Ontario

Supporting English Language Learners in Kindergarten

A practical guide for Ontario educators

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Introduction

Martina is 5 years old. She has just come to Canada with her grandmother, to join her mother and two older brothers. Martina and her family speak Czech at home. Martina is usually at home with her grandmother while her mother is at work. She loves to listen to her grandmother tell stories of what her life was like as a child.

Shivam is also 5 years old and was born in Ontario. He lives with his parents and his sister, who is in Grade 3. The family speaks Punjabi in the home and maintains close ties with their cultural community.

Shivam and Martina are eager and excited to start Kindergarten. However, they are both worried that they won't always understand the teacher and they won't have any friends.

Martina and Shivam are only two of many children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds – born overseas or here in Canada – who are beginning Kindergarten. For all children, starting Kindergarten is a time of major transition for both the children and their families. For children like Martina and Shivam, beginning school is not only about adjusting to school and its routines, but also about doing so in a largely unfamiliar language.

Kindergarten teachers are asking how best to meet the needs of these English language learners (ELLs) – both those born in Canada and those arriving from other countries. What can we do in our classrooms to create an environment in which children of varied cultures and languages thrive and grow? How can we increase our own knowledge, awareness, and teaching practice to appropriately support the children's ongoing learning needs? How can we value and respect the experiences of *all* children?

This document is a resource and tool for teachers, administrators, and other school staff as they support ELLs in achieving the overall expectations of the Kindergarten program. It will help them provide a quality beginning school experience for ELLs.

In preparing this resource, the Ministry of Education acknowledges the valuable work being done in schools and classrooms across Ontario, and the dedication of teachers throughout the province in creating an inclusive learning environment that supports the success of every student.

In this document, *parent*(s) is used to mean parent(s) and guardian(s).

Who are English language learners in Kindergarten?

The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised) affirms that early learning experiences have a profound effect on development (p. 1) and that children develop their knowledge by building on their past experiences and the learning they have already acquired (p. 2). These points apply equally to ELLs. It may be challenging for the teacher to get to know what those past experiences/learning have been and what they continue to be within the children's homes and communities. The importance of building on children's prior experiences/learning cannot be overestimated since their identities are involved.

The differences that [ELL] children bring to classrooms ... are not simply individual differences or idiosyncrasies. They are far too patterned to be written off as individual differences. They are products and constructions of the complex and diverse social learnings from the cultures where children grow, live and interact. These cultures are not just "traditional" cultures we affiliate with ethnic groups or national origins, but they are best described in terms of the community cultures and sub-cultures where children are socialized. These too are dynamic and hybrid – mixing, matching and blending traditional values and beliefs, children rearing practices and literacy events with those of new, post-modern popular cultures.

Eve Gregory, ed., *One Child, Many Worlds* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997)

Definition of English language learners

English language learners are students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English[1] that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario's schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English.

These students may be Canadian-born or recently arrived from other countries. They come from diverse backgrounds and school experiences, and have a wide variety of strengths and needs.

Canadian-born English language learners

Many English language learners were born in Canada and raised in families or communities in which languages other than English are spoken. They may include, for example:

- Aboriginal students whose first language is a language other than English;[2]
- children who were born in communities that have maintained a distinct cultural and linguistic tradition, who have a first language that is not English, and who attend English language schools;[3] and
- children who were born in immigrant communities in which languages other than English are primarily spoken.

[1] English is an international language, and many varieties of English – sometimes referred to as dialects – are spoken around the world. Standard English is the variety of English that is used as the language of education, law, and government in English-speaking countries. Some varieties of English are very different – not only in pronunciation or accent but also in vocabulary and sentence structure – from the English required for success in Ontario schools. Some varieties are so different from standard English that many linguists consider them to be languages in their own right.

[2] The Ministry of Education is dedicated to excellence in public education for all students, including First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students. The document *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework,* 2007 provides the strategic policy context within which the Ministry of Education, school boards, and schools will work together to improve the academic achievement of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students. The framework has two components: targeted strategies and supports for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students; and strategies to increase knowledge and awareness of Aboriginal histories, cultures, and perspectives among all students, teachers, and school board staff. In order to achieve these goals, a holistic approach integrating the framework strategies throughout all programs, services, and initiatives is necessary.

[3] Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms defines the right of Canadian citizens of the English-speaking or French-speaking minority of a province to educate their children in that minority language, wherever numbers warrant. In Ontario, francophone children who come within the defined classes, and who are otherwise qualified to be resident pupils, have the right to be educated in French language schools at both the elementary and secondary levels. For more detailed information, please refer to *Aménagement linguistique – A Policy for Ontario's French-Language Schools and Francophone Community* (2004).

Newcomers from other countries

Newcomers[4] arrive from countries around the world at various stages in their educational careers. They may arrive in their pre-school years or at any point between Kindergarten and Grade 12. They may arrive at the beginning of the school year or at any time during the school year. Depending on their age and country of origin, they may have had varying educational experiences prior to their arrival in Canada, and consequently will require different levels of support in order to succeed in the classroom. Newcomers from other countries may include:

- children who have arrived in Canada with their families as part of a voluntary, planned immigration process. If they are of school age, they have most often received formal education in their home countries, and some may have studied English as a foreign language. However, some of these students may have had limited or inconsistent access to schooling;

- children who have arrived in Canada as a result of a war or other crisis in their home country, and who may have left their homeland under conditions of extreme urgency. These children have often suffered traumatic experiences, and may also be separated from family members. They may have been in transit for a number of years, or may not have had access to formal education in their home country or while in transit.

English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2007, p. 8-9

[4] Children of parents who do not meet Section 23 criteria can be admitted to Ontario's French language schools by an admissions committee. Though they may be from any background, they are often the children of parents who have settled in Canada as immigrants or refugees, and for whom French is their first, second, or even third language, yet who feel a certain attachment to French. They often come from countries where the language of public administration or schooling is French.

Understanding the importance of first languages

Linguistic and cultural diversity is an asset, not a deficit, for young children.

National Association for the Education of Young Children, *Many Languages, Many Cultures: Respecting and Responding to Diversity* (Washington, DC: Author, 2005)

A major component of previous learning involves children's first languages. Many, including some parents, think that the best course of action when children are faced with attending school that is taught in English and with living in a society where English is the dominant language is to abandon all use of the first language and focus entirely on English. However, a solid body of research indicates that this is not the best way to proceed. Children's first languages are closely tied to their identity, and encouraging ongoing development of first language eases the social and emotional transition that occurs when children begin school. At the same time, students who have a strong foundation in their first language are likely to learn English more quickly and achieve greater success at school.

Fred Genesee, ed., *Educating Second Language Children: The Whole Child, The Whole Curriculum,* 1994

Because of the diversity of language backgrounds in Ontario schools, it is important for the school and the home to work together to support the continued development of the first language for a number of reasons.

- Continued use of the first language allows children to develop age-appropriate world knowledge and vocabulary without having to wait until they have learned enough of their second language to engage with such topics.
- A rich store of knowledge learned in the first language will transfer readily into the second; for example, it is much easier for children to learn the language around "matching" and the ways in which objects match if they can already do so in their first language.
- Reading and storytelling in the first language – including in languages with non-alphabetic writing systems – models and strengthens literacy processes.
- Children who see their previously developed skills acknowledged in school are more likely to feel confident and take the risks involved in learning in their new environment. They can see English as an *addition* to their first language, rather than as a *substitution* for it.
- Children who have another language learned the important lesson early on that words are not the things or actions themselves but represent those things or actions. Knowing this results in mental flexibility and makes it easier for children to acquire further languages.
- All children who continue to develop a strong foundation in their first language as they learn other languages are well prepared for participating in a global society.

Developing English language skills

Some children who come from homes where another language or variety of English is regularly used may be indistinguishable in English language proficiency from children of the same age who have only heard and learned English. This is particularly the case with children who have been regularly exposed to two languages (one of which is English) from their earliest years. The way they develop both languages is largely the same as those brought up in a home where only one language (English) is spoken (McLaughlin, Blanchard, and Osanai, 1995). Teachers who have not had an opportunity to get to know the children and their parents must take great care when making judgments about the English language proficiency of these children.

Children appropriately identified as English language learners are likely to have a strong grasp of their first language on entry to Kindergarten. If they have recently arrived in Canada, they may understand very little or no English. That does not mean that their ability in their first language is lacking in any way; they may speak it fluently and may even be able to read and write in that language.

Children whose first language is a variety of English other than that used in Ontario schools are also acquiring a second language when they enter school. As suggested by the late Jamaican poet and performer Louise Bennett, it is unacceptable to think that varieties of English like Jamaican English are "inferior" or "bad English."

> My Aunty Roachy seh dat it bwile her temper an really bex her fi true anytime she hear anybody a style we Jamaican dialec as "corruption of the English language." For if dat be de case, den dem shoulda call English Language corruption of Norman French an Latin an all dem tarra language what dem seh dat English is derived from. Oonoo hear de wud? "Derived." English is a derivation but Jamaica Dialec is corruption! What a unfairity!....
>
> Louise Bennett, *Aunty Roachy Seh* (Kingston, Jamaica: Sangster's Book Stores, 1993)

Language development strategies

Kindergarten-aged ELLs use the following strategies as they learn English:

- using their first language;
- not speaking (silent period);
- using headlines and learned phrases;
- producing more complex structures and vocabulary.

Based on the work of Tabors and Snow (1994)

Though this is generally the sequence in which children employ these strategies, they are interrelated and are not necessarily developed or used in a strictly linear fashion. A vast range of individual differences will be found, with some children not using a particular strategy at all and others staying with the same strategy for an extended period of time. For most children, there is a lot of movement forward and backward between strategies, depending on how comfortable children feel in a particular setting or how confident they are with the content.

The children in the examples that follow are reflective of ELLs in Ontario classrooms, both those born in Canada and those who arrived from other countries.

Using first language

There are two options for children when everyone around them is speaking another language: children can communicate in their first language or stop speaking altogether.

- For a period of time, many children communicate in their first language.
- In situations where no one else speaks/understands the language, this usually leads to children giving up after they realize that their attempts to make themselves understood have been unsuccessful.
- In situations where several children speak the same first language, they will quickly identify who they can rely on as conversation partners and who they cannot.

In the classroom ...

Soon after Nazir arrived in his new Kindergarten classroom, he took a banana from the snack table and asked the teacher to peel it. He handed it to her and said something in his first language. The teacher asked, W*ould you like me to peel this?* (using a gesture to show a peeling action). Nazir shook his head yes. Because he was successful in having this request met, over the next couple of weeks, Nazir continued to approach the teacher using his first language. He stopped speaking when he realized that he and the teacher spoke a different language and she was being rather slow at learning his!

Teachers can ...

- respond positively to children's attempts;
- respond by affirming the children's attempts to communicate;
- respond using a combination of gestures, words, and tone of voice;
- speak with families to learn a couple words in the children's first language;
- display and highlight writing in a variety of languages.

Silent period

Children who abandon their efforts to communicate in their first language often go through a period where they do not speak at all. These children may be actively observing, listening, learning, and communicating using non-verbal strategies. They may be whispering or speaking in a quiet tone, repeating what other children or adults are saying, as they explore the sounds of the new language. They may also be imitating reading and writing behaviours modelled by the teacher.

The time spent in this "silent period" varies among children.

In the classroom ...

Sophia spent the first few weeks of learning centre time standing near the water table then, tugging on the teacher's shirt and pointing to the water table, she began exploring the water table materials. The teacher knew that it was important to support Sophia's attempts at trying out her new language in a safe context. The teacher asked Sophia where she would like to go at learning centre time, and expected Sophia to point and say, *water table*.

Teachers can ...

- use movement, music, and visual representation;
- observe children's physical movements (e.g., standing close to something they may want);
- provide hands-on manipulative experiences;
- have concrete objects available for children to hold and explore (e.g., snow, when engaged in an inquiry about snow);
- have children point to picture symbols to express their needs;
- invite children to participate by pointing to familiar objects in shared reading texts.

Using headlines and learned phrases

When children are ready to "go public" with their new language, they begin to demonstrate new strategies for communicating that are characterized by their use of speech that sounds like headlines or short learned phrases.

Headline (often referred to as *telegraphic*) speech is a typical part of very young children's development of their first language. It involves using a few content words to communicate an entire idea, and it often focuses on the naming of objects.

Learned phrases (often referred to as *formulaic speech*) refers to the children's use of phrases they have heard and tend to use before they fully understand the meaning of the phrases and before they can use the individual words of the phrase in other utterances.

In the classroom ...

