

# **Strategies and Considerations for Supporting Multilingualism in Education**

## **A Resource Guide**

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CSD 9638: Developmental Language Disorders II

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December 19, 2025

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## The Importance of a Multilingual and Multicultural Lens

### VALIDITY OF NORMS

Many standardized assessments and speech milestones have been normed based on monolingual populations, reducing their validity for multilingual children (Sinclair et al., 2025).

### LANGUAGE IS TIED TO CULTURE

Equitable access to services entails taking measures to ensure culturally responsive and appropriate assessment and intervention tools, as well as collaborating with communities and families who may not speak English (Allison-Burbank et al., 2023).

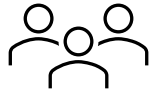
**Strengths-based, culturally responsive practice** means SLPs familiarizing themselves with cultural beliefs, trauma-informed considerations, and linguistic traits of populations within their care in order to prioritize families' routines and values in treatment (Allison-Burbank et al., 2023).

**To differentiate between language differences and disorders**, multilingualism adds a crucial role for SLPs, where they must tease apart the process of language learning from any underlying areas that can benefit from SLP intervention.

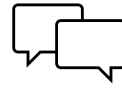
## The Role of Speech-Language Pathologists

Speech-Language and Audiology Canada (SAC) gives a position statement emphasizing the role of SLPs in protecting support and fair access to multilingual populations:

*"It is the position of Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC) that children with, or at risk of, language disorder should be provided with the support they need to become bilingual in home, childcare and school settings, including access to speech-language pathology services. **Children with language disorder should not be counselled out of opportunities to initiate or continue their bilingual development.**" (SAC, 2021)*



## Translanguaging



**Translanguaging** is how multilingual students use all their languages in various ways to communicate, learn, and express themselves. In contrast to translating, ***translanguaging encourages and acknowledges students' full linguistic and cultural identities*** (Haynes, 2025).

Translanguaging is a tool that...

1. Supports students' learning and comprehension. When they can use their full range of language abilities, students are empowered to best grasp and retain new concepts
2. Affirms a sense of identity, confidence, and belonging through encouragement of students' cultural backgrounds and home languages
3. Promotes critical thinking and cognitive flexibility by encouraging students to compare ideas across languages
4. Sets students up for a multilingual world, where they will encounter environments in their personal and professional lives where multiple languages and cultures are involved

(Haynes, 2025)



Dual language input **does not confuse children**, and it is not necessary for them to be kept separate (Hoff & Core, 2015).

### Strategies for Using Translanguaging in an Education Environment

- Foster a **welcoming language environment** (Haynes, 2025)
  - Encourage students to use any form of language abilities without the fear of being corrected, setting an environment that all languages are acknowledged with an open mind and curiosity.
- Form **connections between languages** (Haynes, 2025)
  - Show connections and deepen understanding by using similar words across multiple languages, and find opportunities to start conversations about language similarities and differences (i.e., with words, expressions, and idioms).
- Incorporate **multilingual resources** to support learning (Haynes, 2025)
  - Provide and encourage bilingual instructions, media, stories, and digital materials. Students can develop their own glossaries to explain concepts in their home languages.
- Encourage **artistic expression** (Haynes, 2025)

- Students are welcomed to write stories or make music using all their languages, giving a more holistic view of their identity and perspectives.
- **Advocate, educate, and collaborate** with school leadership (Haynes, 2025)
  - In order to set a positive translanguageing environment, school leaders must understand and support these learning opportunities. Professional development and example-setting is necessary to guide its implementation and shared facilitation.

A video example of translanguageing: <https://vimeo.com/910161076> (Haynes, 2025)



In this example, the educator expands on students' multilingual input in the classroom activity focusing on immigration, encourages multilingualism in classroom discussion, and explores how students can connect and relate to one another and the activity topic.

## Resources for Understanding and Incorporating Translanguageing

### Appendix IV

#### Translanguageing Spaces Planning Template

Area of Lesson/Strategy design	My Ideas
What are my students' characteristics, including the languages they speak?	
What is the topic/focus of the lesson?	
What are the content objective(s)?	
What are the language objective(s)?	
What are the translanguageing objective(s)?	
What is the activity/strategy that I will focus on? Specifically, how does translanguageing fit into this activity/strategy?	
What multilingual materials would I need?	
What other considerations are needed for a translanguageing pedagogy focus?	

1. The Initiative on Immigration and Education presents a **free online module for educators**, including sample activities, planning templates, and note-taking templates.

Educators and professionals are encouraged to consider a variety of factors and objectives when creating an ideal translanguageing space.



