

Working with Young Children
who are Learning
English as a New Language



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This resource is primarily intended for:

Early Childhood Services teachers	✓
Playschool teachers	✓
Day-home operators	✓
Day-care workers	✓
Early childhood professionals	✓
General public	

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Introduction

► Purpose

This guide is intended to help early childhood professionals, such as Early Childhood Services (ECS) teachers, playschool teachers, day-home operators and day-care workers, better understand:

- how young children learn a second (or third) language
- the relationship between learning the English language, and maintaining and developing the home language and culture
- how to develop effective programming that enhances English language learning for young children.



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1: Learning English as a New Language

► Early stages of learning

Children move through a number of stages when learning English as a new language. Some go through these stages more quickly than others, and children will sometimes have the characteristics of more than one stage at the same time as they transition between stages. Understanding a child's stage of learning is important for planning appropriate activities.

Early childhood professionals play a role in helping children progress to higher stages; however, each child's English development will follow its own timetable. Planning and programming should be based around each child's abilities and developmental level. The association Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) identifies five developmental stages for learning a new language.



Beginning Stage

- **Home language use:** Some children initially use their home language in educational settings because it is the only language they know. Most young children give up using their home language quickly, realizing that it is not an effective means of communication in that context. If a few children in a setting share the same home language, they may continue to use it amongst themselves.
- **Nonverbal period:** In a new setting, young children may not use any language at all, or very little, for a few weeks or even months. They are listening and accumulating knowledge of English, but are sometimes hesitant to speak much. Children often use gestures to communicate with adults and other children. Sometimes they may rehearse phrases in English quietly to themselves.

Emerging Stage

Young children at the emerging stage typically use one- or two-word responses to questions like "What's that?" or "Do you want a turn?" Their English use is also not very original. These children use a lot of formulaic expressions (words or phrases they hear others say); e.g., "what's happening?", "wanna play with me?", "I dunno," "me first," "it's my turn," "no fair!", "so what?", "lookit this!" Formulaic sentences are important because they help open the door to social interaction with early childhood professionals and other children. With more social interaction comes more English learning.

Developing Stage

Children gradually move from memorized sentences to original, productive and spontaneous English conversation. When young children learning English can engage in conversational English, this does not mean that they have mastered the English language. In fact, their English often has errors in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, and these errors may last a long time.

- **Transfer errors:** Some children’s errors are traceable to their first language, and these are called *transfer errors*. Pronunciation errors are a common type of transfer error because an accent is based on the sound system of the first language. Even very young children can have an accent in English.
- **Developmental errors:** Most of the errors that young children make are *developmental errors*, which means they are common to all learners of English. For example, because they have little vocabulary to work with, they sometimes overuse general verbs like *do*: “he *do* a baseball” to mean “he threw a baseball” or “I *did* some loud” to mean “I blew (a horn).”

This guide deals mainly with the three developmental stages listed above. TESOL identifies the later two developmental stages as **Expanding** and **Bridging**.

► How long does it take for children to learn English?

There is a commonly held belief that young children can learn to speak English in just a few months, unlike adults, who may take years. Research shows that this is not true; young children learning English can take years to become as competent in English as their peers whose first language is English.

- It takes approximately **three to four years in school** for young children learning English to accumulate an English vocabulary size comparable to their English-speaking peers, and even longer for them to produce sentences free of grammatical errors.
- It can take from **five to seven years in school** for young children learning English to master complex academic English skills, both spoken and written, that are the same as their peers who speak English as their first language.

This common misconception most likely comes from our low conversational expectations for children. When adults speak to young children, they often ask questions requiring *yes* or *no* answers, refer to things in the child’s immediate environment and compensate for any communication problems. This means that a young child can know very little English and may still appear competent because she or he can easily guess how to respond.

► Why do some children learn English faster than others?

Individual children vary in how quickly they acquire English, even when they are in the same learning setting. These individual differences can be due to such things as the following.

- **Language aptitude:** Language aptitude is a kind of learning skill, a set of verbal and memory abilities that varies between individuals. Children and adults with high language aptitude tend to be faster second language learners. Language aptitude is thought to be an inherent characteristic. You cannot increase a child’s language aptitude.