When Bojan was building with blocks, his teacher said, *Tell me about your building.* Bojan said, *House.* The teacher said, *Bojan, you're building a house.*

While David was drawing a picture on the whiteboard, he put the whiteboard close to the teacher's face. The teacher said, *Tell me about your picture.* David pointed to the two people he drew. The teacher repeated the statement. David said, *Dad, me.*

When Julia arrived at Kindergarten registration, she smiled at the office assistant and said in a quick sequence, *How you are … See ya later.*

While Samson was baking bread with the teacher and a small group of children, he took the measuring cup and said in a questioning tone *I do that?*

Teachers can ...

- use movement, music, and visual representation;
- model (e.g., demonstrate a counting strategy, point to words in text while reading);
- think aloud (e.g., *I'm going to start the reading here,* while using a pointer to show where the reading starts);
- use gestures (e.g., *You put the block on the bottom,* clearly pointing to the block on the bottom);
- identify the child's actions (e.g., *You painted a picture, you jumped, you were counting the animals*);
- affirm the child's attempt to communicate (e.g., *Yes, that does say your name*);
- extend the communication (e.g., If the child says, *I making cake*, say, *You are making cake. Is it chocolate cake?*);
- introduce new vocabulary (e.g., *The boy in the book was* scared *of the dark*).

Producing more complex language

In a supportive and inclusive environment, children begin to use more complex English.

Early strategies can include:

- using a mix of first language and English to converse with other children;
- asking simple questions;
- joining in with familiar songs, rhymes, and poems;
- using first language with peers who speak the same first language to clarify instructions;
- responding to basic question words like *who, what, where,* and *when*;
- communicating observations after teacher modelling (e.g., *Our tower is 10 blocks high*);
- knowing and following directionality in text.

As children continue to produce more complex English, they begin to rely less on learned phrases and begin to rehearse, apply, and gain control over syntactic structures.

Later strategies can include:

- retelling personal experiences using simple sentence patterns and familiar vocabulary;
- representing personal experiences through paintings and drawings;
- beginning to describe their thinking in conversations with teachers and other children;
- following directions related to familiar routines;
- participating in whole- and small-group activities and social situations;
- naming some letters in upper and lower case;
- making suggestions in small groups when problem solving;
- contributing to shared writing experiences;
- experimenting with present and past verb tenses (e.g., *What you doing? I done that.*);
- speaking with clarity and fluency approaching the pace of first language peers.

In the classroom ...

Iva was at the writing centre with another child who spoke the same first language. The teacher observed the two speaking their first language with each other. She also heard some English phrases (e.g., Iva asked, *I use marker?*)

During music and movement experiences, Ayla followed along with the actions and sang familiar songs, demonstrating her productive language strategies. In other large-group activities such as Shared Reading or Shared Writing, Ayla was not yet orally participating. Knowing that sometimes children first attempt their new language during music activities, the teacher planned music every day.

The teacher planned a small-group shared reading lesson with Jasmin, Nikos, and Kim, and modelled the reading strategy of using illustrations to predict and confirm unknown words. Looking at the picture in the book helped Nikos read *black* cat and *yellow* duck.

Teachers can ...

- affirm the child's attempt to communicate (e.g., *That was good thinking; I like the way you described this part of your picture*);
- use gestures (e.g., *How tall do you think your plant is?* while moving the child's hand along the plant);
- use movement, music, and visual representations;
- label children's actions and extend language (e.g., If the child says, *I making a cake,* say, *Could you make three cakes that I can pick up after work?*);
- introduce new or specialized vocabulary (e.g., *That is your shadow*);
- model (e.g., demonstrate using illustrations to read unknown words);
- think aloud (e.g., make connections by saying, *When I read this part, it made me think about the park near my house and how the leaves crunch when I walk on them*);
- plan and implement small-group shared reading, using multiple copies of the same text;
- plan and implement small-group discussion, using a wordless book, a familiar object, or something the child has drawn or constructed.

What might I expect to see and hear as English language learners are learning English?

It is important for all people who work with Kindergarten children to recognize that *language mixing* or *code-switching* are common strategies used by children learning a second language. It will take children a while to separate the languages they hear around them and to use each of those languages in appropriate circumstances. In the meantime, they use what they know and demonstrate an eagerness to communicate by doing so. This also applies to children who come to school speaking a variety of English, although it is likely that they have heard their parents code-switch between dialect and standard English and already have a receptive understanding of the language of school.

There is much variation in how long it takes ELLs to develop age-appropriate English language proficiency. Many factors come into play, such as how much English children know on entry to Kindergarten, how strong their first language skills are, and how comfortable and engaged they feel in the Kindergarten environment. Even before they begin to produce English, however, they are working diligently on their English skills. Some children will not speak much until they can speak well; others will use whatever English or other language they know, and add whatever gestures they need, in order to join in the activities of the classroom almost from Day 1. Whatever combination of strategies they employ, these children will develop English skills. With the school and the home working together, the children's first language will also continue to develop during this time.

Teacher Reflection When I think back to when I first met the ELLs in my class, I marvel at how much progress they have made in such a short time. It never ceases to amaze me how the children are able to navigate their way through so much new learning. I have learned so much from working with ELLs and their families.

ELLs in Kindergarten with possible Special Education needs

It is important to recognize that ELLs will demonstrate exceptionalities (including giftedness) in similar proportions to the general population. However, it is often difficult to determine the nature of ELLs' exceptionality before they are fully fluent in English. Characteristics of learning a second language may mimic characteristics of some learning exceptionalities. For example, a child who can focus on instruction only for a short period of time may raise a question about a possible special education need, but for an ELL it may be indicative of a lack of comprehension or exhaustion from trying to work out what is being meant.

For further information, see Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised)*, pp. 25–26.

Working with families and communities

Children's first language, culture, and personal identity are inextricably linked. The positive development of each child requires maintaining close ties to the child's family and community. When schools respect and value a child's first language and culture, children, families, and communities stay securely connected. If children and their parents feel that their previously acquired language, background knowledge, and culture are not valued, children's sense of identity and self-worth can be negatively impacted. However, when schools capitalize on the richness of the culture (e.g., experiences, understandings, values, and language) that children bring to the classroom, children's learning and sense of belonging are enhanced.

A welcoming and inclusive multicultural school is one in which students and parents of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds feel welcome, valued, and included.

(Coelho, 2004)

Role of parents

The Kindergarten Program acknowledges that children perform better in school if their parents are involved in their education (p. 3). Parents provide a wealth of family tradition, knowledge, and experience for their children. They are their children's first teachers; this role continues when the children enter school.

Building relationships with the home

School staff can lay the groundwork for ensuring that communication with the home is handled in an honest, sensitive, and respectful manner. Communication with parents who are ELLs themselves requires some thoughtful planning.

Interaction

New Teacher:
How do you begin to communicate with children's families when you don't speak the same language?

Mentor:
A good starting point for me is to think about how I would want to be treated if I were a parent in a new country talking to my child's teacher. I'd like that teacher to recognize the important role I play in my child's education and to show empathy for me as a newcomer.

Providing an interpreter would help me communicate more complex ideas than I could if I had to struggle to express myself in the language I was just learning.

Inevitably, there will be some challenges along the way, but the key is to learn from them and move on. For example, I found it natural to hold out my hand to shake parents' hands, and sometimes they would not return the gesture. Reflecting on those uncomfortable moments helped me learn what to do next time. In some parents' cultural tradition, shaking hands with a teacher did not feel appropriate. So now I wait for the parents to offer their hands first or, if I forget because it comes so naturally to me, I just pull back my hand and say, "*Good morning, I am your son's teacher.*"

New Teacher:
I know it is important to find out about the families' backgrounds, so what have you done to find out more?

Mentor:
I have tried different things as this is something I am learning too. I have said things such as, *I look forward to learning more about your family's background. It will help us work together to support your child's learning.*

I find working with interpreters very helpful as they are able to provide general information about many cultures, as well as important information specific to the family. I've used the Settlement Workers In Schools website, *www.settlement.org.* There's lots of information there.

I also find that I pay more attention to international news items now that I have ELLs in my class. The reports often provide background information as to what is happening in the countries parents have come from, and I can sometimes use that information as a conversation starter. But I also try to be careful not to generalize about families' cultural backgrounds.

Stages of acculturation in adults

There are well-documented stages of acculturation that most newcomer adults experience:

- arrival and first impressions
- culture shock
- recovery and optimism
- acculturation

Whether Kindergarten children go through these stages is yet to be proven, though it is possible that their parents' feelings about their own adjustment would have a general impact on the family.

For further information, see Ontario Ministry of Education, *Many Roots, Many Voices,* 2006, p. 39.

Teacher Reflection As a teacher of ELLs, I have a wonderful opportunity, as well as an obligation, to extend my own learning, to deepen my cultural awareness, and to reflect on my own assumptions about the role of the parents and the community in education.

Planning the registration process

There are several ways to plan for an inclusive registration, and many things can be done to make the transition from home to school a smooth one for English language learners. Below are some questions to consider when planning early opportunities to build relationships with the home.

Registration

- How will we reach out to the community? Have plans to inform parents about registration been made (e.g., advertising in the local community in places such as doctors' offices, libraries, grocery stores)?
- How could we make the registration process welcoming and informal (e.g., a lemonade party, a tea party, a display of pictures and visuals of the learning environment)?
- How could registration be offered at staggered times (days, evenings) to accommodate more families' schedules?
- Where will the registration take place, and is the space welcoming (e.g., what is on the walls, how are the tables positioned, are there lots of visuals and concrete examples)?

- How will signs for registration be translated into the main languages of the community?
- How will parents know what paperwork/information they have to bring to register?
- How will staff be made available to meet with families? Who will be available (e.g., Kindergarten teacher[s], administrator[s], interpreters, ESL teacher, office administrator, teacher/librarian)?
- How will interpreters or parents who speak languages represented in the community be available to support families during registration (e.g., meet before to plan how parents can support other parents, have interpreters help fill out forms and communicate parents' questions)?
- How will parents know who to communicate with at the school (e.g., name tags, signs in the language of the community)?
- What information will be available for parents? How will we ensure the information is inclusive (e.g., displays, a video, a slide show on computer, translated versions of any school board material, calendars, school routines)?
- How will we make sure the information given to families is free of jargon and written in clear language?
- How will we provide supervision and materials for younger children who come with their families?
- How could older students help (e.g., work with the teacher to show families the school and the Kindergarten classroom)?
- How will we meet with parents to gather background information? (See Section 3: Working with English language learners in Kindergarten for an example of questions that can guide the discussion.)

Orientation

- When could we invite families to come and visit the Kindergarten classrooms (e.g., end of school, beginning of the year, before school starts in September)?
- How will interpreters be available on that day? If there is a person on staff who speaks the language of some of the families, how will that person be made available?
- How will other community resources be involved in an orientation day (e.g., Ontario Early Years Centres, SWIS, Public Health, the public library, Children's Mental Health Centres)?
- How can we meet with members of the community to ensure our orientation is welcoming and inclusive (e.g., get feedback from parents of older children in the school and input from community members)?

- How could we, with the support of interpreters, organize a parent evening to share and exchange information with parents (e.g., to discuss the value of maintaining first language, how parents and schools can work together, how to support literacy and numeracy learning)?

Adapted from Toronto District School Board, *Transition to School,* Kindergarten Registration Appendix A.

For more information, see *Ontario Ministry of Education, Planning Entry to School: A Resource Guide, 2005*.

Strategies for involving parents and the community

As soon as families register in our schools, we want to provide an environment where they can feel comfortable and valued in the classroom. Sometimes, finding ways to encourage ELLs' families to come into their children's classrooms presents a challenge, especially if we are just learning how to best communicate with each other. Involving family and community members in the classroom, however, provides children with positive role models and affirms the connection between home and school.

Involving parents and community

- Invite parents to share information about available community resources.
- Talk with parents informally on the playground (if they pick up and drop off their children).
- Establish a parent network for newcomers at the school.
- Indicate a drop-in time, signified by a special picture and sign on the door.
- Invite parents to come to the classroom to create dual-language books, or to tell or read stories in their first language.
- Have parents or community members share in a classroom experience such as cooking or planting a garden.
- Invite parents or community members to discuss their careers (e.g., pharmacist, farmer, taxi driver, miner, veterinarian).
- Invite parents to volunteer in the classroom.
- Ask parents to bring in objects from home for the classroom, such as food containers, boxes, and newspapers or magazines in their first language for the dramatic play centre.
- Encourage parents to serve on the School Council.
- Invite family and community members (e.g., Elders, grandparents, retired volunteers) to come in and share stories.
- Plan a picnic on the school ground or at a nearby park.
- Plan class visits to areas of interest in the community, for example, visit the local market, take photographs, and bring back produce to use in vocabulary development.