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The module can be found here:

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d9b610753ba512b1fb88e9e/t/69371d7b9a03cb59518edd6a/1765219707081/Translanguageing+and+Immigration\\_updated2025.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d9b610753ba512b1fb88e9e/t/69371d7b9a03cb59518edd6a/1765219707081/Translanguageing+and+Immigration_updated2025.pdf) (Sánchez, 2025)

2. The CUNY-NYS Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals provides a **resource guide for establishing a school's emergent multilingual leadership team**.

They recommend developing an interprofessional plan to support multilingual students, detailing who is involved (i.e., administrators, educators, support staff, families, coaches) as well as when and how often stakeholders will meet. The team plans how they will develop translanguaging opportunities, share success stories, and share perspectives for how to empower a diverse student population.



The full guide can be found at: <https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/establishing-your-schools-emergent-bilingual-leadership-team/>

3. The CUNY-NYS Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals also provides further professional development resources. They have **translanguaging guides** available and **video tutorials** for topics such as unit planning, teaching writing, and building curriculum:

<https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/translanguaging-guides/>

4. SLPs can encourage multiple means of representation across an interprofessional team, where a variety of materials are made available to students, showcasing linguistic diversity. **A guide for “nurturing a multilingual ecology”** explains this further to educators: <https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/nurturing-a-multilingual-ecology/>



5. Colorin Colorado, a bilingual site for educators and families, encourages a holistic approach to investigating whether or not a child's language needs are being met:

- Non-SLP team members should receive education on the process of language acquisition so that they can **become familiar with typical developmental patterns**
- SLPs should **seek out the support and training** needed to provide effective assessment and treatment for students of diverse linguistic backgrounds, as well as manage family interactions in an effective and culturally-informed way
- **Critically review and update the current assessment, evaluation, and screening procedures** in place in the school to ensure they are meeting the needs of ELLs
- **Continually pursue feedback and collaboration** with community members, families, and colleagues with diverse strengths and cultural knowledge in order to collaboratively access different areas of expertise

6. CUNY-NYSIEB provides a guide for supporting young emergent bilinguals:

<https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/resources-for-work-with-particular-subgroups/young-emergent-bilinguals-tips-from-cuny-nysieb/>

Emergent bilingual children -- a strengths-based term to describe students learning English as an additional language -- often face misunderstandings from educators regarding their language development.

**Educators should understand:**

1. There is no “gap” in their language compared to monolingual peers. Language may look different in children belonging to marginalized communities, due to stigmatization of their language practices. A child’s language abilities are comprised of many more factors than typically observed in formal education (Otheguy & García, 2019).
2. Young multilingual children translanguage naturally, which can be enriching and supportive to their learning when validated by educators and professionals (CUNY-NYSIEB, 2021).
3. Young emergent bilingual children use multimodal language, such as gesturing, pointing, acting, and drawing. This emphasizes the utility of validating rich multimodal language of children regardless of language (CUNY-NYSIEB, 2021).

**Strategies for Implementing Translanguaging**

1. Use multiple means of engagement, representation, and action & expression to drive instruction.
2. Encourage creative expression using children’s home language.
3. Take the perspective that all members of the educational team are language and literacy teachers, and can facilitate supportive language environments and strategies.
4. A school team that meets regularly is essential to discuss strategies to best support their multilingual student population and give feedback and advice.

(CUNY-NYSIEB, 2021).

## Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) in ELLs

A label of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is characterized by signs such as:

- Reaching language milestones later than peers, i.e., forming sentences, learning new words
- Difficulty making conversation
- Difficulty understanding directions
- Frequent grammatical errors
- Difficulty organizing stories and writing
- Difficulty using and understanding complex language
- Difficulty reading

(NIDCD, 2023)

In order to accurately investigate whether ELL children may have a language disorder, SLPs need to ensure that:

- ☐ Signs of DLD are consistent across all the child's languages
- ☐ Assessment includes input from the child's teacher and family members to get an accurate view of all languages

### Note on under- and over-identification:



Learning a second language does not *cause* a language disorder.

Just as SLPs must be careful not to over-attribute difficulties in one language to a potential disorder, they must also ensure that information is not dismissed due to the child learning English as a second language. Particularly for sequential bilingual children, they are at risk of *delayed identification, under-identification, and over-identification* of DLD (Paradis, Schneider & Sorenson Duncan, 2013). Families are often counselled against multilingualism, but evidence indicates that **children with and without DLD are able to acquire multiple languages, given an enriching and supportive learning environment** (Paradis et al., 2013).



## Development Considerations in Multilingual Children

Studies comparing expressive vocabulary between monolingual and bilingual children have shown that both groups have **similar vocabulary sizes when counting total words across all languages**, and even when only counting unique conceptual vocabulary (i.e., not doubling up across languages), values still fell within a normal range. Pearson et al. (1993) and Core et al. (2013) showed that the average conceptual vocabulary scores (expressive and receptive) for bilingual children fell around the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile for their age.