- **Age of acquisition:** Starting to learn English early—*before* the ages of six to eight years old—is better for developing pronunciation and grammar. Starting to learn English a little later—*after* six to eight years of age—results in faster vocabulary growth and development of skills such as storytelling. There is no age within the childhood years when it is ‘too early’ or ‘too late’ to learn another language.
- **Socio-economic status:** A family’s socio-economic status is measured primarily through the parents’ levels of education and income. Children from newcomer families where the parents have post-secondary education tend to learn English faster because these parents often have higher language and literacy skills in their home language.
- **Quality and quantity of English exposure:** English language learning children vary in the English they experience outside the classroom, and this has a measurable impact on a child’s development. For example, the more books read in English and the more English-speaking friends they have, the more practice children have with English, and the more English vocabulary they will build.

Did you know?

Some immigrant and refugee families come from oral cultures, where storytelling is a more widely used parent-child activity than reading books. This can influence young children’s familiarity with literacy.



2: Developing and Maintaining the Home Language

Research shows that when young children are developing two languages at the same time, the two developing languages build on each other rather than take away from each other. The stronger the first (or home) language proficiency is, the stronger the second language proficiency will be, particularly with academic literacy. Maintaining the home language is key to a child's success in school.

Young children from newcomer families are in a different situation than their parents because their first languages are still developing when they begin to learn English, and opportunities to continue learning their first language are often limited. Young children from newcomer families are at risk for *first language attrition*. This means that they may never completely acquire their first language. Their first language acquisition may stagnate at a certain level, or they could lose some or all of their competence in their first language over the elementary school years.

Some reasons why children lose their home language:

- not living in a community where the first language is widely spoken
- a strong desire for assimilation to the mainstream culture and the perception that belonging to a peer group means rejecting the home culture
- attraction to majority culture popular literature and media, and a lack of interest in the literature and media from the home culture
- absence of educational opportunities in the first language
- language shift in the home, meaning all family members are using English more, even if the parents are not proficient in English

Did you know?

Immigrant and refugee families often speak multiple languages. Some of these languages have their own unique structures and communication styles (e.g., Western cultures tend to prefer a direct style whereas many Asian cultures prefer a more indirect style to avoid disagreement and promote harmony) that may be different from English.

► Why developing and maintaining the home language is so important

Family relationships can weaken if children and parents do not share a common language of communication. If children have limited proficiency in their first language and the parents have limited proficiency in English, the communication of values, beliefs, advice, family stories and other cultural and familial understandings can be compromised. As well, the loss of the home language may cause a child's self-esteem to suffer because the child may feel he or she does not belong to the home culture without the language. At the same time, these children may also feel that they do not fully belong to the majority culture.

► How early childhood professionals can encourage children's home language development

Research shows that if young children continue to build their home language at the same time as learning an additional language, development of both languages is enhanced. Therefore, it is important for early childhood professionals to encourage families and communities to support children's home language development and maintenance. Early childhood professionals can encourage parents to:

- talk to children in the language the family and community members know best—the home language
- provide many and various opportunities for children to hear and use their first language at home and in the community
- take children to events where their home language is spoken and discuss what took place with the children when they return back home
- find or make books in their home language
- use pictures in books as prompts when talking with children in their home language
- sing songs, recite rhymes and tell stories in their home language
- play games from their culture while using their home language
- use their home language even when talking about television shows and videos the children watch in English.

Did you know?

Preserving cultural identity is a priority for many immigrant and refugee families.

3: Engaging Families and Communities

Family engagement in children’s learning and overall development is an important factor in their success. Engagement of the wider community to which the families belong is also critical. It is within the context of community that children develop skills and knowledge. Therefore, engaging parents and community members in programming will increase your understanding of who the children are and how best to meet their needs.

Family, community members and the children themselves are great resources as you seek to establish a learning environment where cultural and linguistic diversity is valued. As you get to know families, you will want to be responsive to what you see, hear and observe. Young children’s learning is integrated and interconnected, therefore experiences that reflect and support the home and community life of the children will have the greatest impact on their learning.

► Tips for communicating with families and communities

● Understand the importance of your role.

In the case of newcomer families, you are often the first relationship they may have with someone from the majority culture. The role you play, and the impression you make, will have an impact not only on the children’s experiences but also on their families.

● Consider newcomer issues.

Newcomer families may be dealing with a range of issues, such as:

- decreased socio-economic status
- lack of community and family support
- unfamiliarity with the majority culture and its childrearing practices
- changing roles and responsibilities of family members
- racism and discrimination
- mental health issues
- maintaining home language and culture
- adapting to the Canadian education system.

● Learn about who they are.