Working with community partners to support English language learners and their families

Best Start was introduced by the provincial government in November 2004 as a tri-ministerial, ten-year, early years strategy aimed to ensure that children in Ontario will be ready to achieve success in school by the time they enter Grade 1. Part of the mandate of Best Start is to address factors that put young children at risk, and to promote healthy child development through the establishment of early learning and care hubs in local communities. This initiative is one of many services available to support young children and their families. Many agencies have specific services for newcomer families. Depending on where ELLs and their families live, teachers may work with or refer families to educational partners in the community such as:

- Best Start networks;
- Ontario Early Years Centres;
- settlement workers in schools;
- Native Friendship Centres;
- child care centres;
- parenting and family literacy centres;
- public health agencies.

Sharing information about the school and Kindergarten program

Families of ELLs will differ in their knowledge of the Ontario school system. Access to quality education may be one of the reasons for making the move to Ontario, and parents will have high expectations of the school system's ability to deliver that quality education for their children. There will also be families who are quite familiar with the Ontario education system as they have older children already registered in Ontario schools.

Depending on their ages and countries of origin, some ELLs may have attended pre-school or early primary school prior to their arrival in Canada. Others may have little or no experience being in large groups of children or separated from family members, and Kindergarten will be their first contact with school.

Given this diversity of background experience, as we begin the important conversations with families of ELLs about what and how their children will be learning, it is helpful to ask parents some questions:

- What do you already know about the Kindergarten program?
- What would you like to know about how we organize learning for children of this age?
- What does your child already know (e.g., counting, colours)?
- What would you like your child to learn in school?

Depending on answers received to these initial questions, teachers can select what information needs to be shared in brief or in greater detail:

- Share routines for communication between home and school (e.g., phone calls, newsletters, permission forms, field trips, bus schedules, cancellations due to weather, procedures for contacting the school). Having concrete examples of the routines, as well as having them translated, will be important for all parents and essential for some.

- Share features of the Kindergarten program, including the six program areas (Personal and Social Development, Language, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Health and Physical Activity, and the Arts). Having photographs of examples of what children will learn in each area provides a visual aid to discussion.

- Discuss the role of play as a vehicle for learning. It is critical to be clear with parents what play looks like in an educational context, and that the teacher's planning, guidance, and verbal interaction with children as they play makes it very different from the play that children do at home.

- Discuss clothing (e.g., warm clothing for outdoor play in the winter, gym clothes and indoor/outdoor shoes). Teachers can discuss alternatives with their administrators when children's clothing may be unsafe (e.g., children needing to wear shorts on indoor climbing equipment).

- Discuss behavioural expectations for all children to be successful in the group learning environment.

Questions parents ask

Why do you take the children on field trips? Don't they learn better in the classroom?

T – Do children in the country you come from go on field trips?

P – Not so many. Maybe only one trip. But I do not agree with them.

T – I plan trips that are about a topic that the children are learning about in our classroom.

P – But what would they learn that you cannot teach them faster in school?

T – The children are learning about the natural environment, and on a field trip they can explore the real outdoors. That is much more helpful to them than the pictures or videos I could use in the classroom. All of their senses are involved, not just looking. They can talk about this experience when we return to the classroom.

P – My son doesn't know many English words. I want him to learn more.

T – Field trips provide many opportunities to learn new words in English. Children can connect the words with what they see.

P – I am not convinced yet, but thank you for your explanation.

T – I have invited parents to come on this field trip. When you bring back Manvir's form, maybe you could let us know if you could come with us. Then you can see for yourself why field trips will help Manvir learn the English words to talk about the environment.

P – I will see. Thank you.

What is my child going to learn if she is playing?

Research tells us that learning-based play helps children improve their thinking skills, solve problems, and learn language and social skills.

Learning-based play is one way your child learns at school. While children play, they can hear new words, learn what they mean, and use these words in their talk.

I plan what the children will use at the centres based on what we expect them to learn. For example (show the materials), tubing, funnels, water pumps, and water wheels at the water centre help your child learn about water – how it moves, what shape it takes.

I work with your child to help her learn new words, and together we can write what she learns (show samples where possible). At the learning centres, she counts, measures, reads, and works with others. She can show me what she knows as she plays before she knows how to say the English words.

How will you challenge my child?

I make sure that your child has experiences that both challenge him and allow him to feel successful. When he feels he has done a good job, he wants to try it again. Then, I can ask him to try new things. When he is successful, he gains confidence. It is when he is feeling confident that I see and hear him learning new things. We can work together to make sure he feels challenged this year. Please feel free to talk with me about how and what your child is learning.

How can I help my child learn?

T – I know you are already doing so many things to help her learn. By talking and reading with her in your first language, you will help her with her learning. Her brothers and sister could help her, too, by telling her stories or helping her write her name.

P – We go to the library.

T – That is really helpful – you can choose books to read together. When you are reading, you can talk about the pictures. Talk about what she thinks will happen next. You can tell her what you think of when you read the book. Ask her to tell you what parts of the story she likes best.

P – I will try, but I am learning English.

T – You are a wonderful model for her because she told me you speak three languages. You can help your daughter most by talking to her in the language that you and she are most comfortable speaking. That way, you will be able to express the most complex ideas and build on her learning English or any language.

P – Yes, I will do that. What about her math or other subjects?

T – You are helping her learn math if she helps set the table, measure during cooking, sort laundry. You are also helping your child learn when you draw attention to the signs around you or to what is happening in nature.

What can parents do at home to support their child's first language development?

> Kindergarten teachers should encourage parents to continue to use their own language at home in rich and varied ways as a foundation for language and literacy development in English.
>
> Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised)*, p. 24

Educational studies that have been done around the world have found that parents who continue to speak with their children in their first language at home do not slow down their children's learning of English. On the contrary, children need to be able to relax into a language they are comfortable speaking when they get home. Parents are being most helpful when they encourage their children to talk with them in that language about the world around them and about what they are learning in school.

To build the solid base on which ongoing learning occurs, in any language, it is important that parents believe and are encouraged to value the continued development of their children's first language. Teachers can talk with parents about how first-language development occurs in many natural ways as they engage in daily routines and experiences.

Parent-teacher interaction

P – We want our child to learn English, and we worry that if we continue speaking our language at home that will cause him problems learning English.

T – You don't need to worry. He will have plenty of opportunities to learn English in Kindergarten, and I will do all I can to make it easy for him to talk with me and the other children. I will report to you regularly on the progress he is making. I will make sure he knows from me that his first language is an important part of who he is. So from time to time, I will ask him to teach me or the other children some words and phrases in his first language, and he will have access to books in both languages to help him with his beginning reading. I hope you understand why I am doing this and will support me.

Parents can

- talk with their children about activities they are doing together to help them expand their vocabulary and develop more complex sentence structures;
- talk with their children about what they watch on TV (e.g., encourage them to watch nature shows that are highly visual and that build vocabulary as well as background knowledge);
- complete daily tasks together (e.g., getting ready for school, setting the table) and talk about what was done first, next, and last;
- talk during activities that they do with their children (e.g., riding the bus, walking to school, shopping at the market, going on a family picnic);
- talk about how things work (e.g., kitchen gadgets, radios, telephones);
- have children explain how to play a game or do an activity (e.g., children can explain to younger siblings, grandparents, friends);
- read with children daily and talk about the story (e.g., tell your children about something that the story reminds you of, and ask them to tell you about something the story reminds them of).

Note: Reassure parents that reading at bedtime is not the only time to read to children; there may be other times that are more appropriate for some families (e.g., while waiting for an appointment).

For further suggestions, see *Ontario Ministry of Education, Helping Your Child with Reading and Writing: A Guide for Parents, 2007*.

Communicating with families about children's progress

In addition to learning how to communicate effectively with all parents, teachers have an opportunity to work together with families of ELLs to set goals for their children's learning.

Some parents may be hesitant to disclose some kinds of information, especially if they are unaware of the variety of supports available.

The Kindergarten program includes six areas to plan for, assess, and communicate with families about their children's progress. It is important to begin with what parents would like to know. This sometimes takes place through an interpreter.

Informal

Kindergarten programs include many opportunities for parents and families to talk with each other about their children's development, progress, and adjustment to the learning environment. These informal contacts can be through phone calls, through notes going home, during pick up and drop offs (when children are not bused), and at school and community events. In some situations, parents will still be acquiring English language skills.

The following strategies may help bridge the communication gap:

- use clear and concise language so that parents can use translators from their own linguistic community;
- bilingual staff in the school could interpret, where necessary.

Note: Older students can be used to translate non-confidential information, but they should not be used for parent/teacher interview situations or when any confidential information is being shared.

Sample conversations between ELLs' parents and Kindergarten teachers

How will my child learn to read in English when he is just learning to speak in English?

T – We will teach your child lots of words in English and, at the same time, match the words he speaks with printed ones, starting with ones that are really important to him, such as his name.

P – He is sometimes shy to speak in English. He talks a lot at home.

T – Developing his oral language is most important. We will give him many opportunities to practise speaking in English as well as in his first language. We will use big books and charts (show examples) to model the way that we read and encourage him to join in when we read together.

P – Does he do that?

T – Yes, he is just beginning to join in. We will work on letters and sounds and help him learn strategies so that he can start to read on his own.

P – What can I do to help him?

T – The most important thing that you can do at home is to work with your child in your first language by talking, telling stories, and reading books as often as you can. Every child can learn to read given time and the right kinds of support. I hope that answers your question.

P – Yes, thank you.

Parent and teacher telephone conversation

Shivam's teacher made it a practice to contact the children's parents during the first few weeks of school. The teacher knew that Shivam's father was comfortable speaking in English so she arranged to have a telephone conversation with him.

During the conversation, she asked how Shivam was adjusting to school. His father had said in the initial interview that Shivam was worried that he wouldn't make friends and that he wouldn't be able to understand the teacher.

T – How is Shivam feeling about school?

P – He enjoys school.

T – Is he still worried about not understanding what I ask him to do?

P – He says no, and he is starting to answer me in English even when I am speaking Punjabi.

T – He is using some English words in class, too. He is trying to join us in our songs and he is teaching us to count in Punjabi.

P – He told me he is excited about learning English.

T – What does Shivam like about school?

P – He likes to explore at the water table.

T – He spends time there exploring with funnels. Is there anything he does not like about school?

P – No … He said that he doesn't like his clothes to get wet at the water table.

T – Thank you for telling me. I will make sure I help him keep his clothes dry.

P – Thank you.

T – It was a pleasure speaking with you. Please call me if you have any questions or concerns.

Formal

At times, communication with parents will be more formal, such as in conferencing with parents to show evidence of growth over time.

> Reporting throughout the Kindergarten years must always indicate the child's growth and achievement in relation to the learning expectations for the end of Kindergarten. Reporting should reflect achievement in the skills and strategies that the children are developing as they progress through the Kindergarten years.
>
> Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised)*, p. 10

Teacher Reflection Every year, I reflect on the ways I am communicating during parent-teacher conferences. Some questions and reflections are: Have I set up my conferencing area to be welcoming and conducive to private conversations? Have I prominently displayed the language resources that the children use (e.g., dual-language books, big books)? Have I anticipated the questions the parents will ask and prepared good answers? I remind myself to begin by asking the parent what they want to know and tell me about their child. Even though I feel the pressure of time, I have to schedule enough time with these parents so that I'm able to wait while they think about what I've said in English and they figure out what they want to say in English. Do I need and have I arranged for interpreters and extended interview time accordingly?

Face-to-face conference

The formal face-to-face conference may present more of a challenge for parents who are acquiring English. Some strategies teachers can use include:

- helping parents prepare for a parent-teacher conference by sending home translated information from the SWIS website (*www.settlement.org*);
- sending the information home on paper before the conference and encouraging parents to write down any questions they want to ask;
- using language that is as concrete as possible;
- using language that is jargon free;
- speaking in short segments with pauses that allow parents time to process and respond to the information, even when not using an interpreter;
- using visuals that show children's growth over time, such as paintings, photographs of structures the children have built, writing samples, etc.;
- extending conferencing time when interpreters are used;
- encouraging parents to call whenever they have a question, not wait for an interview.

The do's in working with an interpreter

- Schedule extended interview time.
- Use adults.
- Introduce the parents to the interpreter (e.g., *I have asked _____ to join us today to help us talk with each other, since I don't speak your language*).
- Look at parents, not at the interpreter, when talking. This also allows the interpreter to look at the parent.
- Break up your messages into short sections, and pause between each so the interpreter can translate.
- Leave time for parents to ask questions.

