



2nd Edition

Many Languages, One Classroom

Teaching Multilingual
Language Learners

Karen N. Nemeth, EdMpi

Many Languages, One Classroom

SECOND EDITION

Karen Nemeth, EdMpi


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Introduction

I've worked with thousands of teachers in the United States and other countries since the publication of the first edition of this book. This new edition captures many changes in our field: revised curricula, new state requirements, and updated research. It is based on the many questions teachers have asked and the many strategies they have shared for working effectively with multilingual children in the preschool years.

Teachers work in increasingly diverse classrooms. Twenty years ago, the teacher who asked for guidance about supporting English language learners was the exception. Now, most teachers have at least one child in their classroom who speaks a different home language. Not only are teachers encountering more children who are new to English, but they are also faced with an increasing variety of languages. As challenging as these changes may be, an early childhood teacher's goal remains the same—to welcome all children and give them the best possible start in education and in life.

That said, even the most experienced teachers can feel unsure about how to meet the unique needs of children from different language backgrounds. Early childhood teacher-preparation programs have generally fallen short in preparing teachers to work with linguistically diverse children, and college courses for English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual education certification have not addressed the needs of the preschool age group (Gilreath, 2022). This was true at the publication of the first edition of this book in 2009 and persists sixteen years later.

Applying Recent Research to Support Multilingual Learners

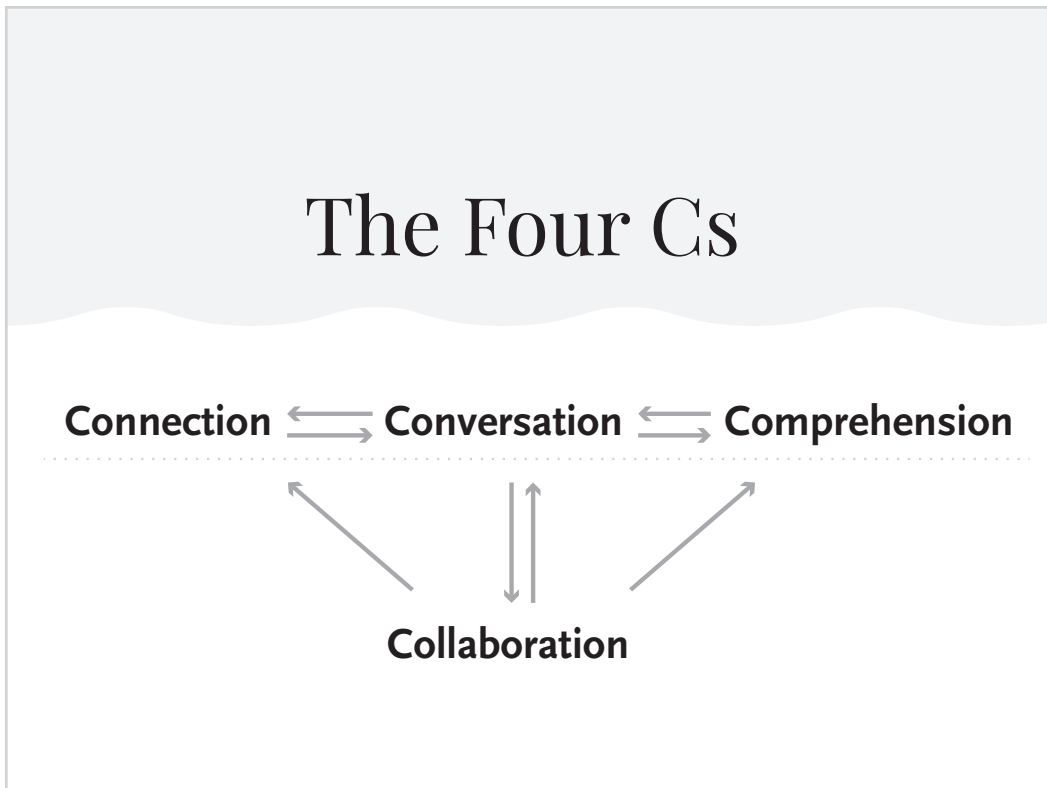
Since the first edition, several major reports have been published to enrich our understanding of high-quality early childhood education:

- *Teaching in the Way Human Brains Learn: First Results from Active Playful Learning* (Nesbitt et al., 2025)
- *A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum* (Bredekamp, Espinosa, Hutton, and Stephens, eds., 2024)
- *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8* (National Association for Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020)
- *Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education* (NAEYC, 2019a)
- *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators* (NAEYC, 2019b)

These papers represent convenings of extraordinarily compelling and diverse experts. One key message appears in all of them: the best early childhood education must meet the needs of each child individually to support their unique experiences, cultures, languages, and abilities. In the past few years, a growing body of research has given us a clear message that multilingual learners (MLLs) need meaningful support of both their home language and English to succeed in school (Banse, 2021; Durán et al., 2023; Serafini, Rozell, and Winsler, 2022).

This places a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of individual teachers to update their knowledge and practices. We hope to see changes in system-wide supports and deeper improvements in curriculum materials. These changes are difficult because there is no one-size-fits-all answer. Experts agree that supporting the home language of each multilingual learner is critical when it is done in meaningful ways to help children understand more and communicate more, so they can learn more (López and Páez, 2021). The goal of this book is to provide the most current, research-based strategies that put this research to work in ways that support you and the children you teach. The research and the strategies are organized according to four categories: comprehension, connection, conversation, and collaboration.

FIGURE 1.1



THE FOUR CS: COMPREHENSION, CONNECTION, CONVERSATION, AND COLLABORATION

Collectively, the recent research sheds light on the four components of successful multilingual preschool education (López and Páez, 2021). Figure 1.1 shows how they work together.

- **Comprehension:** Children need to understand words and concepts to learn them. When multilingual language learners encounter language they don't understand, they cannot learn as much as children who do understand. The supports you provide to MLLs should focus on helping each child comprehend what's happening, what's being said, and what they need to learn. It is often helpful to use the child's home language specifically so they can learn

new information. For example, imagine going to a restaurant in a country where you do not speak the language. One server notices that you speak English and keeps saying “Hello!” while showing you the menu. Another server comes over and explains, “We have sauerbraten. That is like a beef stew or pot roast. It is served with spaetzle, which is a kind of noodles.” The server who uses your home language to help you comprehend the menu is more helpful.

- **Conversation:** Two-way interactions using verbal and nonverbal language, known as *conversations*, provide critical support for cognitive and social development. They serve two important purposes in early childhood education.
 - ▶ **Conversation to demonstrate learning:** Multilingual children need to have meaningful two-way interactions with teachers to reveal what they understand and what they need to learn. Children in preschool are not taking written quizzes to demonstrate their learning. Instead, teachers find out how they’re doing by asking questions and observing behavior. This is not as easy when the child and teacher speak different languages, but it is necessary. For example, a teacher mentioned she wasn’t sure if her Arabic-speaking students were understanding a story until she asked her bilingual assistant to have a conversation with them. The assistant identified some things the children did comprehend and some gaps they needed to learn more about.
 - ▶ **Conversation to advance learning:** All children need to use new words to fully learn them in a variety of meaningful conversations. You may find that it is not easy to have a real multi-turn conversation with a child who speaks another language, but that child needs those conversations as much as every other child—maybe more. Multilingual children may depend on active learning interactions even more than English speakers because they need to make sense of a new language in addition to their home language. Children can learn to repeat words by hearing or chanting them, but this does not result in true learning of the meanings and uses of words. Language-acquisition research shows that the brain adopts and makes sense of new words by saying them during interactions that occur in play, exploration, and lessons (Shanahan and Lonigan, 2023). International literacy expert Claude Goldenberg (2023) tells us, “. . . students learning to read in a new language need additional oral language support

so that they will understand the words and text being used to teach them to read.” Talking about content helps children understand the words. These interactions require active processing and critical thinking. For example, a child from Korea entered a three-year-old class and used her few English words when possible. At first, she called every four-legged animal *dog*. Over time, as she played with peers and teachers using animal puppets and small toys, she heard them use *dog* for some animals but not others. Through chatting and listening, she began to recognize there are several types of dogs as well as many four-legged animals that are not dogs at all. She learned many new words—nouns, verbs, and adjectives—to talk about animals. This also helped her get more involved in play and conversation as she developed a more detailed understanding of how she could use her English words and what other people would understand when she communicated.

