Supporting Dual Language Learners Right from the Start
Observing Dual Language Development in Action!

Guidance on Observation Process

DLLs experience rapid developmental changes in each of their languages. Because of this, it is important to gather information on their language use frequently, across different settings, and in each of the languages they are learning. Observing DLLs during various learning experiences throughout the day will allow you to get valuable information about their receptive and expressive language. And, in doing so, you will be tuning in to them and building more responsive relationships as you go.

As you observe, listen carefully to how they express themselves. Focus on how they use language and note the patterns in this use. Be sure to record examples of what DLLs **can do**. These "language samples" will help you set language goals and determine the types of supports DLLs may need to develop further.

SOME QUESTIONS A TEACHER MIGHT ASK TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DLLS' LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

How does the child communicate? Verbally? Nonverbally?

How does the child participate or engage in an activity?

How does the child approach language (e.g., does he jump right in and try new words and phrases? Mostly observe and practice language in private? Become easily frustrated and "act out?")?

With whom does the child talk (children and/or adults)?

During which activities does he use his first language?

For what purposes does the child use language (e.g. to share feelings, describe an event, pretend play, gain access to play, ask questions, retell a story, solve a conflict)?

What does the child like to talk about?

How much language does the child use? (variety and length of phrases and interactions)

What types of grammatical structures does he use?

What types of words and phrases does she choose? Basic or more complex vocabulary?

How does she communicate at home?

How well is the child able to follow instructions or directions?

Start your observation plan by asking yourself *"What do I want to find out?"* This question allows you to focus more closely on your purpose. Sometimes your question will be prompted by a state early learning standard or an assessment objective.

After determining what to observe, decide on opportunities you have to obtain the information you are interested in. Observe, ask questions, watch carefully, and listen—in multiple settings over a period of time—to build a picture of the child's efforts, progress, and achievement. You can do this for all children, in all areas of development but for DLLs, you are looking specifically at their **dual language development**.

Recording what you observe can take various forms. The methods you choose will depend on what you want to know, what is practical, and the amount of information and detail needed. As much as possible, embed these methods in your daily interactions. Occasionally you might need to set up a structured task to prompt the response you seek. Here are some methods you can use to gather evidence:

- Brief anecdotal notes (on post-it notes, mailing labels, in notebooks, on an iPad)
- Notes on a daily log or calendar, frequency counts/tallies, checklists, charts, matrices
- Audio and video recordings
- Narrative language samples
- Story retells
- Drawings and representations
- Photos
- Work samples
- Diagrams, and sketches (dated and documented with notes describing the event and/or dictation from the child)
- Family interviews

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Classroom: _____   **Date:** _____

Set an Observation Goal: What's the purpose of your observation? What do you hope to learn about how DLLs understand and use language?

_____

_____

Decide on an Observation Setting or Activity: When and where will you observe?

☐ Large group/morning meeting	☐ Playground	☐ Meals or snack time
☐ Small group	☐ Centers	☐ One-on-one lesson
☐ Transition times	☐ Arrivals/departures	☐ Storybook read aloud
☐ Other _____	☐ Other _____	☐ Other _____

Determine Your Method: How will you gather your information?

☐ As you interact with children	☐ As your co-teacher interacts with children	☐ As children interact with peers
Asking questions – what will you ask? ☐ Open-ended questions – ☐ Closed-ended questions -		☐ During a structured task you will set up

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It's Time to Observe! (add Post-it notes here or compile your notes in whatever way works for you)

CHILD 1	CHILD 2

Reflect on your observations. *What did you find out? How will the information you have learned impact your instruction for each child? Are there particular moments where language use was more challenging? or the DLL had more difficulty keeping up? What were the language demands of the task? What adaptations and supports can you put in place to advance their learning? How will this inform your planning?*

Determine supports. These are many supports you can embed in routines, learning activities, and assessment to help DLLs make meaning from language and content. Use these supports to carefully design learning spaces, activities, and materials that build on children's already acquired skills and knowledge and support their progress in their language development.

Menu of Supports

Visuals and Other	Interactive Supports
• Props and objects	• Partners/ peers
• Pictures or photographs	• Small groups in first language
• Illustrations, maps, drawings	• Small groups in English
• Gestures	• First language connections
• Visual schedule	• Internet websites
• Songs and chants	• Software programs
• Visual necklace	• Adult prompting
• Cognate charts	• Modeling/Demonstrations
• Transition sticks	• Other -
• Descriptive books	• Other -

Adaptations and supports you will put in place:

CHILD 1 _____	CHILD 2 _____

Additional resources needed?