You will likely encounter families with cultural values and beliefs that differ from your own. Valuing diversity is the first step to family and community engagement. Show interest in children’s families by getting to know their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and find out what goals and dreams they have for their children. Embrace a mutual exchange of knowledge, information and experience when talking with family and community members.



● **Use what you have learned to help you communicate.**

When communicating with family and community members whose home language and culture are different from your own, consider how the following types of differences can influence communication:

- philosophical beliefs and religious practices
- the function of time (e.g., children’s routines regarding meals, naps, toileting)
- the role of hierarchy (e.g., children’s views of authority)
- comfort with silence (e.g., cultural expectations regarding children’s participation in adult conversations)
- displays of emotion (e.g., children’s need for closeness or distance when experiencing anxiety or fear)
- the use of feedback (e.g., types of questions adults ask in supporting children’s explorations of the world around them).

► **Strategies for engaging families and communities**

Meaningfully involving family and community members is essential to offering culturally-relevant early learning experiences. Welcoming family and community members to engage with children will enrich the experience for all children, not just the children of specific cultural groups. Strategies for involving family and community members include the following.

● **Offer flexible drop-off and pick-up times.**

Making the beginning and end of the day as open and flexible as possible by having the children engaged in free play will allow for casual conversation with parents and community members as they drop off and pick up children. If a conversation is not possible due to a language barrier, communicate your openness through nonverbal behaviours such as smiles and nods.

● **Use informal notes and phone calls.**

If communication in a common language is possible, brief notes or phone calls to share information or to express appreciation for something are ways to build connections between the home and the learning environment. This type of communication can also be done through a cultural broker or interpreter.

● **Post information on bulletin boards.**

Brief, relevant information that is updated frequently, posted in high-traffic areas and translated into multiple languages can bring programming details and special event information to the attention of family and community members. Also include a display of children’s artwork and photographs of children engaged in a variety of classroom activities.

● **Develop family-friendly newsletters.**

Short, friendly newsletters in the home language of families can provide information about events, requests for participation, suggestions for at-home activities or thank-you notes. Photographs of actual children’s work or photos showing the activities step-by-step (e.g., looking at a book together, making a craft/art together) can be used to provide information.

- **Organize family and community meetings and gatherings.**

Formal and informal family and community member gatherings help build community and shared understanding. Families and communities learn more about the programming their children are engaged in, and you can learn more about the cultural values, beliefs and practices of families and communities. It is important to consider the dietary, cultural and religious practices associated with various groups when planning such events; for example, planning events that do not interfere with cultural and religious holidays.

- **Consider home visits.**

Meeting with families in their homes can provide insight into cultural and linguistic practices as well as help build relationships and establish open communication between home and the classroom. Home visits should never be forced, and family privacy and confidentiality must always be respected. When necessary, home visits can be arranged through a cultural broker and this person can be present during the visit. Cultural brokers can also provide essential information regarding cultural practices prior to the home visits.

Did you know?

Many immigrant and refugee families (e.g., Chinese, South Asian and African families) come from cultures in which it is uncommon for a child to sit and play with an adult. In these cultures, children's play is mostly with siblings or other children, and extended family (e.g., grandparents) are responsible for taking care of the children.

Also, adjustment to a new life in Canada (e.g., employment commitments, re-certification or learning the English language) can limit the parents' availability to engage with their children one-to-one.

4: Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

Creating safe and caring environments for children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds involves establishing a tone of respect. This means that children, parents and community members should feel as though they are welcomed members of the learning community and that their diverse identities are valued.

► Establish a welcoming early learning environment

Establish a welcoming environment by:

- reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of all children in such things as classroom posters, pictures, props, tabletop toys, games, storybooks, media resources, musical instruments and foods served in the classroom
- providing opportunities for family and community members to share experiences with children in the classroom in their home language as well as in English
- providing learning experiences such as field trips and other community outings to places where children and families can learn about the culture and history of themselves and others
- offering opportunities for children, assisted by their parents or other family and/or community members, to cook foods from a wide range of cultural backgrounds
- learning and using key words in the home languages of the children
- ensuring that all children are respected and valued, and that biases and discrimination are quickly and effectively dealt with when they arise.

► Encourage children to play

Play is the cornerstone activity for social, cognitive and language development in children from two-and-a-half to five-years-old. Early childhood professionals should promote play as the leading activity for children.

The relationship between language development and play is two-way: Language makes it possible for children to adopt roles, and to negotiate the rules and goals of play. Dramatic or pretend play stimulates the development of language.