- **Connection:** To engage fully in meaningful interactions, MLLs need to feel confident and comfortable and to have a sense of belonging. Think of this as the role of interpersonal connections to support emotional and cognitive development, a role we know is key for young children’s development. When children do not speak or understand the languages of other children or adults, building those needed connections can be a challenge. With the many obstacles MLLs can face, finding ways to strengthen their connections when possible is especially important. For example, think about how isolated a small child must feel to be left for hours in a place where no one speaks their language. No matter how nice and fun the people and activities may be, that child is still missing so much and may find it hard to see where they fit in. That child’s family members may also be new to English. One teacher came up with the idea of taking photos of her classroom areas. She used a translation app to ask new children and families “What do you like?” or “What will you play with?” in their home language. They could indicate which objects in the photos were most interesting for their child. This allowed the teacher to highlight those items that made the newcomer feel welcomed and supported from day one. The teacher also knew she could better support this child’s learning of important concepts by using favorite, familiar items to demonstrate. If the child loved painting, for example, the teacher could introduce counting with paint.

- **Collaboration:** Some say that early childhood education is a team sport. Supervising, teaching, and nurturing so many diverse little children takes a lot of collaboration. The recommendations in this book include strategies that you can use to relate effectively with colleagues and with families.
 - ▶ **Collaboration with colleagues:** Teachers and paraprofessionals need to plan together about who will use which languages and in what ways to support multilingual learners. Strategies appear throughout the book to help you make the most of these vital relationships. Whether both the adults in a classroom speak the languages of the children or they speak different languages, planning increases effective teaching for all. For example, a new preschool teacher realized he had never learned much about how to work with an assistant teacher during his college coursework. When he started the year, he thought he should be in charge of everything that happened in the class, even though he spoke only English. His experienced assistant gave him some suggestions that really opened his eyes. The assistant showed him the value of building in time for the assistant to read the day's story to a few children in their home language before the scheduled English story time. The change in the children's behavior and learning was noticeable right away, and the new teacher learned so much about the value of true collaboration.
 - ▶ **Collaboration with families:** Teachers need to partner with families of multilingual learners to exchange information about each child's interests, culture, and experiences to extend learning. Put simply, you need the families as much as they need you. Each of you has information, experience, and expertise that gain power when they are put together. Throughout this book, you will find many ideas for working with families to build the best possible early learning experiences for young MLLs. For example, a teacher was preparing to welcome a child from Brazil. She asked two questions of the family in Portuguese as they walked into school carrying a soccer ball. She asked about the child's favorite soccer player and team. Then, she asked them to teach her one phrase they would say to their child if she became upset during the school day. In that moment, the teacher communicated her respect for the family's knowledge about their child, and she learned important information she could use immediately to relate to the child and make her feel safe.

As you can see, the four main categories will help you organize your learning about research and strategies for teaching young MLLs. In this book, you will see each chapter introduced with guiding questions about comprehension, conversation, and connection. The fourth category, collaboration, is woven throughout each chapter to support strategies for the first three Cs.

Making Sense of the Terminology

An essential step in the process of understanding and supporting language development is to clarify the terminology we use. Depending on decisions made by your school, you may lead one of these approaches, you may engage in co-teaching, or you might receive occasional supports or specialist consultations. Keep in mind that children who have identified delays or disabilities may qualify for therapeutic interventions, behavioral supports, and/or special education (Paradis, Genesee, and Crago, 2021). Of course, some of these children may also be multilingual learners who need language-acquisition supports at the same time. The more you know about how these services fit together in your program, the better prepared you can be to offer effective supports to each individual child who is learning in two or more languages.

