Appreciating Diversity and Educating the Young English Language Learner

Fact File on Diverse Language Learners

- There are 74.5 million children under the age of 5 in the United States; this means that more than one in four children are under the age of 5 (Children’s Defense Fund, 2011).
- The United States has the highest number of families with low incomes since the Census Bureau began collecting data in 1959 (Cauchon & Hanse, 2011).
- Over 950,000 homeless children enrolled in U.S. schools during 2008–2009; children make up about half of the homeless population, and almost 50 percent of these children are under age 6 (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011).
Part One • Language Learning in Context

• The number and types of early childhood education programs have increased; so has the cultural and linguistic diversity of the children enrolled in these programs (Garcia & Frede, 2010).
  • Children of color, who are now 44 percent of America’s children, will be the majority of children in 2019 (Children’s Defense Fund, 2011).
  • Black children’s chances of being poor are about 2.5 times greater than those of their white counterparts; 31 percent of white children and 69 percent of black children who are born poor spend at least half of their childhood living in poverty (Ratcliffe & McKernan, 2010). Sixty-four percent of low-income children were born to immigrant parents (Chau, Kalyani, & Wigth, 2010).
  • English Language Learners (ELLs)—children who are developing proficiency in English—constitute one in nine students in the United States and are projected to represent one in four students by 2025 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011). Approximately 80 percent of these ELLs are native speakers of Spanish (Fortuny, Hernandez, & Chaudry, 2010).
  • The number of ELLs enrolled in U.S. public schools increased by 51 percent between 1997 and 2008 (Education Week, 2013). Of the 2.7 million school-age children who spoke a language other than English at home and spoke English with difficulty in 2009, about 73 percent spoke Spanish (Aud et al., 2011).
  • The majority of people in the world today are bilingual or multilingual (Baker, 2006); although many people in the United States are monolingual, this is changing due to immigration (August & Shanahan, 2008).
  • Four major factors may contribute to the development of bilinguals: (1) the status of the languages involved, (2) the socioeconomic status (SES) of the child’s family, (3) the amount of language input in each language, and (4) the language(s) the mother or caretaker uses with the child (Dixon, Wu, & Daraghmeh, 2011).
  • In the United States as well as some other countries, English not only dominates but also is associated with status, education, wealth, and power; it is also the language of international business and technology (Dixon et al., 2011).
  • Family SES usually is conceptualized as some combination of family income, parents’ education level, and job status. In the United States, SES has been shown to be a predictor of school outcomes for bilinguals (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2008/BIB> ). Higher income can facilitate access to more language-learning resources such as books, technology, cultural events, tutors, and enrichment programs (Willingham, 2012 ).
  • When families use English in the home, proficiency in the ethnic language often declines (Dixon et al., 2011If there is a very dominant societal language, children may need more sources of input to preserve and enhance their knowledge of their first language (Gathercole & Thomas, 2009; Scheele, Leseman, & Mayo, 2010).
• Over 400 different languages are spoken by young ELLs. However, nearly 80 percent of the ELLs in the United States are children living in poverty whose first language is Spanish. The next most populous groups of ELLs in the United States are Vietnamese, Hmong, Cantonese, and Koreans (Kindler, 2002).

• As the student population has grown more diverse, the teaching force has become more homogeneous (Johnson, 2006). In 2003, nearly 40 percent of U.S. public school children were members of minority groups, while less than 10 percent of their teachers were members of minority groups (Snyder & Hoffman, 2003).

Did any of this information surprise you? If so, what? Why? How will you use this knowledge to educate and care for the very young?

What is the Cultural Context and Home Literacy Environment?

Every group and every individual has beliefs about language and its use, values and ideas about language and its speakers, and expectations for language teaching and learning (Park & King, 2003). Children bring to school the effects of one highly influential type of cultural context—the home literacy environment (HLE) (Burgess, 2011; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006a; 2006b; 2006c). The HLE is conceptualized in many different ways; however, the main idea is the amount of support that children get at home in their efforts to acquire literacy with print (Duursma et al., 2007; Hood, Conlon, & Andrews, 2008; Nutbrown, Hannon, & Morgan, 2005; Phillips & Lonigan, 2009). To illustrate differences in the HLE, hearing parents of children who are deaf (Stobbart & Alant, 2008) and parents and families of children with severe visual impairments (Murphy, Hatton, & Erickson, 2008) may have very different concepts of their roles in supporting literacy. The HLE has both immediate and long-term consequences for learning (Melhuish et al., 2008).

