

Instructional Sample Practice for a Prekindergarten Classroom Aligned to the Next Generation Learning Standards

Sentences or words in underlined constitute hyperlinks. Sentences and words in bold are classroom activities that thread oral language, language awareness, and flexible groupings throughout this unit.



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*Instructional Sample Practice for a Prekindergarten Classroom Aligned to the
Next Generation Learning Standards*

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Spotlight

This Instructional Sample Practice describes play-based instruction across learning centers in the Prekindergarten classroom. Organized as a thematic unit, instruction was presented to children in the form of play-based activities and rich materials for children to explore, relating to the “Foods We Eat.” In addition, specific strategies useful in a linguistically diverse Prekindergarten classroom are presented as considerations for planning instruction.

The three practices, **oral language development, language awareness, and flexible grouping**, discussed in the introductory document, are presented here, first in a discussion of their role in instruction, and then with concrete examples of how they appeared in play-based centers in the Prekindergarten classroom. The teachers in this unit highlighted these three overarching practices, which reinforce an awareness of the unique needs of bilingual/multilingual students and lend themselves to adaptations on their behalf. These practices—**developing oral language, promoting language awareness, and implementing flexible grouping**—are woven throughout the grade levels, but they have singular significance for the youngest learners in Prekindergarten. In particular, preschool children who are learning English in school while still learning their home languages are particularly reliant on instructional approaches that have thoughtfully incorporated these three practices. At this point, it is important to discuss the role of translanguaging in the pedagogies created for Emergent Multilingual Language Learners (EML)¹.

Translanguaging is a pedagogical practice that brings together the students’ entire linguistic repertoire (home and new languages) in ways that create spaces for deeper and more complex thinking. Translanguaging requires the creation of spaces where learning is intentional, strategic, agentive, and thoughtfully carried out (Fu, Hasjioannou, & Zhou, 2019; Espinosa & Lerner-Quam, 2019). In this instructional practice, you will notice the intentionality that teachers bring to teaching EMLs in order to **foster oral communication** that takes place in **flexible and dynamic partnerships**. **Language awareness** is made possible when teachers have opened a translanguaging space (Velasco & Fialais, 2016).

Prekindergarten Standards

Integrating speaking, listening, reading, and writing, the [Next Generation Learning Standards](#) (NGLS) for prekindergarten emphasize the role of discussion, shared stories, retellings, and personal connections as they relate to the stories children hear. Distributed across classroom centers, emergent literacy skills, such as phonological awareness and concepts of print (embedded in the NGLS standards), are presented to children through play activities available at these classroom centers.

¹ In 2017 The New York State Board of Regents adopted the term “Emergent Multilingual Learner” (EML) to identify those children of preschool age who speak languages other than English in their homes and are learning English in the Prekindergarten setting. The term EML will be used throughout this document and all NYSED documents pertaining to this population.

It is critical in the Prekindergarten year that the growth toward conventional reading is not solely organized around concrete activities that require children to trace letters, practice their name, or circle words on a worksheet, etc. Instead, the natural tendency to imitate the behavior of the adults in their lives can move children toward the role-playing of reading and writing. This offers a richer, more authentic experience enacted through play. NYSED's Introduction to the Early Learning Standards reminds early childhood professionals that "...passive approaches such as seat work, worksheets, scripted programs, and rote learning are antithetical to a play-based paradigm for learning" (Morell, 2017, p. 5).

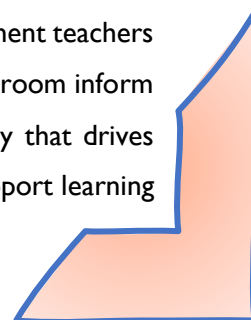
Identifying Young Multilingual Learners

The official identification of Emergent Multilingual Learners (EMLs) begins in Prekindergarten. Procedures for identifying multilingual children attending Prekindergarten have been locally determined. In 2017, to formalize the identification process for this population of young students, NYSED recommended the Emergent Multilingual Learners Language Profile Protocol (EMLLPP) for Prekindergarten.

The EMLLPP serves two important functions in the Prekindergarten program. First, it provides a framework for the [identification of EMLs](#) in the early childhood setting. Additionally, it organizes the instruction and programming offered to EMLs, who speak other languages at home and are learning English in preschool (New York Education Department, 2017).

The EMLLPP does not engage early childhood professionals in determining a child's level of proficiency in English as "Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, Expanding, or Commanding." Instead, the EMLLPP focuses attention on EML's actual experiences (instruction and programming) in Prekindergarten. It describes how gathering a linguistic profile of the young EML enables teachers and other Prekindergarten professionals to implement approaches for his/her participation, adjustment, learning, and assessment that are informed by knowledge about language learning in early childhood. The EMLPP promotes the idea that the home language is fundamental to all learning and should be a significant element in instruction and programming; all EMLs benefit from access to home language instruction, activities, interactions, and programs.

In order to create this environment for EMLs, the monolingual English classroom will necessarily evolve to include multilingual approaches. This will dictate some of the professional development teachers will need. In Prekindergarten, the language practices of EMLs in their homes and in the classroom inform instructional planning and programming. It is not the children's level of English proficiency that drives instruction; rather, it is the imperative to preserve the home language and leverage it to support learning in school.



Sample Unit

This sample unit was created for an English-language Prekindergarten classroom. It is understood that within an English-medium class, multilingual strategies will be implemented to support EMLs. All activities in the unit can be modified for Prekindergarten classrooms with EMLs.

In this example, the teacher created a thematic unit after overhearing a conversation between two students. She used this event (overhearing the conversation) to design a thematic unit that promoted important values about inclusion, but also engaged children in compelling exploration that connected to their home lives in significant ways. *A developmentally appropriate thematic study for EMLs allows them to use their full linguistic repertoires and encourages teachers to engage the students in activities that include the four language modalities: Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening.*

The roadmap below illustrates a design of play-based activities within centers, suitable for all Prekindergarten classrooms. Modifications in the languages of instruction (discussion and materials) make the activities useful for classrooms with EMLs.