Play fuels development through imagination and *symbolic functions*. Symbolic functions are the ability to understand that objects, actions, words and people can stand for something else. Symbolic functions are at the core of pretend play and form the foundation for conceptual thinking, literacy and numeracy.

For young children learning a new language, play provides a safe space to try out new words. Even if they do not know the exact word for something, children do not feel embarrassed by using a different name for it since, as in play, everything can become anything—a stick can be a horse or a pen.

► Model language use

To maximise the exposure of young English language learners to the English language, use the following strategies.

- Use simple but explicit language to “label” your own actions as you carry them out. Saying, “First, I am putting this big, red block here. What should I put next?”, for example, can transform a “building” activity into a language-enhancing activity.
- Label children’s actions as they carry them out the same way you label your own actions.
- Ask children to participate actively in an activity by giving them specific instructions. Saying, “Hand me the tiny brush” while pointing to it, for example, helps young children pay attention to what you are doing while building their vocabulary.
- Verbalize your thinking and the strategies you use to solve a problem. Saying, “Let’s see why this tower is falling down. It is too tall? I wonder what would happen if we took the top block off?” helps involve children in the process of problem solving and brainstorming possible solutions.
- Use language along with demonstration when introducing a new skill or concept. For example, if you are teaching a child to build a tall tower, saying “You put the biggest block first, then a smaller one on top, then another even smaller one on top ...” while doing it, connects the words with the action and helps children remember the sequence when building on their own.

What do I do if children do not understand what I am saying?

Young children learning English, especially in the beginning and emerging stages, will not understand everything an adult is saying in English. Here are some suggestions for improving communication.

- Supplement verbal communication with gestures like pointing, touching an object, making motions with your hand like the verb you are describing (e.g., swimming in water).
- Use objects and pictures to support explanations and event descriptions.
- Repeat the same idea or instruction more than once, the second time using shorter sentences, easier vocabulary and speaking more slowly.

- To check for comprehension, try to ask questions where the response is not just a “yes” or a “no.”
- Tell and talk about the story in a book rather than reading it directly. Written language is harder for young children to understand than spoken language because sentences are often longer and have more difficult words in them.
- Choose books with simpler language and/or repetition books that are interesting to the children. Encourage children to “chime in” during the parts of the story they are familiar with.

Did you know?

In some of the cultures of immigrant and refugee families, where social interaction has a high value, solitary play with toys is not considered an important developmental activity. Also, due to access, gender roles, religious beliefs or even their understanding of the concept of play, many toys that are available in play-schools and other settings may be uncommon objects.



5: Language Learning Activities

Young children learn about the world as they experience it. This means that their learning is holistic and related to particular events in their lives. Thematic and project-based approaches are two effective ways to offer children relevant and hands-on learning experiences.

Consider developing an overall thematic or project-based approach with language functions embedded in it. Themes and functions should be related to children's everyday lives, surroundings and routines. Media and popular culture-based themes are often effective because they are what young children learning a new language have in common with their peers. Access to peer group culture is important so that children can make friends and learn to play together, no matter what their cultural and linguistic background is.

► Focusing on language functions

Language functions to emphasize:

- requesting (*e.g., asking to join in the activity, asking for an object, asking permission, asking for information, asking politely*)
- responding (*e.g., to questions, to continue the topic*)
- expressing likes and dislikes
- describing what just happened, what they did yesterday, etc.
- describing (*e.g., a scene, an object, a person*)
- apologizing and expressing thanks
- narrative storytelling
- giving information and explanation
- giving "how to" instructions
- problem solving
- negotiating

Language functions are phrases associated with a specific purpose; e.g., expressing a wish, apologizing, asking for help. A focus on function-based language embeds vocabulary in sentences and is a more effective strategy for learning a new language than teaching lists of single words. A focus on function-based language also models grammar in real-life contexts, rather than teaching isolated grammar rules. Most young children do not yet have the maturity to benefit from explicit grammar instruction.

► Activity planning tips

● Encourage interaction.

Involve children in dialogue with peers and adults who will model more advanced language use. Develop activities that encourage real dialogue between child–child and adult–child rather than relying on activities that just require children to respond by either nodding their heads or pointing to a picture. Encourage interaction between children in pairs or small groups.

- **Interact with the children.**

When children make a vocabulary or grammatical error, recast what they said using the correct form, and then move on with the conversation. Make an effort to expand on children's language. For example, if a child says, "My shoes," you can talk about the colour or type of shoes the child is wearing.

