

Supporting English Language Development When Children Have Little Experience With English



Caregivers and teachers, even when they do not know the home language of children, can use a number of effective strategies throughout the day to support the children’s English language development.

Create opportunities to model English

- ▶ Engage dual language learners frequently in one-on-one and small-group conversations.
 - ▶ Talk with children—and encourage them to talk—at centers, during free play, during meals and snacks, while outdoors, and at other times.
 - ▶ Have back-and-forth conversations in which you and each child take turns talking, striving for at least five turns for each of you.
- ▶ Have content *and* language goals for classroom activities
 - ▶ Be explicit about what content (information and skills) you want children to learn during activities, such as “identifying the emotions expressed by characters in a story.”
 - ▶ Be explicit about what you want dual language learners to learn about English from the lesson; for example, “to learn English words for common emotions, such as ‘happy,’ ‘angry,’ ‘sad,’ and ‘excited.’”

When speaking to dual language learners . . .

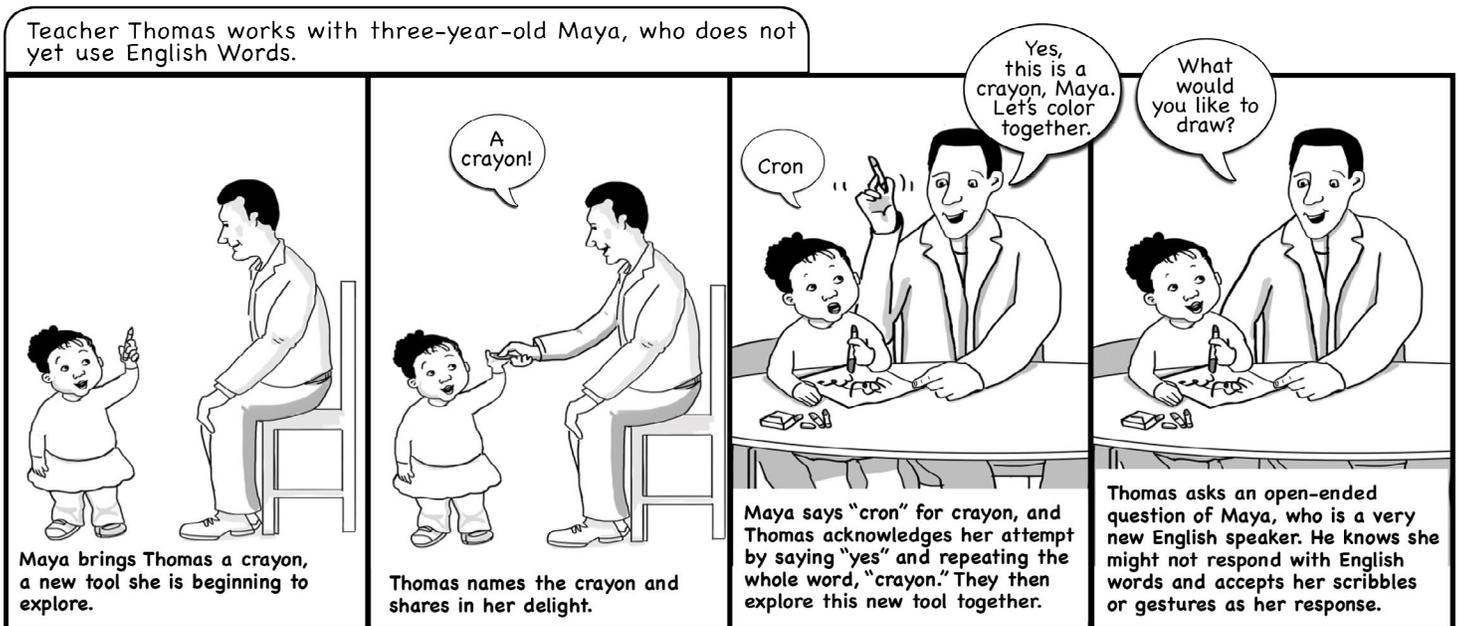
- ▶ Speak clearly, warmly, and at an appropriate speed.
- ▶ Match the complexity of the sentences and vocabulary to the children’s level of understanding of English. Use simple words and short phrases with children who are very new to learning English, and use more complex words and longer sentences as they learn the language.
- ▶ Wait patiently for dual language learners to process what you say.
 - ▶ Expect that dual language learners may need as much as five seconds or more to make sense of what you say.
 - ▶ Even dual language learners who speak English well and who have been speaking English for a while may still need a longer “wait time” before they respond to you.