Table 1: Roadmap of the Instructional Thematic Unit on the for Prekindergarten

Development of the Unit	Classroom Practices	Suggestions for Modifications for All Teachers of EMLs
Developing a unit in response to a classroom incident – activities across centers	<p>The teacher plans activities across centers that will encourage the children to talk, examine materials, and describe their ideas about cultural differences relating to food.</p> <p>Activities are designed for flexible groupings of children across the various centers.</p>	<p>Teachers can design activities in the languages of their students while allowing children to use one or multiple languages in their activities. Teachers can create a space where their students’ home languages are valued and are used as a resource for content and language development.</p>
Launching the unit – read-aloud	<p>The teacher reads the book “Everyone Cooks Rice” highlighting cultural similarities and differences among the students’ families. She highlights the different spoken languages, as well as how some children speak different language(s) at home than they do in school. The launch of the unit is an opportunity to engage children in a conversation about inclusion and acceptance.</p>	<p>Teachers can engage in a read-aloud² and foster conversations among their students that can be conducted bilingually or in the home language(s), if possible. Teachers of EMLs can show pictures and videos or play an audiotape with sounds or music related to the topic or to key vocabulary words.</p>
Engaging families – at-home activities	<p>Involving parents in developing vocabulary and emergent literacy skills through at-home activities in the home language reinforces learning in the classroom.</p>	<p>Teachers can support learning at home that is consistent across Prekindergarten classrooms, fostering the students’ home language and communication with the parents. Teachers can share resources in the languages the parents speak at home with their child.</p>
Play-based activities in learning centers: Kitchen Corner Science Center	<p>Immersive, engaging play activities encourage children to use language with their peers and adults. Teachers plan activities that will invite discussion, not solely exploration of the materials. In this way, play-based instruction is</p>	<p>Teachers can engage all their students in the same play-based activities. With scaffolds and language supports, these are applicable in the classrooms with EMLs.</p>

² The Read-aloud is an educational practice whereby a teacher reads a book or segments of a book aloud to her/his class. The teacher also models the thinking that the text triggers and can ask questions to her/his class pertaining to what a particular section of the book makes them think or feel.

<p>Art Center Math Center Small Group: Writing a Recipe</p>	<p><i>paramount to promoting the development of oral language in the prekindergarten classroom.</i></p>	
<p><i>One-to-one interaction across centers and activities</i></p>	<p><i>In order to assess and extend children’s learning, teachers organize instruction to allow for multiple opportunities to converse with children, ask questions about their work or play, and encourage them to discuss ideas with their peers. Careful scheduling of the day enables teachers to regularly enter the centers where children play and interact individually with them.</i></p>	<p><i>Teachers can follow the same principles while scheduling the day. One-to-one interactions in the EMLs’ classroom will occur in multiple languages. Assessment and the extension of learning makes use of multiple languages as well.</i></p>
<p><i>Culminating celebration</i></p>	<p><i>Bridging children’s homes and schools, celebrations are a constant feature in the prekindergarten classroom. In linguistically diverse classrooms, celebrations highlight language awareness, promote inclusion and prosocial behaviors, support oral language development in both the home and classroom languages, and promote parents’ active participation.</i></p>	<p><i>Teachers should engage in culminating celebrations that yield the same benefits. Teachers of EMLs can remind students that it is okay to speak their home language as they create their final products for celebration of learning.</i></p>

Overall Description of the Classroom Setting

Ms. Weston is a teacher in a Prekindergarten classroom. She works in a school-based program housed in an elementary school. Ms. Weston speaks English, but she has worked her entire career in linguistically diverse settings. The classroom paraprofessional, Ms. González, is fluent in English and Spanish and is a long-time resident of the community.

The community where Ms. Weston and Ms. González teach has been undergoing demographic changes in recent years. A growing immigrant population has driven the increase of multiple home languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Urdu, and Arabic, particularly among the youngest children.

A key belief that Ms. Weston and Ms. González share is that play is a primary vehicle for learning. They do not consider play as distinct from “academic” learning, but as the means to practice and master increasingly abstract concepts through engaging activities that attract and delight young children. Both teachers consider that appropriate instruction for very young children includes making play “purposeful” by presenting their students with the very skills and concepts they should learn in a manner that facilitates examination and practice with rich materials. In addition, they understand how important it is to [incorporate children’s home languages in instruction](#) in order to maximize learning.

Ms. Weston and Ms. González planned together for a full day of Prekindergarten. They know that a predictable daily schedule promotes self-regulation³ and good behavior for young children. A substantial portion of the day is devoted to “center time,”⁴ during which children have an opportunity to select where they want to “work.” At predictable intervals, the teachers signal a transition to a new center. If a child’s first center choice was already occupied, they select another, knowing that there would be transitions that would eventually allow them to play at that first-choice center.

In addition to designing play-based activities for the centers, Ms. Weston and Ms. González plan for small group instruction at a designated part of the classroom (usually a table or floor space with an easel and chart). Ms. Weston utilizes small group instruction for many purposes, as it offers an opportunity to observe the development of emergent literacy skills and other content area competencies up close. During small group instruction, Ms. Weston maximizes on strategies for **flexible grouping** by selecting the individual children to work together *in groups with peers that can speak their home language*. The home language is always an important resource in small group instruction. Ms. Weston’s planning always includes identifying (with the support of parents, bilingual individuals, online resources, etc.) words and phrases in

³ *Self-regulation is the ability to understand and manage behavior and reactions to feelings and events taking place in the surrounding environment.*

⁴ *“Center time” refers to the large blocks of time dedicated to free choice activities distributed across sections of the classroom designed for specific kinds of play-based learning (dramatic play, blocks, art, music, science discovery, etc.) (Roskos & Christie, 2009).*

children's home languages that she can use to activate their background knowledge in a small group lesson. For this reason, an element of Ms. Weston's instructional planning always includes reaching out to parents in advance, asking them to record and share key vocabulary words and phrases in their home languages that would correspond to her small group lessons.