- **Use repetition.**

Language use can be low-level at first; e.g., repetition. Repetition is nonthreatening and helps with pronunciation. Children need to feel secure and successful even when they are beginners. Incorporate the same language functions, vocabulary and sentences in many activities and across themes. Make sure children get numerous opportunities to *both* hear and use language functions in conversation.

- **Introduce new material slowly.**

Introduce new linguistic material in small chunks at a time. For new activities at the beginning of the year, start with you talking and the children listening, but as soon as children are comfortable and capable, move to activities where children are encouraged to produce English.

- **Be flexible.**

Children in most learning settings will have a wide range of English abilities; therefore, the activities and programming you provide must be flexible and open-ended to allow for children to feel competent and yet challenged to grow in ability. Children will come with a variety of culturally learned styles of interaction. Some children will be outgoing and gregarious in their interactions, others will be quiet listeners; therefore, language-rich activities that appeal to these differences must be provided.

- **Allow for breaks.**

It is possible that some children in the beginning and emerging stages may need a break from the pressure to interact using language. Therefore, for these children, activities like the sand table, building blocks or picture drawing can be a "safe haven."

► **Language-rich activities**

Age-appropriate activities for young children are typically designed to enhance a range of developmental areas: cognitive, spatial, motor, linguistic, social and so on. It is important to make as many activities as possible opportunities to explore and practise language. Activities that naturally encourage meaningful language use include the following.

- **Storytelling and retelling**

Children can tell stories from pictures, books or their real lives. Retelling a story that they have just heard is a good way for children to use their knowledge of language. Short stories supported by pictures are best for all children, especially for beginner English language learners.

- **Puppets**

Puppets can be used as part of a listening activity at first and an interactive activity later on.

- **Describing unseen objects**

These are activities where children must guess at something they cannot see but can feel, or where one child gives instructions to another child who cannot see the picture. For example, children reach into a bag of toys and have to describe and identify them by touch. Or, one child gives instructions to another child about where to put figures on a felt board to create a certain picture.

- **Motivating activities**

Special activities designed to make children want to talk can provide the motivation needed for shy or reluctant speakers. For example, pictures or stories with unexpected images or events; e.g., swimming in sand or opportunities to sing and dance to a catchy tune, can motivate even shy children to use whatever English they know.

- **Language-based games**

Examples of these are “Simon says” and “I spy with my little eye.”

Did you know?

Some immigrant and refugee families focus more on the development of their child’s social skills and rely on the educational system to introduce literacy-related activities (e.g., reading a book) when the child attends school.

Some immigrant and refugee parents believe in a more “naturally occurring development of skills,” with little interference on their part. The focus is on children’s development at their own pace rather than prescribed stages of development.



► Activity 1: Songs and Rhymes

Materials	Recorded songs, DVD player
Activity	<p>Because songs and rhymes allow for limitless repetition, choose them as part of the daily routines through which children have an opportunity to practise pronunciation and new vocabulary. Encourage all children to sing along when you begin to sing or when a recorded song is played. Songs with simple, repeated words are best for this purpose. For example, singing “Old McDonald had a Farm” allows children to use the names of the animals and the animal sounds.</p> <p>Young children at the beginning and emerging stages of learning English may only be able to hum the melody or make the animal sounds. With time and repetition, they will begin to hear and anticipate what is coming next in the song and be able to sing most of the words.</p>
Family and Community Participation	<p>Learning songs and rhymes used in the cultures represented in the group will allow for a smoother transition between home and school. Through consultation with family and community members, identify folk songs, music and rhymes traditional to farm life and animals to introduce to the children. Consider hosting live performances by family or community members so all children can hear and enjoy the different songs and rhymes from their culture. Children can then become involved in learning these songs and rhymes, or creating ones of their own.</p>
Language Elements Emphasized	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• describing objects and actions



► Activity 2: Early Literacy

Materials	Blank books in a variety of sizes, extra paper, staplers, hole punchers, crayons, pencils, photos
Activity	<p>Have the children take turns telling a familiar story, either from memory or using picture prompts. Invite the children to recreate the story using pictures that they have drawn or painted. Photographs taken of the children enacting the story as a group activity or during free play or block play can be used to make group or individual books.</p> <p>Encourage children to participate by rearranging the order of the pictures to match the actual storyline. Children with intermediate language skills can be asked to make corrections to the order of the events according to the storyline.</p>
Extension	After children have learned the storyline and have made books using different media, deliberately change the order of events using children’s drawings or photographs. Ask, “Is everything in order here?” or “Do you see anything wrong?” Discuss the storyline and the roles of the characters in the story.
Family and Community Participation	Encourage parents and community members to prompt storytelling in their home language by using children’s books written in English. They can also ask questions about the storyline in their home language.
Language Elements Emphasized	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• asking and responding to questions• describing objects and actions• giving information and explanation