LANGUAGE SUPPORT APPROACHES

Generally, school districts offer some kind of English language development service for children who are new to English. Requirements are determined by state education regulations. They may not apply to preschools, but it is good to know about the state regulations and the local district policies so you can plan and advocate for your MLLs. You can look up your state's positions on using science of reading practices with young MLLs in the spotlighted report from the Children's Equity Project.



RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

The Science of Reading and Dual Language Education: Supporting Multilingual Learners' Language and Literacy Development

<https://cep.asu.edu/resources/TheScienceofReadingandDualLanguageEducation>

The options may seem overwhelming. Keep in mind that there are benefits to each of these formats, and choices are often made based on the languages of the children and staff, the curriculum, and the regulations governing your school. The research helps us to identify some common threads that weave throughout all of these and guide the recommendations of this book. You will find the following chapters provide practical strategies that you can use in any of these formats because they are based on research and experience about how young MLLs learn.

- **Bilingual Education:** Instruction is provided in two languages to help multilingual learners make progress leading to their exit from bilingual classes into English-only classes. These classes may have a variety of structures. They may start with 10 percent English and 90 percent home language and gradually shift the balance to more English. They may be taught half in English and half in the children's other language.
- **English as a Second Language:** Referred to as ESL, this format is generally offered as classes in which instructional content is taught in English with added supports to help MLLs learn content while they are also learning English. In preschool, this may be called "English with home language supports."
- **Two-Way Dual Language Immersion:** This is a research-based option consisting of a class with half of the students speaking English and half speaking another language. It is arranged so that content is presented in each of two languages at separate times, such as alternating days or weeks. Together, the English speakers learn another language, and the other language speakers learn English. The goal is for all the participating children to develop bilingual and biliteracy skills. Some interesting research has indicated this may be the most effective model for linguistically diverse preschool programs (Serafini, Rozell, and Winsler, 2022).
- **Language Immersion:** This type of program focuses on instruction for young children presented entirely in a language that is new to them. Some preschool programs in the United States offer immersion classes for English speakers to learn in French, Spanish, Chinese, Italian, or other languages that families want their child to learn. In Canada, where English and French are the official languages, many English-speaking families enroll their children in French-immersion kindergarten to help them become bilingual at an early age. In practice, these programs may operate in a wide variety of ways that

vary from 100 percent immersion in the new language. For example, they may have only parts of the day or certain activities in the new language. Immersion programs have varying levels of success. Factors that may affect outcomes include the amount of new-language practice at home, the effectiveness of the strategies used by the program, and exposure to the home language and the new language outside of school. Children who already speak the majority language of the community have a different experience in learning a new language in school than children who have to learn a new language in both school and the community.

- **English Language Development Supports:** When a school is not ready or able to provide full classes for children who are MLLs, they may offer short-duration push-in or pull-out meetings with an ESL teacher to help them progress in the English language when they need to participate in general education classes. This does not have to be provided as a direct service to young children. In preschool, this service may be provided in the form of consultations between the general-education or special-education classroom teacher and the language specialist, who offers suggestions for helping MLLs learn effectively.
- **Translanguaging:** This relatively new term refers to a way of communicating as well as a way of teaching. It is common for children who are acquiring additional languages to use all of their language repertoire to enhance their communications. Many preschool teachers have heard MLLs say something like, “I want *mas queso*, please.” That child wants more cheese, and his brain is actively pulling together whatever words will help him get that cheese. This is an amazing way of communicating. A cluster of research has been devoted to identifying teaching strategies that can build on this bilingual skill, but up to the point of this writing, studies have focused on K–12 education (Selzer, Ascenzi-Moreno, and Aponte, 2020). It is important to understand the promise of translanguaging skills and teaching strategies while being cautious about assuming K–12 research can apply directly to your work in preschool.