During small group lessons, Ms. Weston and Ms. González documented children's progress toward emergent literacy skills. Here Ms. Weston refers to the [NGLS](#) for Prekindergarten and planned activities designed to provide practice with the skills outlined in the standards. Small group lessons often involved **conversations** about language, [comparisons between languages](#), and reading and writing together. Children were then provided opportunities to develop ideas, discuss topics, and express themselves through drawing, dictating, and writing. Children were given the opportunity to do this in English, their home language, or in both.

The three overarching practices that Ms. Weston and Ms. González emphasized in their classroom—oral language development, language awareness, and flexible groupings—are the focus of the next section.

Developing Oral Language

Language is the basis of human community. The primacy of oral language development undergirds learning in all developmental domains. Beginning with infants' gesturing and babbling, oral language is developed in those real-life interactions where young children observe people around them communicating and are encouraged to communicate as well in any language at an age-appropriate level.

Adults continue to play a critical role in the infant's expanding vocabulary and use of language throughout childhood. A child's first teachers recognize their role in promoting oral language development as they help children learn about the world, name and describe experiences or artifacts in their environment, and develop increasing confidence in expressing their ideas. In addition, early childhood teachers recognize how oral language development in English, in their home languages, or in both is a necessary foundation to emergent literacy skills.

The trajectory from spoken to written language requires children to grasp increasingly complex, abstract concepts that in themselves demand an ample vocabulary. For this reason, children's first encounters with literacy begin with what they already know—compelling stories, familiar rhymes, entertaining dramatizations—all designed to capture children's imagination as they begin to suggest ideas about language in a written form.

For the Prekindergarten EML who enters an English-medium classroom speaking little or no English, the efficacy of the link between oral language development and emergent literacy skills can be

threatened if an explicit connection to his/her home language is not made evident. There are two important considerations for the EML in Prekindergarten.

At four years old, all children are still learning their home languages. For EMLs, even as English is first introduced, it is important to sustain development in the home language in order to access and maximize on children's background knowledge and emerging grasp of abstract concepts. If introduction to English is coupled with abandonment of the home language, the child is literally silenced in the school setting precisely at a time when oral language is the primary focus of instruction.

There is compelling research that highlights the advantages for preschool children associated with bilingualism. Among these is the positive association between vocabulary development in the home language and enhanced comprehension and early reading skills in English (Bialystok, 2007; Hammer, Lawrence & Miccio, 2009). For EMLs, English-only instruction typically results in a decline of home language skills and no greater gains in English (Barnett, Yarosz, Thomas, Jung, & Blanco, 2007). Likewise, in a meta-analysis of comparison studies, English-only instruction represented no advantages to language growth (Barnett et al., 2007; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005).

Language Awareness

Young children benefit from explicit discussion on how a language or languages work. For example, in a linguistically diverse classroom, young children may not understand what it means that their classmates speak other languages, they may only know that they do not understand each other. In cases where English is the language of instruction, there is a risk of dismissing the importance of a child's home language for social adjustment, academic achievement, and the development of a positive self-identity if English is the only language represented or if learning English is the expressed priority.

The early childhood teacher maximizes language awareness (LA) approaches to model that **all languages in the classroom are valued** (Hélot, Frijns, Van Gorp & Sierens, 2018). The objective of integrating language awareness activities with young children is to raise their consciousness about language as distinct from learning a new language. LA activities aim to engage young EMLs in a process of reflective inquiry of their own language practices and those of others in and out of school. By focusing on the speakers and not on the language itself, EMLs can be exposed and reflect on the different languages spoken at home by their peers, even if these languages are not languages of instruction. LA also promotes noticing how languages are used in their environment (what languages are represented in the signs, street names, billboards, titles of books, etc.), that constitute the child's initial experiences with print. LA approaches are inherently inclusive and democratic; they teach all children that linguistic diversity is a human feature to be valued and integrated in all aspects of the class and school culture.

Family projects, bulletin board messages, letters or flyers to the home, and parental involvement activities are intentionally designed in English and in the diverse languages of the classroom to highlight the multilingual resources of the children and families present. More than promoting a sense of belonging for speakers of languages other than English, LA normalizes for an entire class (and further, an entire school) that multilingualism, like multiculturalism, is a constant reality in our classrooms. LA approaches dismantle the ideologies that promote English as superior or more important while other languages are less meaningful to the process of teaching and learning.

Within a context that promotes awareness about languages and their speakers, children are enabled to focus on features of the spoken and written languages in their worlds. They begin to be able to talk about language, comparing, highlighting, and pointing out what they notice. For example, children may notice that Arabic is written in one direction (from right to left) while they write from another (left to right). They may not yet recognize English letters, but they can still discuss a broader concept about directionality of print in different languages. LA is an inherent advantage of bilingualism (García, 2009). While all young children need to develop an understanding of broader concepts about how language works, children who are exposed to multiple languages from birth will have had many naturally occurring experiences where they needed to distinguish one language from another through selective attention. Focused attention on the features of languages is, in fact, a strength that EMLs exhibit in comparison with monolingual children (Bialystok, 2007).

Teaching emergent literacy skills focuses children's attention on how written language works in relationship to spoken language. LA activities have the added benefit of supporting the development emergent literacy skills.