► Activity 3: Storytelling/Reading

Materials	<i>Enormous Turnip</i> picture book in several languages (available at http://www.emcn.ab.ca/)
Activity	<p>Tell the story <i>Enormous Turnip</i> with the aid of a picture book. Use simple language and gestures while also pointing to the pictures to help the children follow the story.</p> <p>Note: Since animal sounds differ among cultural and linguistic groups, all children can be encouraged to vocalize the different animal sounds according to their culture.</p>
Extension	<p>Read the story using gestures, then have different children tell the story while using the picture book as a prompt.</p> <p>Beginner: Help the child to hold the book, turn the pages, and point to the characters on each page as the story is read aloud.</p> <p>Intermediate: Ask the child to take turns along with an English-speaking peer to retell the story.</p>
Family and Community Participation	<p>After you tell or read the story in English, invite parents or community members to read or tell the story in their home languages. Alternatively, use folk tales from around the world that have been translated into multiple languages (available through Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers at http://www.emcn.ab.ca/).</p>
Language Elements Emphasized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening and following a storyline • narrative storytelling • describing a present scene, object or person/character



► Activity 4: Making Props

Materials	<i>Enormous Turnip</i> picture book, crayons, washable markers, scissors, collage materials, glue, paper (construction paper, coloured paper), pieces of fabric with different textures, colours and thicknesses
Activity	<p>Tell the story <i>Enormous Turnip</i> with the aid of a picture book. Once children have become familiar with the story, engage them in creating props such as papier mâché vegetables, masks or headdresses that represent the various characters involved in the story.</p> <p>Begin by demonstrating the use of the materials while verbally describing the properties of the materials used for the various props. For example, “This cloth is soft. It feels like cat fur. I’m going to make a cat headdress with it.”</p>
Extension	Extend the discussion to include the plant and/or animal’s characteristics, its size, habitat and so on, as well as its role in the story. Engage children in conversations that expand their knowledge of the characters outside the storyline, and connect to children’s real life experiences and knowledge. For example, “What do you like about dogs? What do dogs like to eat? Do you know anyone who has a dog?”
Family and Community Participation	Ask parents and community members to bring materials from home that could be used to create culturally specific characters from the version of the story known in their culture.
Language Elements Emphasized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asking and responding to questions • expressing likes and dislikes • describing objects and actions • giving information and explanation



► Activity 5: Acting Out the Story

Materials	Props such as articles of clothing and masks and/or headdresses can be made by the children during Activity 4, as well as by you or the parents. Also gather a collection of clothing articles that are culturally specific.
Activity	<p>Begin by narrating the story while playing the role of the farmer, inviting children to become involved as the various animals attempt to unearth the enormous turnip.</p> <p>Ask all children to repeat your actions; for example, as the characters try to pull out the turnip, encourage the children to not only do the action, but say together the word “pull.” Encourage children just beginning to learn English to point to or name the character that they want to play.</p> <p>In choosing props, ask children with intermediate English language skills to indicate what they want to wear; for example, “I like the cat best,” “Please give me the cat mask,” “Thank you.”</p>
Extension	Encourage children to take over the roles of narrator and farmer. Give them an opportunity to choose a different role each time the story is acted out.
Family and Community Participation	Invite parents to bring culturally specific artifacts to be used in the enactment of the story. Have family and community members tell the story in their home language (using a lot of gestures and nonverbal communication) while all children, who are already familiar with the story, participate in acting it out.
Language Elements Emphasized	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• making requests• expressing likes and dislikes• using polite language



