments to help children make the connection between the concept or idea and the written word. Print may be in their home language or in English.

- ✓ Encourage parents to read stories or poems in their home language to strengthen the child's home language. By hearing stories or poems in their home language, children may begin to link print as a representation of either English or their home language.

### *Questions for Reflection*

- Why was it important for the teachers to allow Gustavo to mix languages (i.e., to code switch)?
- What are some other ways to use dictated stories with English learners?
- What is the relationship between listening, speaking, and writing for the English learner?