Implementing Flexible Grouping

Flexible, **intentional grouping** is a fundamental strategy for teachers across grades. In Prekindergarten, teachers are mindful of children's reliance on direct one-to-one interactions with adults to advance learning. Commonly understood as operating within the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978), early childhood teachers know to advance children's learning through conversation, prompting, questioning, narrating, etc., as children make use of materials, books, or manipulatives. **Flexible grouping in Prekindergarten, then, must factor in the design of one-to-one interactions as well as small group or whole group activities.**

Teachers organize group activities to teach, but also to maximize opportunities to encourage prosocial behavior. Working in groups, children in Prekindergarten learn to collaborate, share, and work toward collective goals, as they mature beyond their natural egocentrism. Flexible grouping for EMLs considers their social-emotional needs, their languages, and their instructional needs. Designing group

activities to foster friendships with peers who speak a child's language, as well as those who do not, is an important consideration for the Prekindergarten teacher. Likewise is using the children's home languages as a resource reinforces both academic and social learning. Teachers use multiple strategies to organize flexible grouping for EMLs, such as:

- Pairing children with a language partner to enable conversation in English as well as other languages;
- Grouping children who share a home language to maximize the use of translated materials and interpreters for bilingual activities;
- Pairing EMLs children with friends who speak English – once children have become friends, speaking and sharing is greatly facilitated;
- Organizing home language groups with parents or other volunteers where all activities are conducted in the children's home language.

Play-based Learning in the Prekindergarten Classroom

The three overarching practices (oral language development, language awareness, and flexible grouping) that guide the work on the implementation of the NGLS with EMLs are evident in the Prekindergarten classroom as the teacher organizes and implements play-based instruction. While the term “play” is frequently used to describe the activities of children in preschool, less is commonly known about the intentional design of play activities prepared by an early childhood teacher. This, in fact, represents a challenge to the early childhood field, in that there is an imperative to protect play as the primary vehicle of instruction in the Prekindergarten classroom.

While play is the vehicle for young children's learning, there are important competencies and skills built in Prekindergarten that serve as the foundation for later academic learning, particularly literacy. Standards for learning in Prekindergarten articulate the age-appropriate skills taught, not as separate lessons, but integrated authentically in children's play experiences. With intentional planning, rich play activities naturally interconnect the three practices — oral language development, language awareness, and flexible grouping. This is particularly important for EMLs who rely on cues from their environment to reinforce their increasing knowledge of the English language. Describing purposeful play, Mraz, Porcelli, & Tyler (2016) write:

When children have access to a rich play environment, they are given an opportunity to learn and express their thinking through multiple sign systems. Sign systems are different ways of communicating. Art, music, drama, and language are all considered sign systems (7-8).

The NGLS for Prekindergarten list play and play-based learning as age-appropriate for developing competencies in emergent literacy. The right context for a Prekindergarten classroom is one where all practices fall within a developmentally appropriate framework (NAEYC, 2009). This framework enables the adaptation of instruction, activities, programming, etc., to children's individual age-appropriate needs, rather than forcing all children toward uniform instructional or curricular goals, even as instructional planning is grounded in learning standards. NYSED's Introduction to the Early Learning Standards outlines the idea of designing instruction for standards, not standardization, as a means of emphasizing how instruction for young children should be organized:

Rather than prescribe a lockstep progression of lessons or curricula for all children in all settings, the Standards serve to articulate the expectations of what children can learn and do as a result of instruction that is not standardized, but personalized, differentiated, adapted, culturally and linguistically relevant, and context-based. While we may have the same learning objectives for all children, our means for meeting these objectives are highly responsive to the individual child (Morell, 2017, 3).

In order for a teacher to implement play-based instruction that will serve to both meet standards and adapt readily to the needs of EMLs, four key strategies can support planning: 1) teaching across centers, 2) integrating children's interests, 3) emphasizing on one-to-one interactions, and 4) integrating meaningful parent engagement. Each of these is discussed below.

Teaching Across Centers

Learning for young children is dictated by their age and development. They learn through multimodal, language-rich experiences that help them make sense of their environment. Repeated exposure, ample practice, creativity and innovation, independent discovery, and prompting questions from adults are characteristic of effective learning opportunities for young children. Capitalizing on these approaches, the teacher also understands that the slow building of knowledge for young children comes as a result of multiple domains of development working in concert. For example, music supports emergent literacy – children sing the alphabet song before they recognize letters. Other examples include pretend play to set a foundation for symbolic representation (text), block building to reinforce mathematical equations, jumping and hopping to help children learn to count, making art to develop fine motor skills needed for writing, etc. For this reason, a teacher plans instruction that is integrated across developmental domains.

Teaching across domains is evident in the classroom when lessons are adapted and presented throughout learning centers. The entire classroom becomes devoted to the topic or theme of instruction. This strategy creates conditions for learning that correspond with precisely how young children learn. Rather than isolated skills practice or memorization, all content is presented to children in a manner that

requires their active engagement and participation through play. Naturally curious, children are drawn to the deeply familiar experiences (dressing up, drawing, building, etc.) applied to new material and vocabulary about the world around them. Through these integrated, multimodal experiences, children can access all their background knowledge and apply it to what is fascinating and new.

It is through careful, intentional planning that a teacher can design instruction that is distributed across the centers of the classroom. It first requires an understanding of developmental domains in young children, knowledge of students' background, diversity, and experiences, and then a creative application of play-based approaches for each center.

Distributing instruction across centers enables the EML student to access content and vocabulary in multiple ways. In addition, this strategy serves as a protective factor for EMLs who are too often relegated to lower order tasks (worksheets, skill and drill) in order to reinforce the "basics."

Integrating Children's Interests

Early childhood settings often refer to the "emergent curriculum" that evolves in response to the interests that young children express in their classrooms (Cassidy, Mims, Rucker & Boone, 2003). Every year, it seems, there is an "expert" in the Prekindergarten classroom who cannot contain her/his enthusiasm for dinosaurs or outer space. This child has considerable background knowledge in specific topics. In fact, all children have specific interests that they want to explore and discuss. The child who so thoroughly enjoys a topic will want to continue to explore the topic in the school setting. If a child's interest is irrelevant or never validated in the school setting, it is logical to expect some level of disengagement from that child. The natural egocentricity of young children leads them to seek out what gratifies their curiosity; in this sense, all children have a need for the validation of their interests and personal stories.