► Activity 6: Creative Activities

Materials	Various art media such as modelling clay, paint, felt, crayons, textile pieces, materials for making puppets
Activity	<p>Ask the children to represent the story through various art media such as modelling clay, paint, felt, crayons, textile pieces and so on. They can create models of the characters, drawings of the story, build puppets (stick puppets, paper bag puppets, sock or mitten puppets), masks, mobiles, and so on.</p> <p>While working alongside the children, describe the properties of the materials as well as your actions. For example, “I like how squishy the clay is. I am rolling it into a ball. If I pinch it here and here, I can make ears for a cat. Now I can roll a smaller piece to make a tail.”</p>
Extension	Ask children questions regarding the materials such as, “How does the clay feel when you squish it?” or “How should the fabric for the cat puppet feel?”
Family and Community Participation	Ask parents and community members to bring materials from home like the ones listed above that could be used to create culturally specific characters from the version of the story known in their culture.
Language Elements Emphasized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asking and responding to questions • expressing likes and dislikes • describing objects and actions • giving information and explanation • making requests



► Activity 7: Dramatic Play

Materials	Various props as created in previous activities
Activity	<p>Practice through peer interaction is essential for language development and a substantial amount of time should be allowed for dramatic play (for example, one third of the day). The negotiation of the use of materials, space, roles, actions and sequence of events in a pretend situation allows children to use descriptive and interactive language that may not be used in other activities. Play also allows a safe space for children to use new vocabulary in a trial-and-error way.</p> <p>Work with the children to create a space to recreate the farmer’s home and field. Encourage discussion about different houses and different farming jobs, as well as the roles various family members play in farming. Dramatic play is an opportunity to talk with peers.</p> <p>Children with pre-beginner and beginner English language skills may sometimes be silent and just watch others. They may also rely on gestures to communicate, or use their home language.</p>
Family and Community Participation	Invite family and community participation in contributing and setting up artifacts for this dramatic play area. Clothes and small gardening tools will bring a realistic element to the play area. The presence of home artifacts encourages the use of home languages alongside English.
Language Elements Emphasized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asking and responding to questions • expressing likes and dislikes • describing objects and actions • giving information and explanation • making requests



► Activity 8: Sand and Water

Materials	A wide variety of root vegetables used by different cultures and reflected in the different cultural versions of the story, small digging tools used in different cultures, sand box and water table
Activity	<p>The sand box and water table can become part of dramatic play and story enactment. By having root vegetables and digging tools as part of these areas, you can initiate and encourage discussions about size, shape, weight and use of the various root vegetables.</p> <p>As children with pre-beginner and beginner English language skills start to label objects, introduce descriptive adjectives by saying while gesturing, “Yes, that is a carrot. It is long.”</p> <p>Ask children with intermediate English language skills to describe vegetables buried in the sand and have the rest of the children guess what the hidden object is. For example, a child might say, “I feel something long and skinny. What is it?”</p>
Extension	As suggested in the prop development and creative activities, the educator should use descriptive language while manipulating materials alongside the children. Introduce math-specific vocabulary. For example, say, “I wonder if this shovel is big enough to dig up the turnip. What do you think?” And “I wonder which is heavier, this potato or this carrot? How can we tell?”
Family and Community Participation	Encourage family and community participation in contributing vegetables and gardening tools from their home countries.
Language Elements Emphasized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describing objects and actions • giving information and explanation • asking and responding to questions



► Activity 9: Cooking

Materials	<p>Real-life cooking equipment, vegetables and other ingredients</p> <p>Note: Cooking should be done in an area where the children’s safety is assured.</p>
Activity	<p>Once the house and farm area are established and children become familiar with a variety of root vegetables, the vegetables can then be explored for their cooking uses. Consult family and community members and invite them to share how these items are traditionally prepared. Involve the children in the hands-on preparation of several dishes. Use this opportunity to introduce simple mathematical concepts such as volume, size, weight, quantity, time and temperature.</p> <p>Encourage the children to either point to, choose, name or describe their favourite vegetables. Ask children with more advanced language skills to say which vegetables combine to make their favourite meals. Discuss the time needed to cook these vegetables and the sequence of actions needed to prepare them. For example, explain, “First we need to wash the turnip, and then peel it before we can chop it into pieces and boil it.” Ask the children, “What size should I make the pieces? How long do you think we should boil it before we can eat it?” Write down the children’s predictions and test the readiness of the turnip according to each prediction.</p>
Extension	<p>Use a variety of language describing the shape, colour and taste of the different vegetables. Ask the children to pick their favourite vegetables and describe them before they cut them into pieces or put them in the pot.</p>
Family and Community Participation	<p>Encourage the children’s use of their home language with parents and community members during this activity.</p>
Language Elements Emphasized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asking and responding to questions • expressing likes and dislikes • describing objects and actions • giving information and explanation