IDENTIFYING TERMS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS

In this book, I have chosen to use the term *home language* to refer to the language the child uses most at home. It might be a non-English language in an area where English is the main language, but some children may speak English at home while living in a community that is focused on another language. Other terms with similar meanings are *native language*, *first language (L1)*, or *mother tongue*. I may also refer to MLLs learning English or to the *majority language*, *second language (L2)*, a *new language*, or an *additional language*.

The language environment a child experiences in their community is also important. The majority language of a community may or may not be the official language of the country. The main language seen and heard in an area is called the *majority language*. Languages that are seen and heard less frequently in that location are *minority languages*. Within the United States, some communities share an additional language and a strong cultural presence. A child who moves from Japan to a typical majority-English suburb will have a different language learning experience than they might if they move into the Japantown neighborhood of San Francisco, where they would be surrounded by signs, music, foods, and customs from Japan. In that neighborhood, Japanese can be the majority language, supporting the child's continuing development of their home language. A native English speaker in that same neighborhood might find additional challenges as they are exposed to English as the minority language of that area. A child who speaks English as the majority language of a community might attend an Italian-immersion preschool and face challenges maintaining that language if they don't encounter Italian outside of school. So, our considerations for each child include the child's own characteristics, as well as the language environments of their home and of the greater community.

I have chosen to use the term *multilingual learner (MLL)* in this book to capture the increasing diversity of languages teachers will encounter. It is the broadest term, intended to include the widest variety of circumstances and characteristics of language learners. Other sources may use this term interchangeably with *dual language learner* or *emergent bilingual*. Teachers have questioned the use of *dual language learner* when they see children growing up with three or more languages. Many educators hesitate to use the term *emergent bilingual* because not all MLLs are destined to become bilingual. For example, consider the language-acquisition patterns of children who are adopted from another country into an English-only family and community. Another example might be a child from a family who is flee-

ing traumatic experiences in their home country, causing them to sincerely reject the use of their previous language. All of these children can be included in early childhood education with supports for MLLs, even if their learning outcomes may be different.

At kindergarten entry, children are placed in general education or special education and may qualify for English-language development services based on the results of their family's home-language survey and the child's performance on a kindergarten entry exam or language screening tool. A child who is not entirely proficient in English may score just high enough to be kept out of ESL or bilingual education placement, even though they could benefit from those extra supports.

Preschools generally have more flexibility to determine how they will place and support children who are MLLs. Policies affecting older grades may use terms such as English language learner (ELL), limited English proficient (LEP), English as an additional language (EAL), or language other than English (LOTE). These terms highlight the focus on progressing toward English. In preschool, the focus is on supporting all of a child's languages (López and Pérez, 2021). Preschoolers are not just smaller versions of elementary-school children; they are at a unique stage of cognitive development, which means they need unique learning experiences.

As the research about early multiple language acquisition was beginning to come together, the Office of Head Start led the field in asserting that all children who are experiencing two or more languages should be considered dual language (now multilingual) learners for purposes of planning and instruction. *The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework* (2015) directly states “. . . children who are dual language learners (DLLs) need intentional support for the development of their home language as well as for English acquisition.” When a child has learned some things in one language and other things in another language, the most effective teaching will strive to access all of that learning in whatever languages the child uses. For this reason, tests are not recommended to identify language abilities in preschool. A home-language survey and conversations with families can help to identify the languages spoken and understood by the children.

THE DUAL LANGUAGE CONTINUUM

When a child is exposed to two or more languages, they should be acknowledged as a multilingual learner. Some educators follow the practice used in older grades to identify a child's "dominant language," or the language they rely on more often. This may not be as helpful when working with preschoolers who learn whole categories of vocabulary and content in whatever language is being used with them at the time. They may seem English dominant during story time but home-language dominant when playing outdoors. Consider the child who has lived on a farm and knows about animals and plants in the Somali language used by her grandparents there. She may use English at preschool, but it would be quite a loss if all of her biology knowledge was never tapped because there was no support for her Somali language.