Another important contribution to the emergent curriculum comes from novel occurrences in the classroom. For example, the discovery that Susie has two mommies might lead to studying families as a thematic unit. It is not families per se that children must learn about in Prekindergarten; instead, the theme of families emerges from the children's experiences and becomes a topic for examination even as opportunities to learn and practice literacy skills remains constant. It is important to allow flexibility in the flow of thematic units in response to children's "expertise," interests, or to novel events in the classroom.

Integrating the interests of culturally and linguistically diverse children requires that the teacher develop meaningful knowledge about her students' cultures and lives. As a caution, EMLs are often presented as interesting themselves because of their differences. This is not quite the same as integrating their interests in the curriculum. The wise, culturally competent teacher gets to know her EMLs and enables their personal interests to come to life in the classroom.

Many Prekindergarten classrooms use published curricula to guide instruction. These curricula may outline the scope and sequence for instruction, and the assessment practices teachers should follow over the course of the entire Prekindergarten year. While these curricula may be developmentally appropriate, they may limit the opportunities to plan more spontaneously in response to occurrences in the classroom or in response to children's expressed interests. In addition, many purchased curricula offer lessons and activities designed solely for English speakers. In the linguistically diverse classroom, these curricula are not necessarily adapted to meet the needs of EMLs. The sample unit presented here aims to offer teachers ideas for creating a thematic unit from an emergent topic, but where that is not a possibility, it also aims to offer examples of the kinds of interactions that promote learning for EMLs within the framework of a published curriculum.

Emphasizing One-to-One Interactions

A class of children seated in a circle listening to their teacher is the quintessential image of instruction in early childhood. This whole-group approach requires maximum effort to promote participation and manage restlessness or wandering attention. In fact, Circle Time can be quite a challenge for a teacher. If we understand that learning takes place in a child's zone of proximal development with the support of the teacher's guidance and prompting, we can examine when these optimal interactions take place in the classroom. Is it during Circle Time?

Emphasizing interactions in instructional planning challenges a teacher to consider her role in the play-based classroom. Perhaps time is consumed with lining up, zipping jackets, signaling transitions, handwashing, etc. If so, when do optimal interactions take place? Teachers must carefully review scheduling to ensure that time is created for one-to-one interactions with every child, every day, over instructional goals.

As instruction is distributed across centers, the teacher plans to enter centers and interact (not solely observe) with children, engaging them in conversations about their learning. This means that the teacher has planned for instruction to be delivered through some large group work (e.g., Circle Time), smaller group work, and most individual work throughout centers.

EMLs may be particularly vulnerable to becoming lost in large group instruction. Unable to join verbally in many cases, they are often silent listeners when instruction is presented to the whole group. As the teacher organizes more one-to-one interactions with EMLs, greater use of the child's home language will be important. Here, teachers can [strategically use the home language](#) to access the child's background knowledge and propel learning further.

Integrating Meaningful Family Engagement

Effective teaching in Prekindergarten is dependent on the collaboration of parents and guardians. Strategic, sustained collaboration among the adults in a child’s life is a fundamental condition for learning. It is incumbent on early childhood teachers to design the kinds of activities that will engage family members meaningfully, not simply as parents and guardians, but as co-teachers along with them. Anything less than this role will not likely yield the kinds of academic and social gains children can achieve in prekindergarten.

Parents/guardians of EMLs can sometimes experience marginalization in family involvement programs because of language or cultural barriers. The Prekindergarten teacher (with the support of the entire school program) must design the opportunities that will enable meaningful participation for the families of EMLs. One such way is through the use of the home language. Research on cross-linguistic transfer highlights the value of continued support of the home language for its relationship to learning in English. The family can directly impact the child’s learning through continued support of the home language.

In order to engage family members as co-teachers in a linguistically diverse classroom, teachers will need innovative strategies for ongoing communication. Daily notes in a communication book, class newsletters, calendars, online postings, group chats, etc., are some ideas that engage a classroom community through print and technology. Teachers of EMLs are mindful of the linguistic and cultural differences inherent in any communication and plan for differences getting to know the needs of families in the classroom – translation, interpretation, and flexible access (multiple means) to the teacher are important strategies.

Planning from Classroom Occurrences – The Emergent Curriculum

In her planning, Ms. Weston referenced the NGLS. These serve as guidelines for the skills young children should practice and eventually master through play-based learning. In addition, both Ms. Weston and Ms. González recognized the importance of taking the children’s lead on topics or themes to be discussed in class. They envisioned an [emergent curriculum](#) as a response to children’s interest and incorporated extended thematic units that blended together principles of a project-based, emergent topics with articulated learning standards. In addition, Ms. Weston and Ms. González planned for instruction that was accessible to the EMLs in the class. They understood the three practices that support planning on their behalf.

The following example illustrates how Ms. Weston planned for her Prekindergarten class to employ the three practices (oral language development, language awareness, and flexible grouping) in a play and standards-based framework.

The Classroom

Ms. Weston overheard a conversation between two children at lunchtime. Celeste commented that she liked her food because, “I eat this at home.” Aki responded, “I don’t eat this at home, I eat different.” Celeste made a face at her friend and said, “Why?” Thinking of the cultural and linguistic diversity in her classroom, Ms. Weston gave the children an opportunity to compare the foods they eat at home and at school. She also decided to plan a thematic unit for the coming week. She titled her unit “The Foods We Eat.”

Ms. Weston planned for play activities for centers in the classroom, where she would have the opportunity to interact with each student and observe their skills and progress on PreK Standards.

Finally, Ms. Weston designed an at-home activity to involve families. Using paper plates, parents were asked to support their children in creating a representation of a favorite food they enjoyed at home – arroz con pollo? Sushi? Kefta? Spaghetti? Children were free to draw or glue pictures/materials onto their paper plates. Then, family members were encouraged to prepare the dish along with their child so that the child would be able to describe the steps in preparing this favorite food during a class discussion. As usual, Ms. Weston encouraged families to use their home languages in all activities and to leave her voicemails or emails of the correct pronunciation of any word in the home language. On the upcoming Friday, families were invited to share a favorite dish at a class luncheon.