See Ontario Ministry of Education, *Many Roots, Many Voices, 2006,* p. 38, "Selecting an Interpreter."

When confidential information is being discussed, the interpreter should be a bilingual teacher, a professional interpreter, or an adult member of the student's family, to facilitate accuracy of translation.

English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2007

Making learning visible for parents

Communicating what and how children are learning is a critical component of the Kindergarten teacher's role.

Suggested strategies that are inclusive of ELLs and their families

- Post signs about children's learning. For example, at the water table, post a sign that says, *We are learning about the properties of water.* At the blocks centre, post a sign that says, *We are learning about measurement and shapes.* Where possible, have the signs in more than one language. Keep the language clear and concise, and add graphics for picture support.
- Post photographs of learning experiences and, with the children's help, transcribe what children are saying and doing.
- Send home a photo album/DVD that illustrates the learning experiences and school routines (e.g., learning centres, outdoor play, whole-group time, read-alouds) so that children can discuss with their families what they are learning at school. (These photographs must not include children.)

Working with English language learners in Kindergarten

Classrooms that contain ELLs differ significantly in their student mix. Along with some English first language speakers, there may be:

- just one ELL in the whole class;
- one or more children who speak a variety of English;
- one or a few children who speak many different languages (other than English);
- a large number, if not most, of the children speaking the same language (other than English).

The mix in any single class will have an impact on how the Kindergarten teacher will plan for instruction. All these children bring a rich diversity of background knowledge and experience to the classroom.

Ontario schools have some of the most multilingual student populations in the world.

Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised),* p. 24

Starting off on a positive note

Parents appreciate when teachers take time to listen to their concerns, and are glad to reach a common understanding about working together. For example, one parent said that she was happy to help her child learn to put on his coat, once she understood that she was supporting the goal of independence for her child.

Coming to school is an exciting and sometimes apprehensive time for children. Coming into a new environment where everyone is speaking an unfamiliar language may simply overwhelm ELLs. They may not understand the nurturing message that the teacher is trying to communicate to them. The challenge is to ensure the communication is open and supportive to both the children and their families. Teachers can convey to ELLs that they are welcome, and make them comfortable at school through their smile, soothing tone of voice, and visual illustrations of what is going on.

Welcoming English language learners who arrive throughout the year

There are sometimes circumstances (e.g., timing with immigration or refugee permissions, the need to move within Canada for employment reasons) that prevent families from coming to school at the beginning of the year or registering for Kindergarten at the time indicated by individual school boards. It is important to welcome ELLs who arrive throughout the year as genuinely as those children who arrived at the beginning of the school year, and to be aware of whether a mid-year entry is the first time a child has been in a Canadian school or is a transfer from another Canadian location. As an example, these newcomers need to see their names on coat hooks and wherever other children's names are displayed.

Depending on the time of the year that the ELL arrives, classroom routines may already be well established, and it may be possible to buddy the newcomer with someone (e.g., another Kindergarten child or an older student) who shares the child's first language, or with another child who will provide the support and friendship that the newly arrived child needs.

Strategies to support the transition to school

- Practise the pronunciation of children's names.
- Learn a few words in the children's first language.
- Provide a little time and a safe space for children to be on their own as it sometimes helps them absorb their new environment.
- Allow the ELL to bring a favourite object from home; it can often be reassuring.
- Outside the classroom door, place a picture of a clock to show entry and dismissal times.
- Create a welcoming environment, with the flexibility that allows parents to stay for a while if they can. Allowing parents to stay a little longer with their children often helps the children (and parents) feel more at ease. Teachers use their professional judgment about when to suggest this, and for how long.
- When possible, access school personnel who can communicate in a family's first language.

Establishing routines

The daily routines of the Kindergarten program are an ideal place to model language, introduce new vocabulary, and encourage oral interaction.

Coatroom or coat area

- Read stories that talk about how to dress for different types of weather, especially winter.
- Post a photo or chart on which each item of outdoor clothing is labelled. This encourages independence and helps students learn the English names for items of clothing.
- Teachers and other adults (e.g., parent volunteers, co-op students, teacher candidates) can use simple strategies to show children how to put on their outdoor clothes (e.g., by laying a coat on the floor and then flipping it over the head) and how to put on and take off their backpacks, while talking about what they are doing.
- The class can create a graph for experts (e.g., who is able to help with zippers, mittens) that children may refer to if they need assistance. This invites ELLs to initiate communication with another child (e.g., children can go to Tasleem if they need help with a zipper).

A helpful website for teachers and newcomer families is *www.settlement.org*, where a video clip titled "Dressing for Winter" can be found. See Resources.

Busing

Children who are bused need support in finding the correct bus and driver. ELLs need visual supports. Their home address and phone number must be accessible by the bus driver. Older students can play a role by being paired with a Kindergarten ELL who rides the same bus.

Names

For all children, names are closely and personally tied to their identities. Many cultures select names that have great significance. A name might represent the aspirations that parents have for their children, or may honour past family members, historical events, or seasons. Parents who think they must give their children English names need reassurance that their children's original names can be used in the Ontario school system, and that school personnel will try to pronounce each name accurately.

Strategies that emphasize the importance and uniqueness of children's names

- Read books that deal with "names," especially unique and different names. Each day, one child's name could be featured, and a bit of information shared about what that name means. This child's name would then be added to the classroom name/word wall.
- Incorporate songs and chants involving the children's names to build a sense of belonging.
- As the year progresses, ask the children to say their first and last names during attendance each day, to practise learning last names.
- As a link to numeracy, sort into two groups name tags that have children's photos on them. Count the name tags to determine who is and is not at school. Teachers should be aware that people from some cultures won't want their child's picture taken.
- Have a "sign in" routine each day (e.g., in a book form or on a chart or concrete graph). At an appropriate time, make a name graph and explore how many letters are in everyone's names, how many names start with the same letter, etc.

Teacher-child interaction

During the "sign in" routine, I observed Gurdeep attempting to write his name on the "sign in" chart. I documented that Gurdeep used his name tag as a reference as he attempted to write the G and the U. This was evidence of his applying a reading strategy to his writing. Based on my observations of Gurdeep's fine-motor development, I knew that asking Gurdeep to trace over the letters in his name on paper would be developmentally inappropriate (outside his zone of proximal development) as it was his fine-motor development that needed support. I praised and encouraged his attempts, and provided salt trays, sandpaper letters, etc., realizing that this would help the bones in his wrist develop so that he could form letters with a pencil. I also wanted him to recognize the letters in his name. So, I traced magnetic letters of his name on a card, and had him match these letters to the letters on the card.

Getting to know the Kindergarten ELL

For some families, Kindergarten will be their first experience with a Canadian school, so the process used to gather and exchange information about the child and the Kindergarten program is a vital task to complete. Some information can be gathered during registration as well as in the first few days of school. When deciding on questions to use in gathering the information, it is important to recognize that some areas may be sensitive for individual families.

Conferencing with parents

This example is a record of a teacher's notes taken during a conference with Martina's mother during the first few days of school. The mother's English was quite fluent, so it was unnecessary to use an interpreter.

"Thank you for coming to the school and talking with me about Martina. Our conversation will help us work as partners to provide a positive start to school. I just want to check that the information I have from registration is still correct. Is this your current information (e.g., family name, address, number of children)? Please let me hear you say Martina's full name, and I'll say it back to you to see if I get the pronunciation right."

Child's name: Martina C_____ Preferred name: Martina
Date of birth: August 19, 2001 Address: ___ Oak Street Unit #__

T – Does Martina have brothers and sisters? Are they younger or older?
P – Martina has 2 brothers – Petr, 14, and Jarmir, 7. Jarmir is in Mr. Baxter's class.

T – Who are the child's caregivers (e.g., home, babysitter, daycare) outside of school time?
P – Babicka (her grandmother) and sometimes her brother Petr care for her.

T – What does Martina like to help with around the home?
P – She bakes with Babicka, helps set the table, puts away clothes when I remind her.

T – What are her interests or favourite activities?
P – She likes to hear her grandmother tell stories in Czech, watch TV, and play with her cousins.

T – Does she have any known medical conditions, such as allergies, hearing, or other medical concerns?
P – No.

T – Does Martina take any medications or have any dietary restrictions?
P – No.

T – Has she attended any preschool programs (e.g., nursery school, daycare, other)?
P – No, her grandmother took care of her.

T – What do you expect Martina to learn in Kindergarten?
P – I want Martina to learn English and make friends. I want her to listen to the teacher.

T – How is the family preparing for her to start school, and how does she feel about it?
P – We are talking about how she will learn like her brothers. We tell her

that Jarmir will take care of her. She is very excited but worried she won't understand the teacher or have any friends.

T – Was Martina born in Canada?
P – She was born in the Czech Republic.
T – When did she come to Canada?
P – She came in July with her grandmother.
(Martina's mom has been in Canada for a year with the two older boys.)

T – What languages do you speak at home?
P – We speak Czech and some English.
T – What languages does Martina speak and understand?
P – She understands Czech and a few English words.

T – In what language do you read with Martina?
P – Jarmir and I read to her in Czech.
T – What is her favourite book?
P – She likes *Povidana o Pejskovia a Kocicce* – It's a story about a little dog and a little cat.
T – When do you like to read together?
P – I'm trying to read more with her in English at bedtime.

T – Does Martina watch television?
P – She watches too much television – we are trying not to have the television on too much.
T – What programs does she like?
P – She watches mostly cartoons.
T – Do you talk about the programs with her? What kinds of things do you discuss?
P – We sometimes watch nature shows together and talk about the animals.

T – Does Martina use a computer? What does she do on the computer?
P – Her brothers are usually on the computer. Martina likes to watch them, and sometimes they will play games together.

T – How does she feel when she has to leave you in the morning?
P – She is used to me going to work every day.
T – What other information would you like the school to know?
P – Martina likes to play school with her older cousins. She is going to the Czech Republic for a wedding in October.

This interview also provides the opportunity for the teacher to share important information with families about the Kindergarten program.

For further information, see Section 2: Working with families and communities.

Developmental considerations

> Young children come to school with an enormous capacity to learn. Important learning and development occur between birth and six years in all areas of human functioning – physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic. Children develop knowledge and skills at varying rates and through various means. Each child has unique strengths, interests, and needs that require teachers to adjust teaching methods and materials accordingly.
>
> Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised),* p. 20

There are very few generalizations that we can make about Kindergarten ELLs. Like their English-speaking peers, many will adjust to school quickly, start to communicate willingly (at least with peers), try new things, develop new physical skills, and engage in new relationships. Others will demonstrate less eager reactions to their new environment.

When observing the developmental and learning strengths, needs, and interests of ELLs who have experienced trauma, malnutrition, loss, or separation from family members, it is critical that teachers and school staff work with the family to provide immediate and appropriate supports.

Information about developmental considerations is provided in *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised),* pp. 20–21. The teacher can consider this chart while planning how to meet the needs of English language learners.

Including children's first languages in the classroom

Strong skills in the first language act as a bridge both for language development and for conceptual development in the new language. When ELLs enter Kindergarten, they may not know English, but they have much experience using language. Speaking and listening to English all day is exhausting, so when it's possible for ELLs to use their first language with each other, Kindergarten teachers should encourage them to do so.

ELLs often naturally use their first language in play and learning centre activities. It is important for the teacher to engage and interact with children when they use first language. The teacher can make significant observations about children's adjustment, interactions with other children, use of classroom materials, and development of concepts during these times. It is essential for the teacher to persevere in speaking with children who have very little English so that they are included as part of the classroom community.

Supporting and encouraging first language use

- Incorporate the children's first language by learning how to say some greetings.
- Include the first languages of the children in environmental classroom print (e.g., Hello and Welcome signs, names).
- Give ELLs opportunities to teach some words from their first language to the class (e.g., book, blocks, cookie).
- Invite ELLs to work and play with same-language partners from time to time (e.g., while reading or working on the computer).
- Invite older siblings or students who speak the child's first language into the classroom and observe them interacting. It is an opportunity to hear the child using his/her most familiar form of communication. The older child could translate, when necessary. It is important to continue this interaction after the child begins to use English.
- Include calendars that reflect the cultures and languages of the ELLs, where possible.
- Embed the diversity in the classroom and in the broader community in learning centres (e.g., boxes and cans in the home centre, environmental print, flyers, newspapers, fabric, cooking utensils).
- Accept and honour children's early writing efforts that are in a first language.
- Include books written in the languages of the ELLs.
- Play children's songs in their first languages.
- Invite resource people (e.g., Elders, co-op students, ECE students, pre-service teacher candidates) who speak languages represented in the community to participate in the daily life of the classroom or be part of special events (e.g., as guest readers or storytellers, on field trips, during cooking experiences).
- Include information technology (e.g., provide electronic stories in the children's first language, have a parent record a story for the listening centre).