Although it may be customary to think of reading aloud and visiting the library, families engage in all types of activities that involve literacy tasks, such as making a shopping list, communicating with family members via e-mail, planning a community garden (Starbuck & Olthof, 2008), or consulting an information board at the local store about upcoming events (McTavish, 2007). Naturally, there is great diversity in the family members present in each home (Mui & Anderson, 2008), the type and amount of media in children’s homes, the time devoted to reading versus television, and the kinds of practice with oral and written language that each child acquires prior to beginning school (Bracken & Fischel, 2008; Linebarger, Kosanic, Greenwood, & Doku, 2004; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002).

Some of the home activities associated with better academic performance in school include engaging young children in conversation, reading and discussing books,
providing writing materials, supporting play that incorporates literacy activities, demonstrating the purposes of literacy, and maintaining a joyful atmosphere around literacy activities (Denton, Parker, & Jasbrouck, 2003). If the home and school literacy environments are dramatically different, it often makes literacy learning more difficult for the child.

Children in today’s classrooms are more culturally, socially, academically, and physically diverse than ever before. To illustrate, in a public school preschool classroom consisting of 16 students, one researcher found that 15 qualified, on the basis of their family’s low income, for the free lunch program. Eleven of the students were ELLs, and three were on individualized education programs (IEPs) due to special needs. Languages spoken by the students—other than English and Spanish—included Arabic, Nuer, Dinka, Oromo, Tigrinya, Swahili, Kirundi, Bajuni, and Sign Language. Some children had a developmental delay, had a speech delay, were deaf or hard of hearing, or had an attention deficit disorder (Howes, Downer, & Pianta, 2011). Teachers of young children need to look beyond their own family experiences and customary ways of thinking (Bornstein, 2009; Christian, 2006; Gonzalez-Mena, 2008, Gonzalez-Mena, 2009; Jones & Nimmo, 1999).

It is surprisingly easy to fall into the habit of thinking the group to which we belong sets the standard by which others should be judged. For example, preconceptions may cloud a teacher’s views of a child with foster parents (Swick, 2007), a parent in prison (Clopton & East, 2008a, 2008b), lesbian or gay parents (Patterson, 2006), grandparents responsible for his or her care (Kenner, Ruby, Jessel, Gregory, & Arju, 2007), or parents who are recent immigrants and speak very little English (Moore & Ritter, 2008). A teacher’s belief system might lead to favored treatment of or, conversely, unease with children from families for whom faith is of paramount importance to their family interactions and traditions (Peyton & Jalongo, 2008). Rather than expecting the child to switch to the middle-class values and attitudes that predominate in the school, the school needs to become more culturally responsive (Gay, 2000; Olsen & Fuller, 2007) and capitalize on each family’s strengths (Carter, Chard, & Pool, 2009; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

One reason that groups of children have become increasingly diverse has to do with public policy. In the 1930s and 1940s in the United States, most children with special needs were kept at home and did not attend school at all. During the 1950s and 1960s, they were completely isolated from peers in special classes. More often than not, these classrooms were located in the least well-equipped and most remote areas of the building. During the 1970s and early 1980s, children with special needs were brought from their special education classroom into the regular classroom periodically to work alongside peers, a practice called mainstreaming. In the 1990s and continuing into the new millennium, children with special needs are included, often full-time, in the classroom with typically developing peers. This practice is referred to as inclusion (Hooper & Umansky, 2009; Mallory & Rous, 2009; Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011). Inclusion means

individualizing the early childhood setting and [following] developmentally appropriate practices to maximize the possibility that a child is able to learn and grow to her
fullest potential. Inclusion strategies...support all children while offering thoughtfully designed supports and interventions to individual children based on their needs. (Parlakian, 2012, p. 71)