Knowing many of these terms provides you with valuable context and helps you to advocate and collaborate on behalf of your students. Still, your focus will always be on what works for the children in your group right now.

In preschool, it is more helpful to think of a continuum. All high-quality classrooms feature creative, active, individualized techniques to help children develop language and literacy. All preschool children are learning language, even if they are learning only one language. Your work will always involve strategies for supporting language development and literacy. You are not only helping children learn language, but you are also helping them learn how language works—what scientists call *metalinguistic awareness*. Keep in mind that language development is a process of active construction of knowledge. It is not all learned through imitation (Nemeth, 2022). One way to illustrate the power of metalinguistic skills is to observe errors in young children's speech. When you hear a preschooler talking about seeing "mouses" in their house or telling you their dad "goed" to the store, you can be pretty sure they haven't heard any adult say "mouses" or "goed." That child's brain is processing the metalinguistic skills of adding an *S* to pluralize a word or adding a *D* to make the past tense. They are constructing those wrong words by using the right rules. Research shows children who learn two or more languages may have an advantage in developing metalinguistic skills because their brains are working on the similarities and differences needed to communicate in multiple languages (López and Páez, 2021).

When you study the language learning of young multilingual children, you are also gaining awareness of metalinguistic development. The adaptations you make to teach MLLs will vary with each child's experiences and needs. There is no one perfect

way to teach MLLs because they are not all the same. Some have many children to play with, while others see mostly adults at home. Some have parents who have completed a lot of schooling, and some have parents who have not. Some have families who speak one language and caregivers who speak other languages. Some hear stories and books read to them every day, and some have no books in their home. Some children see an alphabet similar to English at home, while others see characters that have different meanings and formats than the English alphabet, and some families have an indigenous language that focuses on oral language rather than written.

To determine what will work for each child, pay attention to the child rather than the MLL label. You will find many ideas for observing children and following their lead to build that needed comprehension, conversation, and connection with each of them.


How to Use This Book

It is complex and demanding work to plan strategies that work for many diverse children. There are factors to consider that may leave you with lots of questions. This book is designed to help you find quick answers to your questions, with the confidence that everything is based in solid research and policy guidance. Every chapter has the following sections to help you easily find the information you need for each area of learning:

- **Consider This:** Each chapter begins with questions to orient and organize your thinking as you approach the topic. The questions address the three components that are necessary for teaching MLLs: comprehension, conversation, and connection.
- **Preparing to Welcome All Children:** In this section, I address elements of developmentally appropriate practice; universal design for learning; small-group and individual interactions; and considerations of diverse abilities, cultures, and experiences. This section will help you consider universal design approaches to prepare a flexible environment that includes all children. The universal design for learning framework supports a proactive approach that provides multiple ways to engage children in learning topics, multiple ways to present information to meet children's individual needs, and multiple ways for children to act on their learning (Brillante and Nemeth, 2022). For example, putting pictures on storage bins makes it possible for a child with any

language or ability to find what they need. Engaging children in small-group (less than eight) or individual interactions will give you more options for getting to know what each child needs, what they know, and what is familiar to them from their home and culture.