Working together as a whole class

Whole-group time is an opportunity to help young ELLs settle into a new environment, learn a new language, and become used to a new culture. One of the purposes of whole-group activities is to bring children together, creating an environment where they feel secure, safe, and respected within the whole group. As this happens, ELLs become more comfortable taking risks with language and interacting with other children. While some children may be quiet participants for varying lengths of time, it is important to recognize that they are observing and learning about their new environment and language. Whole-group gatherings are times to encourage a sense of community, inclusiveness, and celebration.

Ideas for encouraging ELLs' participation in class gatherings

- Invite an ELL to toss a beanbag to a friend and say her/his name.
- Greet children using their first language.
- Go around the circle and ask everyone to give a greeting in the language with which they are most comfortable (e.g., *agn neung ha she yo* – Korean; *suba udesanak* – Sinhalese; *tansi* – Cree; *hola* – Spanish; *Ahneen* – Ojibway; *She:kon* – Mohawk).
- Pose a question to the class (e.g., *Who came to school on the bus? Who walked?*), and have them respond by placing a marker or icon by their name. This can be extended into a class graph.
- Select a chart poem or song to share every day.
- Use children's names in daily messages, as much as possible.
- Use visuals in daily messages and other print material.

Whole-group activities are most effective when they are short, focused, engaging, and highly visual. One way of ensuring that group gatherings are inclusive and that they exemplify a multicultural classroom is by talking about how each child makes a valuable contribution to the classroom community. Using pictures, charts, graphs, songs, stories, poems, and games that portray diversity helps build this classroom community. When whole-group time is filled with purposeful talk, ELLs benefit from hearing the English language modelled by their peers and by the teacher.

Whole-group meetings at the end of the day provide an opportunity for reflection and sharing. An ELL might bring something to the group (e.g., something he or she wrote, created, built, or demonstrated) that the teacher talks about on behalf of the child, until the child is comfortable and able to respond independently with the teacher's prompts. Including a goodbye song or poem, or saying goodbye in various languages, again reinforces the sense of classroom community.

Working together as the year progresses

Building a learning community is an ongoing process. As the year progresses, many of the activities done at the beginning of the year can be expanded and extended. For example, when greeting each other in the morning, ELLs can be encouraged to add other greetings as they say a friend's name, or to add "I have something to share." As ELLs become more settled and as their language builds, their capacity to participate will increase.

As ELLs develop English-language strategies, they can respond to text during whole-group read-alouds. In choosing books, teachers consider the length, content, vocabulary, and background knowledge needed. Shared reading and read-alouds are effective ways to expose ELLs to book knowledge and concepts of print, as well as to build vocabulary. It is also a great time to share stories from other cultures. Children should have opportunity to hear favourite stories several times. This helps them internalize the rhythm and fluency of the English language.

Assessing English language learners

A key principle underlying assessment in the Kindergarten program is to "encourage children to show what they know and can do, rather than focus on what they do not know or cannot do."

Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised)*, p. 9

This is a sound principle for working with ELLs, since building their confidence is so important if they are to take the risks involved in becoming functioning members of their new instructional setting.

When assessing ELLs, it is important for the Kindergarten teacher to consider the challenges faced by these learners. Their ability to acquire and demonstrate new knowledge may be influenced by an inability to understand or use the language of the classroom. Great care should be given to aligning assessment tools and strategies with the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the children.

Considerations for developmentally and linguistically appropriate assessments

- ELLs need sufficient time to adjust to the social, cognitive, and physical demands of a new classroom and school environment.
- The teacher should gather information about the child's literacy abilities in his or her first language.
- The teacher should be aware that a variety of factors can impact on the language learner's lack of response to an oral question or request. These factors could include:
  - a lack of English language proficiency needed to understand the question;
  - an inability to access the knowledge or skill;
  - an inability to formulate a response;
  - culturally influenced reluctance to speak in the presence of adults in positions of authority.
- Assessment should allow ELLs to demonstrate what they can do with limited or no English.
- Assessment should take into account the entire context in which the child is learning and developing, and should address the "whole child," not just the child's ability to acquire language.

> Culturally informed teaching supports the learning needs of all children, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. The challenge is not to create the perfect "culturally matched" learning situation for each ethnic group, but to capitalize on diversity ....
>
> Ontario Ministry of Education, *Early Reading Strategy: The Report of the Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario,* 2003

Of the six areas of learning in *The Kindergarten Program* – Personal and Social Development, Language, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Health and Physical Activity, and the Arts – it may seem that the Language expectations should be the main focus for ELLs. However, ELLs often show greater progress in their English-language development as a result of engaging in tasks in another area of learning (e.g., solving a math problem, taking part in a science inquiry, participating in a physical activity, or creating a collage).

The Kindergarten Program lists the strategies to be used in assessing progress of all children as Observation, Listening, and Asking Probing Questions. When ELLs are at the early stages of acquiring English, asking probing questions may be unproductive. Initially, observation will be the most useful strategy to use, but the other two strategies will come into play as the children's understanding and production of more complex English increases.

Some suggestions for assessing ELLs' learning if they can't tell you what they know

Personal and social development

Observe ELLs:

- in large and small groups, at learning centres, during routines, and while interacting with others;
- using materials to show what they know and can do;
- trying new things;
- taking turns.

Language

Observe:

- where ELLs start to read in a book;
- if ELLs model the rhythm of language after hearing read-alouds;
- if ELLs point to words of familiar poems during shared reading;
- writing samples (e.g., names, signs, lists);
- vocabulary recognition (e.g., pointing to letters and words);
- making names with magnetic letters or other classroom materials;
- if ELLs take books home;
- how ELLs interact with computer software.

As ELLs begin to acquire more English, the teacher can begin to ask more probing questions, such as, *Tell me how you sorted. Can you sort them another way?*

Mathematics

Observe ELLs:

- sorting, patterning, placing;
- placing objects in groups;
- pointing to what comes next while the teacher is modelling a more complex pattern;
- adding or taking away objects in a set;
- voting on a class graph;
- using different counting strategies (e.g., tagging objects, counting in their first language, putting one place setting for each person in the home centre);
- building with pattern blocks and geometric shapes, watching to see if they are learning about the blocks' and shapes' attributes (e.g., Are they using shapes to create a stable base?);
- making decisions about the materials (e.g., putting more sand in a scoop; adding more blocks or taking away blocks to make a structure more stable).

Science and Technology

Observe ELLs:

- demonstrating what they observe (e.g., pointing to objects during a class walk, putting their hands under objects to test if they are floating or sinking);
- beginning to use contextualized language, such as, *It do this* or *Look*.

Health and Physical Activity

Observe how:

- small and large muscles, spatial sense, and balance are developing as the ELLs play games or participate in activities outside or in the gym;
- the ELLs use equipment (e.g., climbing apparatus, balls, sand tools).

The Arts

Observe:

- how ELLs use materials;
- the choices that ELLs make in their artwork (e.g., Do they mix colours? Do they use different textures?);
- ELLs during music activities, since children who are silent in other contexts often participate in songs and chants;
- how ELLs follow actions even when they don't understand the words.

Differentiating instruction based on assessment

Assessment informs instruction. The teacher makes adjustments to the program to meet the child's learning needs and provides for individualized instruction, as required.

For information about language development strategies, see pp. 10–14.

Examples of assessment informing instruction

1. Differentiating instruction for a child who is in the silent period

Observations Notes	Analysis of Notes Gathered over Two Weeks	Differentiating Instruction
January 20 Large Group – Shared Reading Huong pointed to bugs in illustrations after my invitation	Huong smiles, nods, and points during large-group activities.	Huong is demonstrating a willingness to participate in group activities, so to build his vocabulary, the teacher decides to engage him in a small group to hear more stories, poems, and songs that are repetitive in nature. He will encourage Huong to participate in the security of the small group. The teacher will use a dual-language book to support Huong's first-language development. Huong will be able to take the book home and read with his family.
February 4 At sand table – *I want truck* February 5 At snack table – *I want that* – points to banana	Huong is beginning to communicate in short sentences, usually when he wants his needs met.	When Huong asks for something he needs, the teacher extends Huong's learning by asking him questions that he can successfully answer and by moving him toward using learned phrases.

2. Differentiating instruction when ELLs are using a range of language strategies

The children have a daily routine of signing in when they arrive at school. The teacher plans various sign-in challenges or focus questions that are changed based on the length of time the children have been in school, the expectations in *The Kindergarten Program*, and her observations of the strengths, needs, and interests of the children.

The class has been focusing on the relationship of other numbers with 5 and 10, based on the expectations in *The Kindergarten Program*. For this activity, the children are challenged to find the side of the chart that corresponds to the number of letters in their name and then sign their name. Children who are able to read the challenge help other children sign in.

How many letters are in your name?	How many letters are in your name?
1, 2, 3, 4, 5	6, 7, 8, 9, 10

The activity is open ended with minimal language demands, maximizing success for ELLs. This particular challenge provides multiple opportunities for the teacher to observe the children demonstrating what they know and can do. The teacher uses an at-a-glance sheet to record the observations.

Observation Notes	Differentiating Instruction
Jordan called out J,o,r,d,a,n and signed his name in the right column *(using more complex language structures).*	Having previously introduced five and ten frames, the teacher modelled an example of how to make a child's name in the frame. She invited Jordan to make his name in a ten frame. J o r D A N The teacher planned to add the classmade five and ten frames to the mathematics centre.
Jordan demonstrated for the children how to count to ten in his first language.	She invited Jordan to teach the class how to count to 10 in his first language.
Albert, Kofi, Zenobia, and Claudia found their name cards and tagged each letter as they counted (*using learned phrases*).	She planned to talk with Albert, Kofi, Zenobia, and Claudia about the counting strategy they used. She made a note to observe these four children at the learning centres to listen, look for, and document other counting strategies they are using.
Manuel put one finger up at a time for a total of six (*silent period*).	She observed Manuel in another context.

Differentiating assessment

> Young children will demonstrate their learning in many different ways ... Kindergarten teachers should assess the child's learning on an ongoing basis in the context of everyday classroom experiences, using a variety of strategies and tools.
>
> Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised),* p. 9

Portfolios are important tools that Kindergarten teachers can use to gather assessment information about ELLs. A portfolio might include samples of the child's work, narrative observations by the teacher, more specific observations of language development, records of conversations with the child, and photographs. The progress that ELLs make is usually rapid, and to see the collection of the work samples can be quite striking. A portfolio allows ELLs and their families to see a range of strengths, needs, and interests.

Using portfolios – An example

Since Roman arrived in our class in October, I have noticed that his drawings are full of detail. He did not communicate orally for the first while and then slowly began to use some of his new English vocabulary. Now, when Roman talks about his pictures, he uses some phrases and simple sentences (e.g., *This guy has power. Now this guy. Car going fast. I going to park.*). With Roman's input, we decided what pictures to keep for his portfolio. His receptive language was developing, and even though he didn't tell me which pictures he wanted to keep, he was able to point to the ones he wanted for his portfolio.

Roman also had a collection of drawings on unlined paper in a notebook, and was beginning to retell orally the stories he represented in his drawings. Based on my assessment information, I decided that it would be linguistically appropriate to gather evidence of his ability to retell using his drawings rather than using a book, as I had done with other children in the class. I was able to share with Roman's family that he could talk about his pictures and include a lot of details. The next step is to model for Roman how to retell a story that we read together.

Evaluation and reporting

> Teachers will communicate assessment and evaluation of achievement to the parents, the child, and others involved in the child's learning.
>
> Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised)*, p. 10

The following are sample comments that illustrate Martina's growth in the six areas of learning – Personal and Social Development, Language, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Health and Physical Activity, and the Arts.

Early in the year:

- Martina has adjusted to classroom routines and is beginning to try new things (e.g., working at the writing centre and the water table).
- She watches and listens to other children when they are talking with each other, and smiles and responds to their questions by pointing or nodding.
- Martina is beginning to use single words and short phrases in English when talking with the teacher.
- Martina has taught us how to count from 1 to 10 in Czech.
- During familiar songs, Martina joins in by following the actions, and she attempts to sing familiar words.
- She looks at picture books and uses her first language to say what is happening.
- She listens to teacher read-alouds and sometimes nods to indicate understanding.

- She follows a pattern using cubes.
- Martina sorts objects into more than one group.
- She observes other children, and she is just starting to join in movement activities such as jumping and moving from side to side.
- She spends time drawing at the writing centre, and adds lots of details to her pictures.