It's important to note that while multilingual children's vocabulary scores may appear slightly delayed compared to their monolingual peers when assessing one language, SLPs must consider the **degree** of the difference (i.e., only one SD), as well as comparing their **growth** over time (which is often similar to monolinguals) (Pearson et al., 1993)



In assessment, the best practice is to use a child's **total language score** (across all languages) when quantifying language use, as opposed to solely one language (Core et al., 2013).

## Strategies for Planning and Conducting Assessments

- Prioritize **internal evidence** reported by families when modifying the course of intervention
- Use **action-oriented listening** when engaging in conversations with families who hold diverse cultural beliefs regarding treatment
- Use **key terms in the family's native phrasing** when conveying assessment protocols, results, and options for next steps, in order to communicate effectively in a way that validates their perspectives
- Allot **more time** for meetings and intervention sessions to accommodate for linguistic differences
- Continually **evaluate personal assumptions and biases**
- **Collaborate with an interprofessional team** to share resources and strategies for culturally responsive care

▪ (Sinclair et al., 2025):

Additional considerations:

- Clinicians must **consider all languages used by the child**, and language background must be thoroughly explored
- Monolingual norms **should not be applied** to multilingual children
- For a comprehensive and accurate assessment, **access to interpreters** (preferably trained, such as with Multicultural Liaison Officers) is necessary
- Educators and clinicians require **training on language impairment in multilingual children**
- Clinicians must consider **cultural aspects of assessments** and ensure the material is reflective of **the child's functional, cultural identity**
- Clinicians must ensure **parents/ caregivers receive education and resources** on multilingual development and the importance of encouraging use of all the child's languages

• (Lifelong Learning Programme, 2015)

### Converging Evidence Assessments

A **converging evidence** approach uses multiple sources of assessment information in making clinical decisions (Castilla-Earls et al., 2020). These sources include:

1. **Language experience questionnaires** from both parents and teachers, such as:
  - The MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories (CDI), which have been adapted across a wide range of languages.
  - The Alberta Language Development Questionnaire (ALDeQ), which includes norms for reference and explores children's milestones, current L1 abilities, behaviours, preferences, and family history. Appropriate for ELL children aged 4;6 – 7;6, speaking any L1 and with between 4-40 months of exposure to English as a second language (Paradis et al., 2013)
  - The Alberta Language Environment Questionnaire 4 (ALEQ-4) to explore parent-reported information on language exposure, language use at home, the child's engagement in language-related activities, and parental education and language fluency (Paradis et al., 2020)



Note: A brief screener has also been developed based on the ALDeQ and ALEQ-4 which includes an interpretation rubric to investigate the interplay between responses (Paradis et al., 2020).

These examples of language experience questionnaires can be found at:

<https://sites.google.com/uAlberta.ca/ches/questionnaires?authuser=0>

2. **Evaluation of learning potential**, i.e., response to intervention and dynamic assessment to assess the child's *learning* ability as opposed to their current language skills (Castilla-Earls et al., 2020)
3. **Standardized testing using both languages** and taking the best score achieved, such as with the BESA (Bilingual English-Spanish Assessment)
4. If possible for the language, a **bilingual language sample analysis** using a large-scale database reflective of the child's language profile
5. A **comparison of language to adult samples** can help to identify morphosyntactic and lexical scoring adaptations, to avoid scoring based on a culturally- and linguistically-inappropriate standard (Karem & Washington, 2021).
6. An **Alternate Norm Referencing Calculator** (Paradis et al., 2020) can also provide context when quantifying scores in a way that factors in language exposure. A formula can roughly calculate the probability that the child's test scores follow a pattern similar to ELL children with typical development, using a converging evidence approach. The calculator uses the child's length of English exposure in months, the ALDeQ score, Edmonton Narrative Norms Instrument (ENNI) standard scores, Test of Early Grammatical Impairment (TEGI) screener score, Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP) nonword repetition subtest score, and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). The calculator provides a sensitivity score, sensitivity score, and a probability score:



A score of 0-.49 indicates a low probability of the child having a language impairment/ developmental language disorder (Paradis et al., 2020)



A score of .50-1.0 indicates a high probability of the child having a language impairment/ developmental language disorder (Paradis et al., 2020)

The calculator resource can be accessed as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet through the University of Alberta CHESL Centre:

<https://sites.google.com/uAlberta.ca/chesl/alternate-norm-referencing-calculator?authuser=0>



## Some Cross-Linguistic Assessments Designed for Multilingual Children

While many have been developed as the utility of this type of assessment rises, here are two examples of cross-linguistic assessments:

1. Given the rising prevalence of English-Arabic bilingual children in Canadian schools, the **CHESL sentence repetition task** has been developed with norm referencing for Canadian English and Syrian Arabic speaking children aged 6-12, with 4-40 months of English exposure (Soto-Corominas et al., 2022):

