

How Parents Can Help Their Child Learn a Second Language

Multilingual learners are learning the language of instruction at the same time they are learning rigorous academic content, all while trying to remain balanced between their primary culture and the new one that they are now learning in. Parents/caregivers can help their students make the transition into an English speaking school environment by helping students develop English and academic literacy at home. Try using the strategies below to help your ELL child become academically successful in not one language, but multiple.

- **Don't be afraid to use your native tongue.** This tip may be the most important since it is the bridge between your child's learning situations — that is, the connection between his or her primary language and culture and new language and culture. You can explain unfamiliar words and concepts in the language familiar to your child and continue to build his or her literacy skills in the primary language, while practicing and developing English and academic literacies. Consistent opportunities for practice and meaningful practice and reinforcement of learning the new language and understanding the new culture are important.
- **When it comes to homework, have a routine.** Establishing a good study routine at home can make a significant difference in your child's learning. Provide a quiet environment by removing or minimizing any potential distractions and make sure that your child has all the supplies he or she needs including pencils, books, paper, etc. Take the time to answer any questions your child may have. If you don't know the answers, you can help your child find resources to help answer the questions he or she has, or you can help your child write down the question to ask his or her teacher. Even if you cannot yet speak English yourself, you can still check on your child to see if homework assignments are finished.
- **Study the same thing in new ways.** Try picking a folktale or children's story with which both you and your child are familiar. Although your child may not understand all of the words at first, your child should generally be able to follow the plot of the story and will pick up new vocabulary and grammar along the way. Asking questions about the story's plot, characters, etc. can help with your child's understanding. You can also try watching movies in the new language or even play games that involve language, such as [Scrabble](#), to practice and learn language at home.
- **Use creative outlets to practice and learn language.** A fun way to practice and learn language is to engage in creative activities. For example, make a scrapbook together featuring things that have taken place in your new home, city, and/or country and write all the captions and titles in your new language. Does your child like to paint or write? Have them draw a picture and write or tell a story about it. The possibilities are as limitless as your child's creativity.
- **Encourage involvement in extracurricular activities.** Extracurricular activities such as being a member of the school's newspaper or yearbook committees provides additional meaningful opportunities to develop language and literacies. Such activities can help students link the perspectives, strategies, roles and responsibilities they experience in the classroom with those outside of the classroom. Understanding and using language and literacies skills across settings is important in learning and achievement.
- **Stay connected and collaborate with teachers.** By staying informed, you can keep up to date on your child's linguistic, academic, and social progress in school. Understanding what is going on in school will give you a better idea of how you can support your child at home. Coordination and partnership between the school and home helps children thrive and succeed in their new learning environments

Source: Edynn Sato, Ph.D.