

# A Guide for Writers on Addressing Linguistic and Cultural Differences

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*Basics of Supporting Dual Language Learners: An Introduction  
for Educators of Children from Birth through Age 8*

## About dual language learning

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Children under the age of 6 who come from immigrant families make up the fastest-growing segment of our population. Experts estimate that close to 25 percent of young children enter early childhood education programs speaking a language other than English at home. This means that most early childhood professionals will at some point be working with children from language and cultural backgrounds different from their own. Readers who work in diverse environments need information and ideas about adapting their practice to support that diversity.

To best meet the needs of a broad range of readers, when writing for NAEYC publications, it is helpful to keep the following in mind.

- Young children who are dual language learners (DLLs) may be fully bilingual, or they may have started learning in one language and begin to experience a new language after moving or starting school. The term *dual language learners* describes children learning in two or more languages, regardless of the type of program or classroom.
- Children in grades K–3 who are DLLs may be placed in identified bilingual classrooms, or they may be placed in ESL (English as a second language) classrooms, where English is the primary language of instruction. Or they may be included in general education classrooms, where they receive some level of ESL support. Many elementary teachers find they need to learn how to work effectively with DLLs in their classroom and to collaborate with a variety of other teachers and specialists who support these children.
- Typically, preschool programs do not follow the same approach to identifying and placing young DLLs as the approach used in elementary schools. Nevertheless,

preschool teachers, family child care providers, and other caregivers serve children and families with multiple cultures who may speak multiple languages. They need strategies for supporting children who are learning in two languages and for teaching in groups where there may be two, three, or more languages spoken.

- Infant/toddler programs also support children and families from multiple cultures who may speak multiple languages. Teachers need suggestions for adapting their environments and practices to support the development and learning of very young children who are DLLs.

## Guidelines for authors

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In keeping with NAEYC's 1995 position statement on cultural and linguistic diversity, writers can use the following recommendations to ensure that their content is respectful of and valuable to the broadest audience of readers.

### Classroom practices

- Some bilingual early childhood professionals speak the home languages of the children and families they work with. Meet the needs of these readers by offering specific guidance on how to appropriately use their language skills to benefit children's learning and social-emotional experiences.
- Some early childhood professionals do not speak the home languages of the children and families they work with. These readers need suggestions for enhancing nonverbal communication in order to cross the language barrier and suggestions for alternative ways to incorporate children's home languages and cultures into children's experiences.

- When presenting ideas about choosing classroom materials and designing learning environments, remember that many readers need suggestions for culturally respectful materials that support children who speak English and other languages.

- In discussions about any learning domain, writers need to acknowledge that children depend on language to convey and process concepts in all aspects of learning and development. It is important for authors to present adaptations for multiple languages when writing about language and literacy—or about any kind of learning in the early years.

- A growing body of research shows that supporting children’s home languages while they are learning English is an effective approach for promoting language learning and lasting academic success. The NAEYC position statement on cultural and linguistic diversity emphasizes these findings and recommends that teachers support each child’s home language while the children learn English. Writers for NAEYC publications should acknowledge this approach, when appropriate, in their content.

- Research reveals some significant benefits of growing up bilingual. Learning a second language should be a goal for all children as we prepare them for success in school, in life, and in a global economy. The NAEYC position statement on cultural and linguistic diversity supports this view. Writers for NAEYC publications should acknowledge this position, when appropriate, in their submissions.

### Policy, professional development, and administrative practices

- Early childhood professionals who work with children who are DLLs are likely to have questions about relating to families who speak different languages and represent a number of cultures. Content about engaging families should include strategies for building partnerships with diverse populations.

- Professional development providers in preservice and in-service settings need information about preparing early childhood educators to work with children and families who speak languages other than English.

- Administrators face the challenges of working with culturally and linguistically diverse children, staff, and families, and they are responsible for setting the tone of the entire program for supporting and respecting diversity. Content

for these readers should offer suggestions for implementing program policies that embrace diversity.

- Content that focuses on marketing, recruiting, orienting new families and staff, and establishing a program’s mission and vision must make it clear that people of all languages and cultures are visible, equal, and worthy of celebration. This is an important message not only for DLLs, but also to help English-speaking children grow up with positive attitudes about their diverse friends and neighbors.

- Professionals who observe and/or assess young children need suggestions for appropriate strategies to capture and record the behaviors, progress, and needs of children with different languages and abilities.

For more information, see NAEYC’s position statement “Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity” at [www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/linguistic](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/linguistic).

Find these guidelines online at [www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/files/NAEYCWritingGuide\\_CulturalDifferences.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/files/NAEYCWritingGuide_CulturalDifferences.pdf).

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