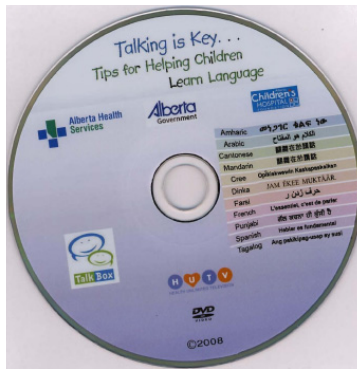


► Activity 10: Blocks and Manipulatives

Materials	Hollow blocks, cylinders, long boards, half circles, triangles, ramps, cardboard blocks and wooden blocks of various sizes, as well as block accessories (e.g., toy figures of people, animals, small cars, trucks)
Activity	<p>Have the children create farmhouses, fields, fences, barns, animals and so on using small and large blocks. Discuss the types of blocks and other materials, such as small animal and human figures, household items and vehicles, used in the creation of the playscape. Introduce mathematical, spatial and other vocabulary. Block play encourages children to solve “technical” problems as they attempt to build different types of structures to accommodate the animals, human figures and plants, and to allow for the manoeuvring of vehicles.</p> <p>Children with pre-beginner and beginner English language skills may sometimes be silent as they observe how the other children use the materials. They may sometimes rely on gestures to communicate or use their home languages.</p>
Extension	Encourage discussions about the buildings being built, their sizes, shapes, functions and relationships to each other. Use comparative vocabulary such as “same” and “different,” “long” and “short,” and “high” or “low.” Ask the children to describe the characteristics of the different blocks (e.g., size, shape, weight, colour), to classify, to make patterns, to map their building plan, to predict and to explain balancing and stability while using a trial-and-error approach. Discuss the functions of the structures built by the children.
Language Elements Emphasized	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• asking and responding to questions• expressing likes and dislikes• describing objects and actions• giving information and explanation• making requests• giving “how to” instructions• problem solving and negotiating

6: Additional Resources

- For more background information on the subjects covered in this guide, the following books are recommended as they are written for educators and other professionals working with early English language learners and other bilingual children.
 - Genesee, Fred, Johanne Paradis and Martha B. Crago. *Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language Learning*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2004.
 - Tabors, Patton O. *One Child, Two Languages: A Guide for Early Childhood Educators of Children Learning English as a Second Language*. 2nd ed. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2008.
 - Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). *PreK–12 English Language Proficiency Standards*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL, 2006. www.tesol.org
- The Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (<http://www.aaisa.ca/>) and various ethnocultural community organizations can be called upon for support and information that will assist you in your work with linguistically and culturally diverse families.
- The Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (<http://www.emcn.ab.ca/>) can be contacted for information regarding Family Literacy Day celebrations and to access multilingual folk tales.
- The School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University in Toronto sponsors a project that promotes the use of home language with preschool children both in the home and in formal programs. Helpful links to resources can be found at <http://www.ryerson.ca/mylanguage/>.
- International Children’s Digital Library (<http://www.icdlbooks.org/>) offers a wide range of books in many languages available online.
- For information regarding the circumstances of newcomer families in Edmonton, see the document *Mapping the Life Experiences of Refugee and Immigrant Families with Preschool Children*, available at <http://www.emcn.ab.ca/research/Research>.



Talking is Key ... Tips for Helping Children Learn Language

- 12-minute DVD shows examples of children from 3 months to 5 years of age
- Learn everyday tips of how parents help children learn language
- Available in 12 languages
- <http://www.parentlinkalberta.ca/publish/946.htm>



Preschool Talk Box

- Offers parents information for
 - using toys to learn language
 - planning fun activities to help children learn language
- <http://www.parentlinkalberta.ca/publish/924.htm>



Creating Language-rich Environments: A Facilitator's Guide of Workshop Activities to Support Parents of Children Birth to Five Years

These workshop activities provide a framework for parents of children birth to five years to explore strategies for creating language-rich environments, and create hands-on opportunities for discussion, exploration and application of strategies.

This workshop will provide participants with the opportunity to:

- learn basic information about the language development of children ages birth through five years
- learn key strategies that enhance language skills during everyday activities
- identify and discuss everyday situations and activities that are opportunities to use these strategies.

http://www.parentlinkalberta.ca/publish/docs/Facilitators_Guide.pdf

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As an early childhood professional, use information and strategies from this guide to support young children learning English as a new language.

This guide also offers strategies for:

- developing and maintaining the home language
- engaging families and communities
- creating a supportive learning environment
- planning language learning activities.