- **Intentional Teaching:** This section includes recommendations for collaborating with teacher assistants, specialists, and volunteers. These recommendations are followed by specialized guidance for “language match” teachers—those who speak the multilingual child’s language—and specialized guidance for “language mismatch” teachers—those who don’t speak the multilingual child’s language.
- **Creating the Environment:**
 - ▶ **BUILDING BELONGING WITH CONNECTIONS:** You’ll find strategies to help MLLs make learning and social connections, so they feel a sense of belonging that is critical to successful learning. This will include displays, materials, and room setup.
 - ▶ **CURRICULUM AND LEARNING STANDARDS:** This part of each chapter covers specific learning supports in the four domains: language and literacy; science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM); social-emotional skills; and visual and performing arts.
 - ▶ **SAMPLE ACTIVITY PLAN:** Each chapter will have a sample activity that shows how the recommended strategies might look in practice. These samples also give you a model for what to include and how to plan.
 - ▶ **FAMILY CONNECTION:** Strategies for engaging families in two-way partnerships to support your work in school and to extend learning at home.
- **Questions for Discussion and Professional Development:** The questions in this section are written to be used in conversation with colleagues. You might use them informally at a staff meeting, or they might become part of a more structured professional development event.
- **Notes to Coach or Supervisor:** Each chapter has a sample message that summarizes key points from that chapter in a letter format. This is designed to give you easy ways to share with your supervisors and coaches about the recommendations you have read and your goals for implementing these strategies. This also highlights the importance of key components of a whole-systems approach to support teachers and make multilingual children’s learning more successful.

Throughout each chapter, you will find anecdotes and case studies that illustrate the topic, as well as resource spotlights (denoted by ) to provide you with additional information. Some come from the author's experiences and observations. Others are contributions from educators from a variety of settings to add to the diversity of perspectives included in the book. Updated recommendations for using technology to enhance learning are added throughout these sections, including reference to using artificial intelligence (AI).

Language Advisory Committee

There are many language and cultural resources around you. You can rely on them to partner with you to support the languages and cultures of the families in your program—if you invite them to participate. Many schools establish a language advisory committee with representatives from families, staff, and the community. In general, the language advisory committee enhances your ability to bring language and culture into your program while building strong relationships with members of your community. One great example was a Head Start program in New Jersey that had several families from Mexico. The director reached out to the Mexican Embassy in New York City and was surprised to find the staff were eager to help. The Head Start program received several shipments of authentic Mexican materials, including children's books, posters, music, and activities that enriched the program for all the children.

Consider inviting people such as the following to your language advisory committee:

- Family members
- Bilingual college students or faculty
- Members of local faith-based communities
- Embassy staff
- Cultural organizations
- Local businesses with a multilingual or multicultural focus
- School district volunteers
- Bilingual musicians and artists
- Your program staff

Here are some ideas for language advisory committee tasks.

- Form a translation subcommittee to evaluate materials that have been translated to make sure they are accurate and appropriate for the audience, whether they are for parents, families, children, or even the press.
- The translation subcommittee could also assist by translating simple documents such as the family newsletter or brochures. Individuals who speak another language are not necessarily skilled translators, but a group can work together to produce effective translations when needed.
- Committee members can write to contacts in their home countries to obtain authentic, culturally appropriate books, music, props, and games.
- Translate key words in popular storybooks in the classroom. Then, put the translations (along with phonetic spelling) on stickers inside the books so English-only teachers can read them.
- Provide translated labels, daily schedules, and classroom rules for the various classroom areas.
- Collect recipes from the different cultures represented in each classroom to use for lesson plans, and perhaps for a cookbook fundraiser.
- Organize family members and other volunteers to teach games and songs, read stories, join in nature walks, go on field trips, or visit the classroom to have home-language conversations with the children. Once you have established a language advisory committee of known members, you can start the process of getting them approved to work with the children for multiple purposes.
- Visit local businesses, restaurants, yard sales, and flea markets to find free or low-cost items to use as language prompts, learning materials, and props in your classroom.
- Serve as advocates, cheerleaders, and fundraisers for your program.
- Create a rich, enticing language environment. At any point in the day, some children may be using their home language and some may not. But at all times, languages should be the center of attention.



For each child and for all children, early learning experiences set the stage for a lifetime of working, learning, and participating as a citizen. Children benefit so much from play-based, joyful, active learning. Research has shown that high-quality preschool education is valuable for all children, but it is not enough to place children in a good program if they don't understand the language being used (Espinoza, 2013). However, when you implement linguistically appropriate methods for MLLs, the result is improved early education for all of the children, multilingual and monolingual. The more you learn about the complexities of multilingual learning, the greater your knowledge about all language and literacy development will be. For these powerful efforts, I applaud you and thank you.





