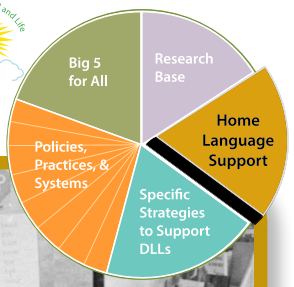
Language at Home and in the Community

Planned Language Approach (PLA)



For Teachers

Ideas to share with families

Encourage families to use their language with children from birth

The easiest, most important thing is for parents and family members to use their home language every day. Many families worry that using their home language will confuse their children or make it more difficult for them to learn English. Help parents understand that children can learn more than one language at the same time. In fact, children will have an easier time learning English if they have a strong foundation in their first language.

Keep in mind:

Share your view that each family's language and culture is a source of pride and strength. Remind them how home language supports their children's growth in many ways and helps them learn English too!

Tell stories and sing songs

All families have a rich heritage to pass on to their children. Stories, chants, rhymes, poems, sayings, and songs are an important part of each family's culture. Encourage families to share these with their children and to have fun doing it!

Share books and stories

Many families worry that reading and telling their stories in their home language will make it harder for their children to read in English—but the opposite is true! Encourage families to read and tell stories in their home language. Explain that telling stories and reading in their home language teaches children words and ideas they will easily transfer into English.

Keep in mind:

Families help their young children develop reading and vocabulary skills when they look at books together and talk about the pictures. It is not necessary to be a good reader to share books and stories with young children.

Encourage families to talk about their traditions and culture

Provide opportunities for families to visit your classroom and talk about their language, traditions, culture, and heritage. Ask them to share family stories and songs. Constantly be on the lookout for ways children can share their heritage regularly in the classroom.

Show that you value home languages in your classroom

Post signs in the languages of all the children in the class. Have books available in all families' languages. Invite families to share a story or read a book in their home language. Look for every chance to help children feel good about their home language.

Keep in mind:

Encourage families to share their culture. Sharing their language and culture teaches their children to feel good about who they are, and teaches the other children more about their children's culture.

Keep in mind:

Actions speak louder than words. You send strong messages by the way you use or don't use children's home languages. Positive messages promote children's strong identity and self-esteem.

Suggest checking out books that are wordless or in children's home language from the library

The library is a great source for bilingual books, DVDs, and music. Provide opportunities for families to learn to use the library. Invite a librarian to a family night, or take a field trip to the library, to show families what is available in their home language, including storytime programs and activities.

Look for community events at which families' languages are spoken

Library programs, cultural festivals, speakers, and concerts are great places for families to meet others who speak their home language. Invite families to share this kind of information with one another by providing a family bulletin board or flyer so they can exchange information.

Encourage families to continue using their home language as their children grow older

Talk with families about encouraging their children to continue using their home language. Long-term relationships depend on language. Communication gets even more important as children get older and they need strong family support to continue speaking their home language.

Keep in mind:

Families are key to maintaining home language. Help families understand the benefits of using their language. When they have the confidence to continue using their language at home, they will make it a priority.

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