Later in the year:

- Martina takes a great deal of pride in her work and accomplishments. She is beginning to share her drawings and paintings with adults and her friends, saying, *Look at my picture*.
- Martina is beginning to use language for different purposes, for example, asking simple questions such as, *I use markers?*
- She joins in with familiar songs, rhymes, and chants such as, *Run, Run as fast as you can …*
- Martina copies words from around the room. She recognizes some letters and their sounds, and we are encouraging Martina to use them to write new words.
- She represents personal experiences in her paintings and drawings, and is beginning to tell the story of her picture for the teacher to write.
- She is learning to be more independent on the computer by using the icons and directions.
- Martina is able to say which group contains more objects by recounting. We are working on more counting strategies so that she doesn't have to recount each time.
- She enjoys looking at and drawing the butterfly display at the Science table. She uses a magnifying glass to look closely at her caterpillar, so that she can add more details to her drawing.
- While working at the sand and water tables, Martina demonstrates curiosity and willingness to explore. She makes observations and is beginning to talk about what she is seeing (e.g., *The water going fast*).
- She consistently demonstrates an ability to throw and catch objects of various sizes.
- She is beginning to role play in the dramatic play centre. She often likes to play the role of the mother, and is now joining in with other children with very little help from the teacher.
- She is experimenting with other materials in her picture making. For example, she used pastels and chalk to change the way her lines looked in her drawing.

At the end of the school year, Martina's Kindergarten teacher will meet with next year's teacher to ensure that Martina will receive the appropriate ESL supports so she can continue to experience success.

Supporting ELLs' language development

Oral language

The Kindergarten Program stresses that oral language is the basis for literacy, thinking, and socialization in any language (p. 15). This is equally true for ELLs whose primary need in the Kindergarten classroom is to understand what is being said around them and to start to interact orally with their peers. A strong oral foundation in both their first language and English will help increase the sophistication of their thinking and build their literacy skills.

The role of the teacher is central to language development. The teacher bridges the child's first language and the oral language development in English. Teachers can guide oral language development by listening attentively to and observing children's responses and interactions, by providing models of richer responses, and by introducing new vocabulary.

Teacher-child interaction

I use a picture-symbol album to support children whose receptive language is developing, but who have not yet demonstrated productive language in English. When Miriam came to school, she was upset and crying for the first few weeks. Eventually, she would come and stand near me when she wanted something. I learned that proximity was an important communication tool for Miriam. To support and extend her communication skills, I used the picture-symbol album. Miriam could express her needs by pointing at the pictures (e.g., washroom, drink, the learning centres). Initially, I would show her a range of pictures and she would shake her head or point when the picture matched what she wanted. Even though it is early spring, Miriam is reluctant to try out her English orally in class. Miriam has shown growth, as she smiles all the time now and goes to get the book and show me the picture by herself.

Supporting oral language development

By watching, listening to, and documenting the strategies ELLs use and develop, teachers will know when it is appropriate to interact with and engage children in dialogue. Teachers' questions/comments lead to thinking, help construct knowledge, and expand language. Teachers understand the importance of encouraging ELLs to explore and express ideas in their first language to support the development of thinking and new concepts. The examples that follow provide some specific ways to support ELLs as they develop oral language in English.

Using first language/Silent period

Teachers can ...

- **speak** and **use** physical gestures (e.g., The teacher can point to his coat and say, *My coat. Show me your coat.* The ELL points to her coat.).

Using headlines and learned phrases

Teachers can ...

- **present** choices and include physical gestures (e.g., The teacher asks, *Can you point to your name?* as she points to the name board.);
- **scaffold** the responses (e.g., *Yes, that is your name. Can you show me a name that starts like your name?*).

Using more complex language

Teachers can ...

- **acknowledge** what children are doing and, therefore, help sustain interest (e.g., *I see that you lined up your cars in a row.*);
- **support** children as they work through a process (e.g., *I see you found a way to get the car all the way down the ramp.*);
- **reaffirm** vocabulary that children use (e.g., *You're right. The blue car is faster than the red car.*);
- **introduce** new vocabulary informally (e.g., *Look at how far the blue car travels.*);
- **ask** for clarification, elaboration, or justification (e.g., *What do you think will happen if you change the ramp?*);
- **challenge** children's thinking with questions (e.g., *How did you know? Why did you decide ...?*);
- **prompt** children to **retell** in different ways (label, identify, describe, summarize) (e.g., *Tell me how you made the ramp higher. Tell me why you did this.*);

- **guide** children to make **connections** (compare, contrast, apply) (e.g., *That's the same as … What does this make you think of …?*);
- **lead** children to **reflect** on experiences – encourage questioning, further wonderings, and inference (e.g., *I wonder what would happen if … I wonder why … What else could you try? I wonder what you could try next …*).

For further information on supporting the development of oral language, see Ontario Ministry of Education, *A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading, Kindergarten to Grade 3, 2003,* pp. 3.11–3.20.

Developing reading and writing skills

Although children develop skills in reading, writing, and oral language (listening and speaking) from an early age, oral language must be the foundation of literacy development in Kindergarten. Through experience with oral language, children develop the ability to identify and manipulate phonemes (phonemic awareness), build vocabulary, develop awareness of meaning (semantic knowledge), and develop awareness of language structure (syntactic knowledge), and thus develop the foundations for reading and writing.

Although oral language is the focus of early language learning, reading and writing need to be taught and developed at the same time so that children can make connections between what they hear, say, read, and write. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all interrelated, and development in one area supports development in all the others.

Teachers plan instruction based on what they know about:

- the children's strengths, needs, and interests;
- English language development;
- evidence-based instructional strategies;
- levels of support that provide instruction for ELLs in their zone of proximal development;
- the materials needed to provide an inclusive, literacy-rich environment;
- developmentally appropriate practice;
- the social/cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children.

Examples of instructional practice

The examples are from Kindergarten classrooms throughout Ontario.

Read-aloud

In this highly supportive instructional strategy, the teacher carefully chooses a text that matches the receptive language capabilities of a small group of children, then models the reading. This allows more focused and personalized opportunities for ELLs to engage with text.

During **read-aloud**, the children:

- hear and enjoy the rhythms and sounds of language (in this case English);
- become part of a "reading community";
- are introduced to new vocabulary in the context of meaningful text;
- gain experience with a variety of genres;
- build a repertoire of familiar texts which they will want to revisit;
- hear the teacher model book language;
- have the opportunity to connect prior knowledge and experiences in order to develop new knowledge and understanding;
- focus on reading for meaning.

Teacher practice

It was early November, and the teacher had been modelling the comprehension strategy "making predictions." To make the strategy explicit for the children, he would use "think alouds" and discuss with the children how predicting helps us understand what is happening in the text. The teacher chose to read aloud a book about a birthday party.

> Teacher (holding up the book) – *I wonder what is going to happen in this book?*
> Shivam (points to balloons on the front cover) – *A birthday party.*
> Teacher – *Shivam, you're thinking it is about a birthday party. What makes you think that?*
> Shivam (pointing to the cover) – *It gots balloons like my party.*
> Teacher – *Good thinking. Authors sometimes use a picture on the front cover to help us understand what might be in the book.*

The teacher asks if other children are thinking the same as Shivam, allowing children whose receptive language is more developed than their productive language an opportunity to participate by raising their hand.

For the first time, Avi, who was born outside of Canada and speaks a language other than English, stood up in the group and came to put his finger on the balloon. Teacher (in an affirming tone) – *Yes, Avi; that's the balloon.*

Shared reading

In this supportive instructional strategy, the teacher uses enlarged text to make the strategies that proficient readers use highly visible to the children.

During **shared reading**, the children:

- learn through the teacher thinking aloud, modelling, and demonstrating that we read to understand;
- learn, using cloze (covering words or individual letters), how to use the strategies of predicting and confirming, applying letter/sound knowledge, and understanding grammatical structure of pattern and text;
- develop phonemic awareness in the context of whole texts;
- use features/concepts of print in the language of instruction;
- build vocabulary and strategies for acquiring new vocabulary;
- hear and rehearse phrased, fluent, and expressive reading;
- produce language in the safety of the group.

Note: It is important to provide small-group shared reading opportunities for all children to reinforce and practise the above skills and strategies.

Teacher practice

The teacher chose to share a Big Book about walking. She plans to use the book over a few days. Based on her assessment information, she knows that many of the children are beginning to use, but are still confusing, the W sound. Most of the children would benefit from the patterned and predictable text, and using the cloze strategy, she can focus on the application of reading strategies. For example, she could cover up the word *me* the third time it is used, have the children use the pattern to predict what the word is, and then use the letters in the word to confirm. On another day, the teacher could cover up the word *cat*, have the children use the illustrations to predict what the word is, and then use the letters and words to confirm.

During the second reading, William pointed to a W and stated, *That letter is in my name.* Josh said, *Hey, I see another one here (using more complex language).* The teacher added, *Yes, there are a lot of Ws in this story.* The teacher turned the page and asked, *Do you see one on this page?* MeiMei was willing to point to the letter W and say, *This W (using headlines).* The teacher replied, *Yes, MeiMei, that is a W.* The teacher then continued with the book.

During the next reading, Sunni nodded *yes* or *no* as the children predicted the next animal to appear in the story. Yasmin, Jason, and Chitrini began to chime in with the rest of the class, as they were familiar with the predictable pattern in the story. Later that morning, the teacher met with a small group of children and some English first-language speakers to discuss the wordless book. At this time, the teacher planned to observe and scaffold the children's oral language development (e.g., vocabulary development, asking questions, offering opinions).

For a further example of differentiating a shared reading lesson, see *www.eworkshop.on.ca.*

Guided reading

Guided reading provides children opportunities to rehearse and practise what they have learned and try out new strategies with minimal support.

Because guided reading involves students reading a text with a minimal amount of teacher support, a decision about whether to use guided reading in Kindergarten should be based on the learning behaviours, strengths, and needs of individual students. When students are able to demonstrate an understanding of print concepts and knowledge of letters and sounds, and can recognize some sight words, they are ready to participate in guided reading groups. Therefore, guided reading may not be appropriate for emergent readers who are still developing these skills. Emergent readers require group shared-reading opportunities where they can learn reading strategies in context.

Teacher practice

The teacher met with Mukwa and Wasici, who were beginning to *use more complex language strategies.* Based on her assessments, she knew that both of these ELLs had demonstrated an understanding of print concepts, knew most letters and sounds, and recognized several words no matter where they appeared. This was an indication that guided reading was an appropriate level of support.

The teacher had observed Mukwa and Wasici several times during independent reading and thought that both children were "decoding." However, when she assessed their comprehension, she found out that they were not making meaning of the text. As a result, the purpose of the guided reading group was to focus on making meaning from the text. She chose a nonfiction text about animals from the north, as she knew how important children's interests and background knowledge were in helping them make meaning from text.

The lesson focussed on helping the children make connections. The teacher had modelled the strategy during read-aloud. She led them both through a picture walk and used a think aloud: *This reminds me of … This makes me think about …* The children then read the book independently, and the teacher observed and documented observations.

After reading, she asked Mukwa and Wasici, *What does the picture make you think of?* Mukwa replied, *That makes me think about the sounds that I hear the wolves make at night.* Wasici said, *Yes, I sometimes hear an owl at night.* Then Mukwa said, *Once I saw a hawk fly up into a nest. The teacher asked, What in the book made you think about a hawk's nest?* Mukwa turned to the page and pointed to the illustration of a hawk. The teacher affirmed Mukwa's connection and stated, *The pictures in a book sometimes help us understand what the book is about. You made a connection with an experience you had when you saw a hawk flying into a nest. That is a good strategy.*

Independent reading

Independent reading provides children with opportunities to rehearse and practise what they have learned and to try out new strategies.

During **independent reading**, children:

- practise the strategies they have learned in shared reading and heard in read-aloud;
- develop preferences for topics they like to read about;
- choose from different genres of books;
- are not restricted to a book: they can read "around the room," familiar charts, and poems;
- read and reread materials they are familiar with, that hold their interest, and that reflect their interests;
- self-select texts that are interesting to them even if they cannot read them independently (e.g., a book from a read-aloud, a book from the science table, an atlas, a map);
- have bins of material that are at their independent reading level.

Teacher practice

The teacher has organized books in several areas of the room (e.g., a book centre, listening centre, retelling/puppet centre), as well as in learning centres (e.g., books about buildings in the blocks centre and books about ants at the science centre). Books are in bins that are sorted by topic (e.g., animals, alphabet books, bugs, making friends). The areas also include charts from Shared Reading, bins of books sorted by levels, big books, dual-language books, etc. The learners in the class include children using their first language, children developing more complex language, and English first-language speakers.