Teaching Across Centers

Ms. Weston designed “The Foods We Eat” as a week-long thematic unit presented in the classroom learning centers. She announced the unit to families (in their home languages) in her weekly newsletter, inviting them to do the arts and crafts activity representing the foods they eat on a paper plate. She announced the culminating celebration at the end of the week and invited all families to take part.

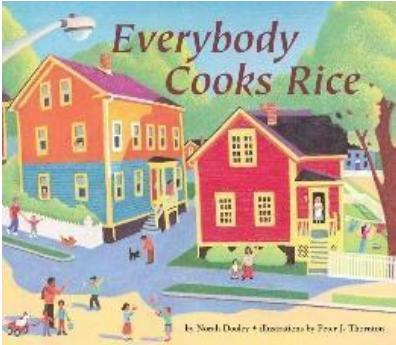
TEACHERS CAN DESIGN ACTIVITIES IN THE LANGUAGES OF THEIR STUDENTS WHILE ALLOWING CHILDREN TO USE ONE OR MULTIPLE LANGUAGES IN THEIR ACTIVITIES. TEACHERS CAN CREATE A SPACE WHERE THEIR HOME LANGUAGES ARE VALUED AND ARE USED AS A RESOURCE FOR CONTENT AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT.

In this weeklong thematic unit, children would have the opportunity to visit every center and take part in each of the activities presented to them. Guided by the NGLS Standards for Prekindergarten, Ms. Weston designed play-based activities for each center. In the daily schedule, Ms. Weston outlined when she would enter each of the centers in order to have one-to-one interaction with her students. Bringing together the three overarching practices and the key strategies within a developmentally appropriate, play-based and standards-based framework, the thematic unit across centers is described below.



Launching the Unit – Circle Time

Remembering the conversation she overheard, Ms. Weston chose the book *Everybody Cooks Rice* by Norah Dooley and Peter Thornton (2018) for Monday morning Circle Time. The book centers on a girl who is sent to find her younger brother at dinnertime and is introduced to a



variety of cultures through encountering the many different ways rice is prepared

TEACHERS OF EMLs CAN ENGAGE IN A READ-ALoud AND FOSTER CONVERSATIONS AMONG THEIR STUDENTS THAT CAN BE CONDUCTED BILINGUALLY OR IN THE HOME LANGUAGE(S), IF POSSIBLE. TEACHERS OF EMLs CAN ALSO PLAY AN AUDIOTAPE WITH SOUNDS OR MUSIC, SHOW PICTURES OR VIDEOS RELATED TO THE TOPIC, OR INTRODUCE THE STUDENTS TO KEY VOCABULARY WORDS.

at the different households she stops by as she looks for her brother. The book includes recipes for the dishes in the story. Before she read the book, Ms. Weston highlighted the author and illustrator, prompting children to explain these two important roles in written

books. Following Prekindergarten learning standards, she engaged the children in a conversation about the book itself as well as the story. Children were invited to make observations about the cover of the book, anticipating the plot of the story. The cover's depictions of homes along a street initiated a conversation about neighborhoods or communities. Ms. Weston could then make the point that this book discusses sharing a space and working together – similar to what happens in the classroom.

This activity is addressed the following NGLS:

- *PreK Reading 6: Describe the role of an author and illustrator.*
- *PreK Reading 3: Develop and answer questions about characters, major events, and pieces of information in a text.*
- *PreK Reading Foundational Skills 1g: Identify front cover and back cover.*

As Ms. Weston read the story, she used strategies of [dialogic reading](#), pausing to ask the children to think about what the main character learned as she visited different homes and saw how different families cooked rice. She then engaged the children in a conversation about how families eat very different foods at home that may or may not be the ones we eat in school. Students were given the opportunity to engage in discussions in their home languages. This book is very rich in text, visuals, and descriptions, which is helpful for all students, including EMLs. Ms. Weston could read the book in stages or multiple times over the course of the unit.

Engaging Families in At-Home Activities

The teachers in this classroom believed that parents should be fully knowledgeable of the information and activities that their children were engaged in during the school day. For Ms. Weston, interacting when the parents came to pick up their children was very important. Ms. Weston had shared the objective of her unit and had encouraged the parents to share their recipes and make their children part of the cooking activities at home. Ms. Weston and Ms. González had also explained the importance of play and had organized their own participation at each center lesson to promote and assess learning.

TEACHERS OF EMLs CAN SUPPORT LEARNING AT HOME THAT IS CONSISTENT ACROSS PREKINDERGARTEN CLASSROOMS, FOSTERING THE STUDENTS HOME LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION WITH THE PARENTS. TEACHERS CAN SHARE RESOURCES IN THE LANGUAGES THE PARENTS SPEAK AT HOME WITH THEIR CHILD.

Language Awareness

Ms. Weston engaged in **language awareness** activities at Circle Time as she discussed the book, inviting children to say the word “rice” in their home languages. She had prepared recordings of the word “rice” in the languages represented in the classroom and played them back to the group, asking children to indicate if they understood the word in their own home languages. She encouraged all children to pronounce the word “rice,” noting how it sounded in [Spanish](#), [Portuguese](#), and [Arabic](#).

Ms. Weston and Ms. González used this opportunity to present their young learners with songs and nursery rhymes in English and Spanish. This song introduced the children to different foods they eat at home and can bring it for lunch and fulfilled the goal of the unit.

