

Building Ecosystems Where Dual Language Learners Thrive

Based on what research tells us about how dual language learners (DLLs) learn best, we've identified six essential ecosystem elements. These elements represent practices that respond to the social, emotional, and learning needs of DLLs. Many of these the elements are essential for all children and some are especially and uniquely important for DLLs.

Building an Ecosystem for DLLs to Thrive



A Deeper Dive into the 6 Essential Ecosystem Elements

A culturally and linguistically responsive environment

- ... a child's first language and culture are welcome, respected, and included.
- ... each child sees himself reflected in the surrounding environment.

First language connections

- ... the first language is integrated and used strategically in meaningful ways.
- ... teachers make consistent connections between the first language and English.



An intentional focus on oral language with additional supports

- ... teachers model rich and complex language so DLLs can learn the language they need to express themselves.
- ... teachers are familiar with each DLL's language development and offer additional supports, e.g., gestures, props, and visuals, to facilitate their understanding and participation.

A curriculum integrated around an anchor book with repeated reads

- ... curriculum and planned activities are connected to an anchor book with multiple reads, to enhance comprehension and vocabulary development.
- ... multiple opportunities exist for DLLs to practice the language and concepts they are learning throughout the day.

Observation, progress monitoring, and fair assessment practices

- ... DLLs' progress in English is observed and monitored regularly and consistently to inform instruction.
- ... assessment practices look at the child's complete language resources – what he knows in English and in the first language.

Strong partnerships with families

- ... strong relationships with families are promoted and there is a firm commitment to actively engage them in their child's learning.
- ... teachers see families of DLLs as valuable resources in the classroom.

A Pyramid of Supports for Dual Language Learners

Without a doubt, high quality early childhood education and an intentional focus on oral language benefit ALL children, and DLLs are no exception. But DLLs need a little more. In order to create effective learning environments for DLLs, there must be additional language and instructional supports and first language connections. It can be helpful to think about this as a pyramid with an intentional focus on oral language building on a foundation of high quality early childhood education and two additional layers, specific to dual language learners, supported by these first two layers: additional language and instructional supports and first language connections. Each tier builds on and depends on the one before it.