During independent reading time, Jasleen is rereading the morning message; Oscar is reading a dual-language book; Becky is reading the alphabet wall; Rashad is reading a class-made book; and other children are using a pointer to reread a class poem. Shivam is working with the teacher in a Reading Conference. He has been demonstrating many *more complex language strategies:*

> Teacher – *I noticed you did something with your voice when you read "me."*
> Shivam – *I made it louder.*
> Teacher – *How did you know to do that?*
> Shivam – *I see it darker, so I make my voice louder.*
> Teacher – *Shivam, that is a good strategy. Authors sometimes do things with the words to help us know how to say them.*

Modelled writing

In this highly supportive instructional strategy, the teacher models the writing process. The experience is surrounded with talk.

During **modelled writing**, children:

- hear think alouds about the decisions writers make;
- experience writing for different (real) purposes and audiences;
- learn that talk can be written down;
- learn aspects of the writing process;
- see how thoughts and ideas are composed into writing;
- experience the reciprocal nature of reading and writing.

Teacher practice

Harshvir, Vu, and Mariam participate without speaking. The teacher looks for smiles, shrugs, sighs, and children glancing from speaker to speaker. She models making a list of the children's names, and uses photographs of the children to make the connection between the pictures and the words.

At another time, the teacher talks with the children as they bake bread. She puts the ingredients in the dramatic play centre, and then writes and draws the procedure the children follow.

Shared writing

In this supportive instructional strategy, the teacher uses enlarged text to make the strategies writers use highly visible to the children.

During **shared writing**, children:

- compose a message with the teacher while the teacher transcribes the ideas;
- learn that talk can be written down;
- learn aspects of the writing process;
- see how thoughts and ideas are composed into writing.

Teacher practice

The class has just returned from a field trip to a nearby park. The teacher and the children spend time talking about what they observed in the park. The teacher brought along a digital camera and took photographs of their observations. The photographs would support the discussion that the class would have later and help the children compose their ideas for writing. Together, the children and the teacher decide to write a class book over several days, using the photographs as a reference.

Jose, who isn't yet speaking in large-group situations, points to the picture that he wants included in the story. Larab and Sophia contribute *bird in tree* and *go down slide.*

Note: Shared writing (Language Experience) with small groups of ELLs or helping individual ELLs record their experiences in ways that the children and the teacher can go back to for further reading moments supports their English language development.

For more information about language development strategies, see pp. 10–14.

Interactive writing

In this supportive instructional strategy, the teacher gradually shares with the children the responsibility of composing a text. Interactive writing is most beneficial in a small-group setting, so children can practise and reinforce skills and strategies.

During **interactive writing**, children:

- "share the pen" and together compose the writing;
- experience a variety of materials (e.g., whiteboards, magnetic letters, white tape, coloured markers);
- learn to consider audience and make meaning of text;
- are given a real reason to write;
- make predictions (e.g., they look at a picture and compose a story about it);
- see themselves as writers;
- learn how to use other resources to help them write (e.g., alphabet board, word wall, signs, labels);
- explore the way letters and words work;
- develop phonemic awareness (stretch the word);
- engage in further practice of high-frequency words.

Teacher practice

The teacher has observed the children over time in a variety of contexts (e.g., writing centre, shared writing, blocks centre, sand table, during morning messages). After analysing her assessment information, she plans the focus for the writing. She knows which children will be successful with the writing (e.g., printing a letter versus a word; sounding out part of a word).

The children want to write a note to the other class that they share the room with, asking, *How did you make the house in the block centre?* Hadi writes the "H." He knows that letter since it is in his name. The teacher asks, *How can we figure out how to write "blocks?"* Rachel goes and gets the sign from the centre and says, *Blocks centre.* Manuel volunteers to make the "s." The teacher is aware that Manuel's fine-motor skills are still developing, so she has magnetic letters available. Manuel selects the "s" and places it in the message.

Independent writing

Using this instructional strategy, the teacher releases the responsibility of writing to the children so that they can practise and apply what they have learned and attempt new skills and strategies.

During **independent writing**, children:

- work with the teacher as he or she assesses their learning;
- see the teacher demonstrate, support, and encourage all stages of writing, from the scribble stage to simple pieces of writing;
- write for different purposes (e.g., draw labels for pictures, signs, grocery lists);
- feel like writers;
- write in different contexts (e.g., learning centres, in small groups);
- learn to use classroom materials as resources (e.g., environmental print, word walls, frequently used words, alphabet friezes/borders);
- use a variety of writing materials (e.g., markers, whiteboards, crayons, pencils, magnetic letters, a variety of paper).

Teacher practice

The teacher plans a writing centre that is rich in materials that can be used for a variety of writing purposes (e.g., making signs, grocery lists, pizza orders; recording the growth of a plant). Materials include different tools to write with, different materials to write on (e.g., clipboards, whiteboards, chalkboards, various sizes of paper, unlined paper), and various resources (e.g., class lists, picture dictionaries, word walls).

Addisa is drawing her structure. Franco is walking around with a clipboard, taking a survey similar to one the class had done. Ahn Sun is making a sign for a centre. Rashin and Paulina are making their names out of magnetic letters and modelling clay. Jasmin is writing the morning message in her first language. Stanley is making a birthday card for his friend. The teacher asks Shivam what he could use to figure out how to write his friend's name, and he uses the word wall.

> These children do not profit from being taken away from the rich language of a reading or a writing workshop in order to work on discrete, out-of-context skills. It is a terrible mistake for an ELL to practice in the hall with an ELL teacher using flashcards containing colours or seasons while his or her classmates tell and write stories, make explanations, describe, question, reminisce, revise, amplify, clarify, and reach for words to convey meaning.
>
> Lucy Calkins, *Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum,* 2003

For further information on teaching approaches for oral language, reading, and writing, including planning for developing literacy in learning centres, teachers may wish to consult the following resource documents from the Ontario Ministry of Education: *A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading, Kindergarten to Grade 3, 2003* (for reading stages, see pages 12.37–12.40) and *A Guide to Effective Instruction in Writing, Kindergarten to Grade 3, 2005.*

The learning environment

An effective learning environment will use space, time, and resources to help create a holistic, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate program for English language learners. A Kindergarten classroom that embraces cultural diversity and honours the whole child will facilitate an emotionally supportive atmosphere.

Use of space

- Allow children to shape the environment. Include displays with representations of children's first languages, labels with multiple languages, ideas or illustrations that children contributed while creating anchor charts, and items that children brought to the classroom environment (e.g., articles for the "I wonder" discovery table/science table).
- Have visual displays that help children develop an understanding of routines and concepts (e.g., photographs and print that support the routine of putting on an apron at the water table).
- Set up activity centres in a manner that promotes talk. Place painting easels side by side to facilitate conversations between children.
- Design all areas of the classroom to create safe and supportive learning environments.
  - Centres with manipulatives, modelling clay, and dual-language books provide activities in which children can access materials and engage in play independently, without having to ask for help. Children can also learn how things work by exploring and watching others.
  - Quiet areas (e.g., a book corner) give children a place to be immersed in language learning without the demands of hearing and attempting to produce English.

Use of time

An important consideration in planning the use of time is the child's English language proficiency and cultural adjustment to a new school setting. Teachers should also consider the attention span of children, the length of time they have attended school, their familiarity with routines, and their strengths, needs, and interests.

Use of resources

All-inclusive Kindergarten classrooms offer a variety of centre-based activities that enhance the children's learning, language, and understanding of the wider world around them. It is important that the activities and materials also reflect the diversity of the specific cultures of ELLs in the classroom.

- Organize materials so that they are physically accessible to all children. This is especially important for children who may not have the proficiency in English to ask for materials.
- Label bins, containers, and shelves. Wherever possible, the label should include the word, a visual representation, and a translation in a child's first language.
- Provide many manipulatives and open-ended materials. This allows children the opportunity to explore freely without being limited by attempting to follow instructions that they may not fully comprehend. In addition, inquiry-oriented materials promote talk, as children work together to determine how best to use the pieces or parts.
- Provide diagrams or pictures demonstrating how to use materials (e.g., how to use a stamp and stamp pad to print an image).
- Include materials that are reflective of many cultures within and beyond the classroom community.
- Provide books and other materials in children's first language (e.g., dual-language books, newspapers, posters, picture books, comic books).

> We see the child as a rich carrier of experience – experience not only of constructing, but also of elaborating meaning in relationship with materials, experience that shows what the child has come to know, what he or she has learned, and what he or she thinks.
>
> Giovanni Piazza, *In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia* (New York Teachers College Press, 2005), p. 136

Learning centres

> Kindergarten programs need to consist of a balance of investigation or exploration, guided instruction, and explicit instruction.
>
> Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised)*, p. 11

As part of intentional and purposeful teaching, the teacher models, supports, focuses on, and personalizes the learning across all aspects of the Kindergarten program. Providing children with large blocks of time and adequate space to work at learning centres allows them multiple opportunities to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they are acquiring, and to practise and apply new learning both independently and with others. More specifically for ELLs, learning centres provide a range of hands-on experiences that give children the opportunity to hear, rehearse, and ground their understanding of English.

Because of the hands-on nature of activities at the learning centres, the teacher is able to observe children demonstrate what they know and can do. This is especially significant with children who do not have the oral language skills to describe and explain what they have been creating. It is through watching, listening to, and interacting with ELLs that teachers determine instruction, choices of materials, and strategies to support children's learning.

Teacher-child interaction

During learning centre time, some of the children in my class will communicate in their first language. I can learn many things about the children's strengths, needs, and interests by observing them as they use their first language. From my professional reading, I have learned how important it is for them to continue developing their first language. I have worked hard at being a keen observer of the way ELLs use their body language, their tone of voice, and visual cues. These observations help me know when to intervene to support the development of skills such as problem solving, questioning, and introducing new vocabulary. I am constantly asking myself a number of questions:

- Do I have enough centres where the children can safely use language?
- Am I supporting children who are reluctant to enter certain centres?
- What centres do the children seem to choose most often?

> Teaching through dialogue is not a laissez-faire pedagogical practice, nor a free-for-all conversation. For dialogue to promote learning it needs to be thoughtfully structured around a sequence of questions that invite reflections. Sometimes a dialogue may be structured with specific learning in mind and at other times leading toward exploration and discovery. However, it always presupposes that the teacher knows enough about children's perceptions to pace the interchange to their needs, capacities, interests, and levels of understanding.
>
> Burton, 2000

Examples of teacher interactions with ELLs at learning centres

These examples illustrate teachers supporting and extending the language development of children who are using various strategies as they acquire English.

Visual arts centre – Texture rubbings

Vasiliki was sitting at a table that had various sizes of paper, paint, wax candles, boards with various textures, including wire mesh, building blocks, and a rubber mat.

V – *Look what I am making.*

T – *I was watching you. Tell me more.*

V – *I took this* (holding up the candle and the paper) *and did like this, then you put the paint on, see.*

Raymond comes over, takes the board that Vasiliki is using, and asks, *Can I try it?*

V – *OK, here.*

T – *I wonder what would happen if you used a board with another texture. What do you predict?*

V – *I think the candle is going to make bumps again.*

T – *Let's test it.*

V – (chooses the building block board, puts the paper on top, and rubs the candle over the board) *Hey, look* (runs his hand over the wax rubbings)! *Bumpy! Let's test this* (takes the rubber mat, puts the paper on top, and rubs the candle).

T – *What did you notice?* (There's no response. The teacher waits, and Vasiliki does it again.)

T – *What happened?*

V – *It's doing this.* (The rubber mat texture caused Vasiliki's arm to vibrate.)

T – (points to Vasiliki's arm to give a context for the new vocabulary *vibrate*) *It's making your whole arm vibrate.*

Teacher Reflection

- How did the teacher support language development?
- Why did the teacher decide to respond this way?
- What do we learn about Vasiliki?
- What strategies is Vasiliki demonstrating?
- What might the teacher do next?

Small-group shared reading

The teacher met with a small group of children who were using headlines and learned phrases to focus on concepts of print. She chose a text that they had read in the large group. She modelled using a pointer (magic wand).

T – *This is where I start the reading.*

The teacher read the text once.

T – *Now, I am going to read it again. Sahira, can you show me where we start to read?*

This time, the children joined in the reading of a familiar phrase.

T – *I heard you helping me read ____ .*

The teacher read the book one final time. The third time that she reached the familiar phrase, she stopped reading. Manni, Sahira, and Kristoff joined in even when the teacher stopped.

T – *I heard you reading the words by yourselves. That was great reading!*

Teacher Reflection

- How did the teacher support literacy development?
- How did she scaffold the learning?
- What reading strategies were the children demonstrating?