CHAPTER 1

Greeting and Meeting

CONSIDER THIS

- How can you enhance **comprehension** for multilingual learners (MLLs) during greeting and meeting times?
- How can welcoming procedures and group meetings spark meaningful **conversations** with each child?
- How can you include displays and procedures during morning greeting and meeting times to build each child's sense of **connection**?

Setting the Tone

Welcoming is an important part of every preschool program because it sets the tone for the day, the program, and the year. It fosters security, acceptance, learning, fun,

and harmony for preschool programs in diverse communities. Greeting every child and family as individuals is the best way to begin the relationship (Koralek, Nemeth, and Ramsey, 2019).

What should welcoming or greeting look like? Start by considering the first impression you make on children's families as they first visit your program to consider enrolling. What do diverse families see:

- as they drive by?
- when they enter your property?
- as they come in the front door?

When signs and announcements celebrate the languages of the community, parents and family members will feel this is a place where they will be respected and their children will be welcomed. First impressions are lasting impressions, so think about the images used in your program's advertising and the languages represented on the website or social media. When deciding what program would be best for their child, families are often attracted to programs that look like a good match for their values, culture, and language.

Mrs. Ramirez, a school district preschool supervisor, voiced concern that she had worked with her team to include linguistically and culturally diverse staff, materials, and experiences, but surprisingly few multilingual families had expressed interest. Their consultant asked how families would know about all these efforts. Mrs. Ramirez admitted they had not yet updated their posters, flyers, and website. On the outside, families saw photos of white children and English-only wording. "I just hadn't thought of that!" she said. She met with staff and family members and developed a plan to add diversity to the forward-facing information about the preschool. They even created a welcoming message to send to all families and employees in the school district to get the word out. Three months later, Mrs. Ramirez reported to the consultant that their efforts had resulted in noticeable improvement in enrollment.

When families enroll their child in early childhood education, they are taking the first steps in their involvement in their child's education. When they take those steps with confidence, they can help their child have a positive attitude about this big new activity. Here are some ideas for establishing this all-important partnership with

Creating Classrooms Where *Every* Language Learner Belongs

As today's early learning environments become more linguistically and culturally diverse, educators face the growing need for practical, inclusive strategies to support young multilingual learners. This updated edition of *Many Languages, One Classroom* offers a hands-on, user-friendly roadmap for creating welcoming spaces where every child feels a sense of belonging and is empowered to succeed.

Drawing from the latest research, classroom trends, and educator feedback, author Karen Nemeth, EdMpi, integrates meaningful updates throughout the book—enhancing guidance on family partnerships, equity and inclusion, curriculum fidelity, and support for both bilingual and monolingual teachers. New features include connections to Connect4Learning® The Pre-K Curriculum and up-to-date guidance on developmentally appropriate practice, along with coaching insights and curated resources for digital and professional development.

Discover how to:

- Build meaningful partnerships with families across cultures and languages
- Plan ahead to welcome multilingual learners and support smooth transitions
- Differentiate strategies for bilingual and monolingual educators
- Promote a sense of identity, belonging, and inclusion for all learners
- Maintain high-quality curriculum while honoring linguistic diversity
- Incorporate technology and current online tools to enhance teaching
- Engage in team-based discussions and professional learning communities using targeted prompts

Whether you're just beginning your journey with multilingual learners or are deepening your expertise, this trusted guide helps you bridge policy, research, and real-world practice to ensure all children thrive—linguistically, socially, and academically.



Karen Nemeth, EdMpi, is a nationally recognized expert in early childhood education for multilingual learners. A former teacher and program specialist, and now a consultant and author, she delivers research-informed, classroom-ready tools to support equitable learning environments. She is founder of Language Castle, co-chair of the National Association for Bilingual Education's Early Childhood Special Interest Group, a board member of New Jersey Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (NJTESOL)/NJ Bilingual Educators (NJBE), and a consulting editor for NAEYC.


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