

Commentary

For Families: Supporting Your Young Dual Language Learners at Home

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How can families whose children attend dual language programs support their children at home during the COVID-19 pandemic? Here is some advice for families:

1. Engage with your child in the language of your home.

Numerous studies have shown that knowledge and skills students learn in the first language transfer to the new language. Once you have the language and ability to make tamales or plant flowers in one language, you only need to put the labels of the second language on it to be able to explain that know-how to someone else. Once you know how to read in one language, you have the conceptual knowledge needed to learn to read in multiple other languages.

Here are some things you can do to develop your child's first language at home which will help your child when he or she returns to school:

- Read to and with your child. Ask them questions about the text.
- Have your child assist you with daily chores and purposefully use language, asking and answering questions about what you are doing.
- Play games, bring out the deck of cards or the board games. You'll be surprised at how much language you use.
- Use togetherness at family meals as an opportunity to talk about things of interest to your child; again, asking questions that will elicit extended use of language.

Don't be afraid to use higher level vocabulary with your child. They can just as easily learn less frequently used vocabulary as they can everyday language, it's just a matter of using the new words with them.

2. Seek ways that you might support your child's second language

Even if you yourself don't know the second language your child is learning, you can provide other opportunities for your child to engage in receptive language development. For example, your child can participate in age-appropriate activities in the second language, and you can show your excitement by asking your child

questions in your home language about what they are learning or doing, Suggested activities include:

- listening to books on tape
- playing online games///
- listening to songs that include video with visuals (and subtitles)
- watching TV, films, or cartoons

In closing, you can support your dual language learner in continuing to learn while at home. Your child will be better prepared when they return to school if they grow their home language and knowledge of the world with you at home while you provide opportunities for them to engage in activities in the language they are learning.

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