When responding to dual language learners . . .

- ▶ Maintain a positive and reassuring manner while interacting with dual language learners.
- ▶ Encourage new speakers of English to respond to speech with words rather than nonverbally with gestures.
 - ▶ Very new English speakers may respond nonverbally when spoken to in English, by pointing and nodding or demonstrating what they want with their hands.
 - ▶ As children learn to speak English, begin to expect more and more complex language in their responses. At first, expect them to respond with single words and short phrases, then in longer phrases and sentences.
- ▶ Repeat what children say and expand upon it.
 - ▶ Repeat children's statements, adding more advanced vocabulary. For example, respond to "Skirt pretty" with "Yes, the skirt is pretty; it is so beautiful!"
 - ▶ Repeat what children say and expand upon it. Respond to a child saying "dog" with "Yes, that dog barks so loudly!"
- ▶ Ask children both closed-ended and open-ended questions.
 - ▶ Ask closed-ended questions that support new speakers of English in using their few English words by asking, for example, "What color is the dog?"
 - ▶ Ask open-ended questions that support all children in developing their cognitive and language skills by asking, for example, "What do you think the dog will do next?"
- ▶ Use self-talk and parallel-talk to help children associate English words and actions in context.
 - ▶ Describe to children what you are doing as you do it (self-talk) by saying, for example, "I am cutting this paper up into pieces."
 - ▶ Describe what children do as they do it (parallel talk) by saying, for example, "You are cutting this paper up into pieces."

The following three illustrated conversations show these strategies in action.

Teacher Thomas works with three-year-old Maya, who does not yet use English Words.



Maya brings Thomas a crayon, a new tool she is beginning to explore.

A crayon!

Thomas names the crayon and shares in her delight.

Cron

Yes, this is a crayon, Maya. Let's color together.

What would you like to draw?

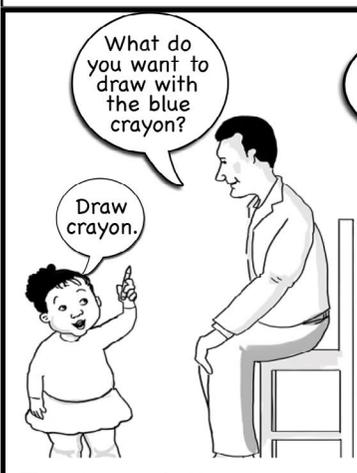
Maya says "cron" for crayon, and Thomas acknowledges her attempt by saying "yes" and repeating the whole word, "crayon." They then explore this new tool together.

Thomas asks an open-ended question of Maya, who is a very new English speaker. He knows she might not respond with English words and accepts her scribbles or gestures as her response.

Maya has now learned some very basic English.

 <p>Maya says an English word. Thomas repeats the word and expands it by adding more words.</p>	 <p>Maya repeats the new word, "blue," and Thomas extends the talk by using the word "blue" in a new context, the color of his pants. He then asks a question.</p>	 <p>Maya responds to Thomas' question. Thomas extends her contribution by naming the rug and also asks questions that continue the exchange.</p>	 <p>Later, Maya and Thomas explore the blue crayon at the art table. Maya is using her new words, and Thomas is continuing to extend her talk.</p>
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Maya has learned some English words, like crayon.

 <p>Thomas supports Maya by asking open-ended questions and requiring Maya to use more English.</p>	 <p>Thomas extends Maya's speech by combining the blue color with the berries to form "blueberries." He also continues to ask her questions.</p>	 <p>Thomas' questions keep the conversation going, and he is talking about a topic that Maya enjoys!</p>	 <p>Maya draws blueberries and says her new word. Thomas extends the talk and learning by moving to new berries and a new color and keeping the conversation going.</p>
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