<https://sites.google.com/ualberta.ca/chesl/sentence-repetition-task?authuser=0>

2. The **Language Impairment Testing in Multilingual Setting (LITMUS) battery** can provide tools to gather information on morphosyntax, semantics, narrative/discourse abilities, lexical and phonological processing, executive functions, and parental questionnaires. It includes **sentence repetition tasks, multilingual assessment in narratives, cross-linguistic lexical tasks, nonword repetition tasks**, and a **parental bilingual questionnaire**. Subtests are available in accessible PDF formats and through a mobile app, and are available across 41 languages (Bi-SLI, 2022):

<https://www.bi-sli.org/litmus-tools>

## Intervention Considerations

- Clinicians should strive to facilitate **culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR)** intervention approaches (detailed in the section below). This provides material that is more functional and relevant than non-tailored material, and children have been shown to have significantly higher post-test scores in a CLR instruction approach (Méndez et al., 2015)
- Following the principles of translanguaging, clinicians are urged to incorporate all of the child's languages in order to promote overall vocabulary learning. **First presenting vocabulary in a dominant language has been shown to facilitate more effective learning in the second language** (Méndez et al., 2015)
- Oral vocabulary is a strong predictor of reading achievement in monolingual children, and evidence is emerging that **strengthening oral vocabulary in multilingual children can likewise support reading in the older elementary grades** (Méndez et al., 2015)

A **culturally and linguistically responsive approach** is characterized by strategies such as

- **Interactive storybook reading**
  - e.g., giving children the opportunity to ask questions, give input, share ideas, and incorporate translanguaging to engage with the story
- **Multimodal instruction**
  - e.g., using visual aids, actions, and items to provide additional contexts and associations
- **Child-friendly definitions**
  - e.g., explaining concepts to children by relating them to relevant, everyday situations
- **Repeated exposures**
  - e.g., having at least 5-6 repetitions of a new word within a task in order to form an effective mental representation
- **Culturally relevant content**
  - e.g., using stories and games that can activate prior knowledge and ideas to encourage new learning

(Méndez et al., 2015)

### **Recommendations for Multilingual AAC Users**

- Clinicians should collaborate with families to incorporate their home language in the implementation of AAC.
- Identify the contexts in which the home language is used, and work together to identify functional AAC goals for these contexts.
- Recognize the family as experts of their child. Provide culturally responsive AAC training in using the AAC system.
- Using both low tech & high tech solutions can be a realistic way of incorporating home language.

▪ (Monroe & Soto, 2025).

### **Collaboration and Advocacy for Equitable Service**

A significant problem in language-based practice is how **difficult it is for students and parents to navigate the system**. Parents' abilities to strongly advocate for supports (such as private services, professional assessments, and necessary intervention) is directly related to their child's access to accommodations. In families from historically

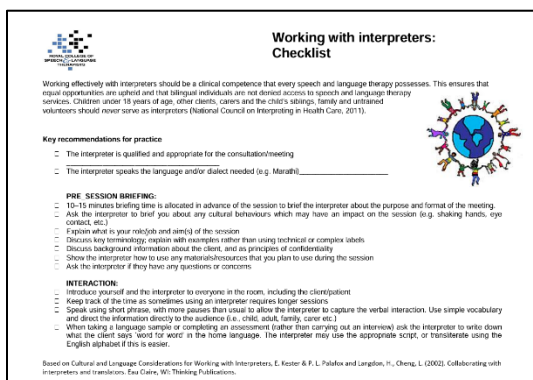
marginalized backgrounds such as being a newcomer or lacking fluency in an official language, this poses an equity concern when they may not have the same communication avenues to secure support for their children. This emphasizes the need for professionals to advocate for their voices to be heard and for families to be connected with resources and accommodations, a key role for speech-language pathologists (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2022).

In a response-to-intervention (RTI) framework, supports become “fragmented” when multiple professionals (i.e., reading specialists, ESL teachers, volunteers, educators, and SLPs) are all supporting students without consultation with one another. **It is essential that they work as a team** to implement strategies and supports, since everyone has a role to support language and literacy. (Troia, 2005).

## Tips on Interpreters

Kester et al. (2002) provide a useful checklist for working effectively with interpreters:

[www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/media/Project/RCSLT/7Working-with-interpretterschecklist.pdf](http://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/media/Project/RCSLT/7Working-with-interpretterschecklist.pdf)



Interprofessional collaboration with interpreters/translators is essential when working with a multilingual population. Effective, ethical practice can be maintained by:

- Using a **“brief-intervention-debrief”** structure to ensure smooth collaboration and understanding
- Use of **plain language** to keep information clear to involved professionals and families
- **Knowledge of training and scope of practice requirements**, both locally and nationally, for interpreters and SLPs

▪ (Alani et al., 2024)

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