[I've Got Something in My Lunch Box](#)
*I got something in my lunchbox.
Something yummy I know.
It's lunchtime now. Let's go!
I got chicken nuggets, carrot sticks,
Grapes and some potato chips.
I've got tortillas with some rice and beans,
Salsa and leafy greens!*

Table 2: Songs and Nursery Rhymes in English and Spanish to Develop Language Awareness in Ms. Weston and Ms. González's Class

English song about rice	Arroz con leche (The website presents the song in English and Spanish.)
Rice, rice I like it	Arroz con leche (arroz con leche)
Soft, fluffy, white rice	Yo quiero saltar (I want to hop, hop)

<i>I chew it all and love eating it</i>	<i>Con una chiquitita (with a little friend)</i>
<i>If I eat rice I get healthy</i>	<i>Que sepa bailar (who knows how to bop)</i>
<i>Together with many side dishes</i>	<i>Que sepa querer (who knows how to love)</i>
<i>Yummy, Yummy. I love eating rice</i>	<i>que sepa cantar (who knows how to sing)</i>
	<i>Que sepa abrir la puerta para ir a jugar (who knows how to play my favorite things)</i>
	<i>¡Con ésta sí! (With this one yes)</i>
	<i>¡Con éste no! (with this one no)</i>
	<i>Con este pollito bailaré yo (with this one I will boogy until it is time to go)</i>
	<i>Levanta las manos (raise your hands)</i>
	<i>Marcha con los pies (march with your feet)</i>
	<i>Mueve la colita (move your tail)</i>
	<i>Y hazlo otra vez (and do it once again)</i>

By singing these songs, students were able to compare how the word “rice” sounds in different languages and how it appears in different songs. They learned adjectives associated with rice (white, fluffy), as well as verbs (chew, eat), and sing a nursery rhyme in Spanish and English. These activities will progressively increase the EML sensitivity and consciousness about how different languages sound.

Center Time

Finally, Ms. Weston explained that Center Time would give children another chance to think about the foods they ate at home and at school. Center Time in Ms. Weston’s classroom served two purposes: to allow children to choose the center they preferred and to conduct small group lessons. A substantial portion of the schedule was dedicated to Center Time, but space at each center was limited, so children were encouraged to make new center choices at structured intervals. Taking turns, all children visited each center and the small group lesson over the course of a week. Utilizing more **flexible grouping**, the teacher designed a small group activity where children would be “invited” (selecting a group) to participate during a portion of Center Time.

Dramatic Play Center

For this thematic unit, the classroom’s Kitchen Corner was converted into a restaurant where children could assume roles as either customers, cooks, or servers, communicating with each other through conversation or written food orders. Special props were provided: order pads, aprons, pencils, pots and pans, tablecloths, and menus. Play in this center focused activities and conversation around familiar foods from home.

As one of the teachers visited this center, she would join children’s play with questions about the restaurant. What was served? How was it prepared? How do restaurants work? Who cooks? Who takes orders? Who serves? The teacher would place an order for a meal and observe as children used the props (i.e., order pads) to write her order.

TEACHERS OF EMLS CAN ENGAGE ALL OF THEIR STUDENTS IN THE SAME PLAY-BASED ACTIVITIES. WITH SCAFFOLDS AND LANGUAGE SUPPORTS, THESE ARE APPLICABLE IN THE CLASSROOMS WITH EMLS.

As the teacher examined their writing, she observed their ability to represent her order. Through questions and discussion, the teacher promoted **oral language development** in the Dramatic Play Center. Likewise, the teacher promoted **language awareness** by explicitly asking children to serve meals from home using words in the home language to describe them.

Science Center

The Science Center was arranged with colorful nonfiction texts about farms, crops, and harvesting all around the world. The class inventory of the home activity (paper plates of the foods eaten at home) was available at the Science Center, where students could find their own home creations and “look up” pictures of their foods in the available nonfiction texts.

LIFELONG PRACTICES FOR READERS:
ENRICH PERSONAL LANGUAGE, BACKGROUND
KNOWLEDGE, AND VOCABULARY THROUGH READING AND
COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS.

When the teacher visited the center, she engaged children in a conversation about their home foods. Is it grown in the earth? How is it harvested? How is it prepared? Where does it appear in nonfiction texts or pictures? What do the pictures show about how this food is grown or harvested? The teacher asked the questions in English and in their home languages. She also asked the children to use the home language words to describe their projects. What foods do they make at home? What are the dishes called? Promoting **oral language development**, the teacher assessed how children described information garnered from pictures in nonfiction text. Promoting **language awareness**, the teacher noted what children can describe about familiar foods.

Art Center

In keeping with the topic of foods, in this center children were encouraged to think about the “colors of fruits and vegetables” and create a design with paint, markers, or materials to illustrate these foods. Cut-out color photographs from magazines were displayed showing a variety of fruits and vegetables common across the world. In addition, a selection of actual fruits (e.g., grapes, lemons, strawberries, mangos, kiwis, etc.) available in the community markets were displayed in bowls in the Art Center.

In one-to-one interactions, the teacher visiting the center engaged children in conversation about the fruits represented in their drawings. Had they eaten this fruit or vegetable? How did it taste? Was it sweet or sour? Was it crunchy or soft? What were the colors of the fruits and vegetables? Are these the fruits eaten at home? What are these fruits called in your home? Asking children for explicit descriptions promoted **oral language development**. Likewise, naming the fruits and vegetables in the home language promoted **language awareness**. This activity addressed the following NGLS:

- *PreK Speaking & Listening 1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse peers and adults in small and large groups and during play.*
- *PreK Speaking & Listening 2: Interact with diverse formats and texts.*
- *PreK Language 4: Explore and use new vocabulary in child-centered, authentic, play-based experiences.*
- *PreK Reading 7: Describe relationship between illustrations and the text.*

Math Center

In the Math Center, children were presented the task of charting their classmates’ preferences for particular foods. Children would circulate in the classroom, ask a question, and record a response. Using clipboards with a template chart, children were encouraged to ask four friends one of the following questions:

Which do you like better?

- Blueberries or strawberries?
- Ice cream or chocolate?
- Milk or juice?