Construction centre

The teacher observed Omar while he was working with construction materials.

O – *I'm building a tower.*

T – *I was noticing your building.*

O – *I made two legs, so it is not tippy. See, like this. See, tippy.* (Omar demonstrates by standing on one foot.) *See, not tippy.* (Omar demonstrates by standing on two feet).

T – *So, by adding two legs it is stable.*

O – *Look how many towers I have now.* (Omar has several three- to five-storey towers on the table.)

O – *I have so many. See how many I have?*

T – *I wonder how many there are.*

Omar tags and names each tower as he counts accurately to eighteen.

O – *See, I have a lot.*

T – *You do have a lot. I noticed that you did something interesting. You touched each tower when you were counting.*

O – *Yeh, that's how I keep track of how many.*

T – *That is a great strategy.*

Teacher Reflection

- How did the teacher support language development?
- Why did the teacher decide to respond in this way?
- What do we learn about Omar?
- What strategies is Omar demonstrating?
- What might the teacher do next?

Blocks centre

The teacher observed that Jason was "taking everything in" while he was in the silent period. He spent a lot of time at the blocks centre, playing with a garage and rolling cars down a plastic ramp into the garage. After observing him, the teacher added some planks, cardboard, tubing, marbles, and tennis balls so that the children could explore ramps.

J – *Look at this. This goes slower.* (Jason rolls a ball down the ramp.)

T – *Why do you think it is going slower?*

J – *The small ball goes slower and the big ball goes speedy fast.*

T – *What could you do to make it go faster?*

J – *I can make it higher.*

Teacher Reflection

- How did the teacher support language development?
- Why did the teacher decide to respond in this way?
- What do we learn about Jason?
- What strategies is Jason demonstrating?
- What might the teacher do next?

Integrating the learning

Using real-life contexts can lead to more effective integration of learning throughout the Kindergarten program. Integration can provide opportunities for children to explore concepts and to develop and apply skills.

Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised)*, p. 13

Supporting ELLs by integrating learning – An example

It is late May in a Kindergarten classroom. All the children in the classroom speak a language other than English at home. The teacher is reflecting on the progress that the children have made with their language development since September. Many of the children are beginning to demonstrate early productive strategies. The children read a book about a little girl who creates a lemonade stand. During their class discussion, the children suggest that they create a lemonade stand for their classroom. The teacher sees this as an opportunity to support the assessed range of their strengths, needs, and interests as she can integrate the learning in large-group, small-group, and learning-centre experiences.

An outline of the teacher's plans over several days:

Whole group:	Read-aloud
	Class discussion
	Modelled procedural writing: How to Make Lemonade
	Interactive Writing: List of Materials for the Lemonade Stand
Small Group:	Lemonade Stand learning centre
	Interactive Writing: Plan for Lemonade Stand
Independent:	Signs for Lemonade Stand

During this concrete and "real life" learning experience, the teacher observes the children:

- using new and specialized vocabulary;
- using oral communication for different purposes (e.g., asking questions);
- using productive English (e.g., *Would you like some lemonade? That will be one dollar.*);
- comparing more/less while making and serving the lemonade;
- counting out money;
- measuring while making lemonade;
- writing signs, orders, and prices for lemonade;
- problem solving;
- cooperating.

The teacher takes photographs which the children take home to share with their families.

Learning through inquiry

> Teachers should use inquiry-based learning to build on children's spontaneous desire for exploration and to gradually guide them to become more systematic in their observations and investigations.
>
> Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised)*, p. 11

Learning through inquiry can pose possibilities and challenges for ELLs, as inquiry often places demands on children's ability to communicate their thinking orally. However, children who are learning English can demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways.

Supporting ELLs' learning through inquiry – An example

It is important for children to explore concepts directly and deeply over time. This is particularly significant for ELLs, as they may have the challenge of both developing a new concept and simultaneously mapping on the English words. One teacher noticed that in the past few years, she had planned topics that had many learning opportunities for the children; however, the learning opportunities were too abstract for ELLs to engage in hands-on explorations (e.g., the rainforest, polar bears).

After deepening her understanding of inquiry-based learning, she planned a structured inquiry about snow, as many of the children were experiencing snow for the first time. She included prediction, observation, and explanation during this large-group guided activity.

The teacher asked, *Do you think it is going to snow today?* She recorded responses on a chart labelled Yes/No. Then, in guided discussion, she asked, *Why did you respond Yes/No? What were you thinking when you said Yes/No?* Children's responses included the following observations:

- Yes – *It is so cold outside. It is raining. The rain tasted like snow.*
- No – *There is no snow on the ground. Because there are puddles.*

After the teacher focused their investigation, the children's responses included the following explanations:

- Sunni – *When it's on my hand, it turns into water.*
- Chatrini – *It crunches.*
- Kelly – *Outside it makes into ice and it cracks.*
- Shivam – *It's melting; it's turning into clouds – water.*
- Erin – *Snow is made of water.*

Teacher's role in inquiry

- Plan the inquiry.
- Gather materials.
- Organize the environment.
- Scaffold the learning.
- Assess through observation.

> The materials we choose to bring into our classrooms reveal the choices we have made about knowledge and what we think is important to know. How children are invited to use materials indicates the role they shall have in their learning. Materials become the tools with which children give form to and express their understanding of the world and the meanings they have constructed.
>
> Cuffaro, 1995

Learning through exploration

Young children are concrete learners. It is experiences with hands-on learning that become the substance of new words. Hands-on experiences give children a context for learning rich vocabulary, such as *soggy, shiny, stable,* and *balanced*. Rather than being passive recipients of language, through the process of exploration, ELLs are active constructors of knowledge. The teacher capitalizes on their exploration to guide their inquiry and extend the learning, providing multiple opportunities for ELLs to acquire English by using language for different purposes and learning about how language works.

Supporting ELLs' learning through exploration – An example

Children were at the sand table, pouring sand into sand mills and funnels. They were noticing and commenting on how fast the sand was pouring: *Look. Fast.* Then, one of the ELLs commented that a big pile was starting to form under the mill. She said, *Look at this big hill.* The teacher recorded their language on an at-a-glance sheet.

The teacher noticed that the sand was very dry, and knew that the children could continue to explore its properties in a different way if they added water. The teacher asked, *I wonder what will happen to the sand when we pour the water on the pile.* One of them responded, *It will go down.* The teacher paused and then said, *Koi thinks the sand will go down. How did you think of that?* Koi replied, *At beach, I built castle and the water came and made it go down.* The teacher responded, *Let's test it out.*

The children poured water on the pile of sand and spent a short time talking about what happened. The teacher introduced new vocabulary, focused their observations, generated some predictions, talked with them about their findings, and recorded language samples of what the children said about their thinking. The whole interaction took about three minutes.

> We always keep all of the possibilities open, because we think that it is important to keep all of the channels of our communication open. We think of collecting memory as dynamic rather than memory as placed in storage. I think that children understand this. Both children and adults are in the process of exploring and constructing knowledge, and we do not know what will happen next.
>
> Giovanni Piazza, *In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005), p. 136

Working as a whole school

To ensure that all students in the province have an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential, the education system must be free from discrimination and must provide all students with a safe and secure environment so they can participate fully and successfully in the educational experience.

The implementation of antidiscrimination principles in education influences all aspects of school life. It promotes a school climate that encourages all students to work to high standards, affirms the worth of all students, and helps students strengthen their sense of identity and develop a positive self-image. It encourages staff and students alike to value and show respect for diversity in the school and the wider society.

Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Kindergarten Program, 2006 (Revised),* p. 26

Creating an inclusive school

For English language learners, it is particularly important – in order to confirm their identity and build their trust in the school as a place where they belong and are valued – that their Kindergarten classroom and the whole school environment provide a bridge between their home/community and the wider world they are entering as they start school.

> We must first comprehend the fact that children – all children – come to school motivated to enlarge their culture. But we must start with their culture ... and look first to determine how they seek to know themselves and others and how their expertise and experience can be used as the fuel to fire their interests, knowledge, and skills ... for they are rich in assets. As teachers, we enter their world in order to aid them and to build bridges between two cultures.
>
> Eugene Garcia, 1999, p. 82

An inclusive environment

> Creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment for ELLs and their families is a whole-school activity, requiring the commitment of the principal and vice-principal, teachers, support staff, other leaders within the school community. The reward for this committed effort is a dynamic and vibrant school environment that celebrates diversity as an asset and enriches the learning experiences for all students
>
> Ontario Ministry of Education, *Many Roots, Many Voices,* 2006, p. 36

An **inclusive environment** represents community diversity. Families should be able to "recognize" themselves and relate to the school environment. The following questions may be helpful when working as a school team to create an inclusive environment:

- What image of the learners is conveyed throughout the school?
- How do the materials on display contribute to a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere?
- How can the school environment reflect the lives, families, and interests of the learners?
- Is the information accessible to families still learning English (e.g., written in clear English or in translations)?
- How are different languages and cultures represented (e.g., through art, imagery, music, and dance)?

Schools can

- develop a plan that includes all staff in welcoming and supporting newcomers (e.g., assigning roles and responsibilities, timelines) and in checking on the plan's effectiveness;
- brainstorm what the school might do to ease the transition experienced by newcomer families (e.g., have as an agenda item during staff meetings, familiarize staff with relevant community resources, emphasize the importance of pronouncing children's names correctly);
- develop routines and responses that consider the cultural norms of students in the school;
- periodically revisit the ways in which they provide key information, such as information about school safety and upcoming events.

Children and their families are facing the challenges of adjusting to a new language, a new community, and a new school system.

Role of the administrative team

The principal works in partnership with teachers, parents, and caregivers to ensure that each child has access to the best possible educational experiences.

The administrative team can

- ensure that office staff who register students are aware of different naming conventions (e.g., double family names from Spanish-language backgrounds);
- schedule sufficient time for interviews with newcomer parents and, if required, arrange for interpreters;
- ensure that Kindergarten teachers have access to quality professional development to enrich and extend their repertoire of instructional strategies to meet the needs of ELLs;
- provide resources for both the Kindergarten classroom(s) and library that reflect the cultural and linguistic make-up of the school;
- ensure that the expertise of the ESL specialist is available to the Kindergarten teachers;
- review and discuss with staff the most recent demographic data for the school;
- provide professional development opportunities for all staff so that they can learn more about non-verbal cultural behaviours. For example, smiles from parents of various cultural backgrounds might signal happiness, an apology, or nervousness. The head waggle in South Asian cultures, which is a movement that can be misinterpreted as a "no" by Canadians, actually signals, among other things, agreement and thanks. In Turkish culture, nodding your head to the front means "yes," but throwing your head slightly to the back, raising your eyebrows, and clicking your tongue means "no."

Even though body language is one of the most ingrained aspects of one's behaviour, people do learn to adapt to different norms. Parents will be at different stages of doing so, as they become accustomed to living in Canada and interacting with Canadian English speakers.

Working together to support English language learners

- Invite support staff into the classroom to talk to the students about their roles in the school.
- Work with other teachers to identify support and resources.
- Collaborate as Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers to support ELLs in making the transition to Grade 1.
- Work with the librarian to augment resources that will benefit ELLs (e.g., dual-language books, picture dictionaries, audio and visual resources that reflect experiences of ELLs).
- During whole-school events, integrate music, songs, chants, equipment, and games representative of a variety of cultures.
- Where possible, match older students who speak the ELLs' first language with ELLs. They can work together as computer buddies, reading partners, learning buddies, etc. Older students can also support ELLs as buddies for outdoor play, bus monitors, and helpers in the classroom.
- Access classroom volunteers who speak the children's first language to work with them in their first language. These volunteers can work with the teacher during a variety of experiences (e.g., telling stories, creating dual-language class books, field trips).

Planning a school and community event

Many schools provide special evening events for parents and the community, such as literacy nights, concerts, plays, science fairs, etc. In a school environment that honours and reflects the diversity of the school and community, the staff will carefully plan for these types of events, taking into consideration the needs of the families.

Some questions to consider

- Have we chosen a date and time when families are available to attend?
- Could we offer the event at different/multiple times?
- Have we made arrangements for childcare?
- In our planning, have we taken into account the languages and cultures represented in the school?
- Have we translated invitations and information?
- Have we booked interpreters for the event?
- Does the space for the event present a welcoming and culturally diverse environment?
- Have we taken steps to encourage and support the participation of parents who might be reluctant to attend?
- Have we contacted community resources who might enhance the event (e.g., SWIS workers, cultural liaison workers)?
- Has staff been invited to participate in the event?
- Have we invited our education partners (e.g., Best Start networks, child care centres, Native Friendship Centres, community agencies, public libraries)?

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