Or a question of their own choosing, composed with the help of a teacher.

- *PreK Language 6: Use words and phrases acquired through language rich experiences, conversations, reading and being read to, responding to texts, and child-centered, play-based experiences.*

Surveys in the Math Center could be conducted in any language. Drawings or pictures for each selection allowed children to speak in their home languages as they conducted surveys across the classroom. In order to represent the results of their surveys, children would color in a square for each response. The sample chart included here shows that out of the four children who responded,

Blueberry 	Strawberry 

one preferred blueberries, while three preferred strawberries.

A similar chart could be created for any question. In one-to-one interactions, the teacher asked about the information represented in the chart. What were the choices? How did the children choose? Which did most children prefer? The teacher counted the squares colored in each column along with the child. Children were encouraged to point to the chart and count in their home languages or in English while the teacher observed their one-to-one correspondence in counting as well as their ability to represent the “findings” of their surveys. Discussion on the Math Center activity promoted **oral language**, while counting in the home language promoted **language awareness**, since numbers may sound different, but they represent the same quantities. This activity addressed the following NGLS:

LIFELONG PRACTICES FOR WRITERS:
ENRICH PERSONAL LANGUAGE, BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE, AND VOCABULARY THROUGH WRITING AND COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS.
EXPERIMENT AND PLAY WITH LANGUAGE.
THINK, WRITE, SPEAK, AND LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND.

- *PreK Speaking and Listening 5: Create a visual display.*
- *PreK Language 5a: Sort common objects into categories (e.g., shapes, foods) for understanding of the concepts the categories represent.*

Small Group – Writing a Recipe

Ms. Weston created a small group for this thematic unit where children would have opportunities for writing. Since children were invited to participate in a small group, they naturally facilitated **flexible grouping** where the teacher could bring together children who shared a common home language or who needed to work on a particular skill.

At a table, materials were presented for preparing a personal snack. Children were encouraged to make “pizza” with cheese, sauce, pepperoni, and different kinds of breads (bagels, pita, naan, arepas) that may be found in the community markets. Where the group included Spanish-speaking children, Ms. González facilitated their conversation in Spanish and English. Where the group spoke other languages (Urdu or Arabic), Ms. Weston planned for a parent volunteer to join the group and facilitate discussion. In keeping with LA approaches, Ms. Weston and Ms. González highlighted for children the words, pronunciation, and other differences (types of bread), that stemmed from their classmates’ lived experience.

TEACHERS OF EMLs CAN FOLLOW THE SAME PRINCIPLES IN SCHEDULING THE DAY. ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM FOR EMLs WILL OCCUR IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES. ASSESSMENT AND EXTENDING OF LEARNING MAKE USE OF MULTIPLE LANGUAGES AS WELL.

Children were encouraged to “construct” their snack in conversation with each other and with Ms. Weston. Once complete, children were then invited to write their recipes on little booklets using pictures, words, and dictation. What came first? What came next? When was it ready? This activity addressed the following NGLS:

- ***PreK Reading Foundational Skills 4: Displays emergent reading behaviors with purpose and understanding***

Culminating Celebration

At the conclusion of the thematic unit, Ms. Weston and Ms. González planned a class celebration highlighting “The Foods We Eat” at home. Family members were invited to join the class and share a meal featuring the food eaten at home. Time was designated for family members to describe details about their homes, cuisine, and ways of expressing themselves. In a broad **language awareness** exercise, children were able to understand that different families have different preferred foods and different ways of describing these foods.

The culminating celebration was also an opportunity to showcase children’s constructions and writing samples across centers. Artifacts from each of the centers were displayed for guests to see. Attempts to write in several languages were evident in children’s work.

TEACHERS OF EMLs SHOULD ENGAGE IN CULMINATING CELEBRATIONS THAT YIELD THE SAME BENEFITS. TEACHERS OF EMLs CAN REMIND STUDENTS THAT IT IS OKAY TO SPEAK IN THE HOME LANGUAGE AS THEY CREATE THEIR FINAL PRODUCTS FOR CELEBRATION OF LEARNING.

Dictation in multiple languages was displayed. Finally, children were encouraged to read the *Everybody Cooks Rice* book to their family members as they visited the book corner.

In summary, Table 3 illustrates the strategies Ms. Weston and Ms. González used in their Prekindergarten classroom. Informed by developmentally appropriate practices reliant on play-based approaches, instruction in this classroom was organized to maximize conditions for EMLs by emphasizing oral language development, language awareness, and flexible grouping.

Table 3: Summary of the Strategies that Ms. Weston and Ms. González Used to Increase the Understanding, Engagement, and Participation of All Students in this Unit

Oral Language Development, Metalinguistic Awareness, and Flexible Groupings

These instructional strategies are meant to overlap. For instance, students working in a small group can use oral language to discuss word choices, translate words, and gain metalinguistic knowledge as well.

Oral Language Development	Language Awareness	Flexible Grouping
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent conversations – questions, discussions, storytelling, presentations, etc. • Center activities that call for verbal interactions, i.e., role playing and interviewing peers • Multiple opportunities to interact – the daily routine, social time (i.e., lunch, recess, center time) • Encourage the use of the home language • Scribing dictations in children’s home languages • Frequent use of dialogic reading • Reading aloud in English and in children’s home languages • Songs and music in multiple languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations about multilingualism • Highlighting features of diverse languages • Inviting families to share their experiences with multilingualism • Labeling the classroom in multiple languages • Recordings of words or entire books in multiple languages • Multilingual family projects • Multilingual bulletin boards • Multilingual newsletters, announcements, messages, etc. • Multicultural, multilingual events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimize whole group activities • Small groups targeting specific content or skills • Interact with children as they play in centers • Pair children who share a home language • Conduct small group lessons entirely in the home language with support from volunteers • Pair EMLs with English-speaking friends • Conduct bilingual small group lessons using translated materials and interpreters

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