In the diverse early childhood settings you are going to encounter, some young children will have highly developed language, and others will face serious language difficulties. Teachers cannot afford to “aim down the middle” with their teaching in the hope that they will successfully reach the average student, that the children who are struggling will somehow catch up, and that the students who are advanced will take care of themselves. Diverse settings require child advocates, teachers who are committed to championing the cause of every child and believe that all children can learn. Overall, the research shows that inclusive early childhood programs work best when there is a clear philosophy, teacher support, a focus on the child, a continuum of services, and interprofessional collaboration (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005). A community of language learners emphasizes cooperation, collaboration, and mutual respect between and among children, parents, families, and professionals. High-quality early childhood language arts programs focus on the whole child. This means that there is attention to the child’s physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and aesthetic growth (Foundation for Child Development, 2008). Figure 1.1 summarizes what a literacy community looks like in action. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2013) asserts that high-quality education is a fundamental right of all children and requires educators to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions to work successfully with children of all races, ethnicities, disabilities/exceptionalities, and socioeconomic groups to assure high-quality education for all children. Figure 1.2 provides suggestions on working with ELLs that reflect this perspective.

Meeting the needs of diverse language learners cannot be accomplished alone. It takes a team of professionals, all of whom are dedicated to the care, education, and support of the child and family (Division for Early Childhood, 2007). As it refers to teaching, interprofessional collaboration is the collective, coordinated effort of members of two or more professions focused on achieving learning goals with and for students and their families. The ability of a variety of professionals to share and collaborate effectively is crucial to program success (Anderson, 2013).

Suppose, for example, that one of your students has had surgery for a cleft palate and needs support to learn to speak clearly. In order to respond, you would need to meet at various times with the child’s parents or family and other educators. Additionally, you might work with other professionals, such as a pediatrician or a speech/language pathologist. Without the benefit of these blended perspectives and expertise, it would be exceedingly difficult to address the needs of the child.

A clear philosophy, commitment to every child, appropriate teacher support, and collaboration with families and professionals all make essential contributions to establishing a community of language learners (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark & Moodie, 2009). The main principle that governs a learning community is that everyone matters (Batt, 2008). In the next section, you will meet Cheryl, my former student. Now a teacher, Cheryl illustrates how all of these principles can be put into practice.
Evidence of Collaboration with Parents, Families, Professionals, and the Larger Community

Teachers who seek to communicate with parents and families in a variety of ways, who strive to make them feel welcome, who use different times and occasions as opportunities to confer about the child’s progress, and who use community resources to enhance learning opportunities for children.

What to Look For

Information boards, flyers, newsletters, displays of children’s work, notices about special events, support services information, notes in backpacks, thank-you letters, invitations to participate, classroom volunteer schedule, videos/audio recordings/books created by the class that can be checked out, and parenting resource books.

Evidence of Support for Emergent Literacy and Reading

Teachers who are avid readers themselves, both of professional materials and of children’s books, and who immerse children in print and high-quality literature to support emergent literacy and reading.

What to Look For

Independent reading, paired reading, reading aloud, choral reading, chants, raps, rhymes, reading “big books,” song charts, dictated stories, poems, child-constructed books, Readers’ Theater, Thought for the Day, classroom helper board, visual aids for instruction.

Evidence of Support for Drawing, Writing, and Spelling

Teachers who provide support when they call children’s attention to print; who model the writing process for children; who demonstrate enthusiasm for multiple symbol systems that children use to communicate; who offer support and encouragement to children engaged in drawing, writing, and spelling; and who use technology to support children’s pictorial and graphic communication.

What to Look For

Children’s handwriting, mailboxes with drawings and letters, stories accompanied by drawings, multimedia projects, scripts of plays, original picture books, class e-mail and web pages, message boards, word-processing software and computer printouts, signs and posters, peer editing, journal writing, class newsletter.

Evidence of Support for Oral Language

Teachers who talk and listen respectfully to children and families, who encourage conversations between and among children throughout the school day, and who provide time and materials for play and spontaneous language to support oral language.

What to Look For

Opportunities for peer interaction, extended conversations between adults and children, recorded books and equipment for listening to them, music center, literacy materials to use during play, props for dramatization, puppets, flannelboard cutouts, high-quality DVDs to view and discuss, computer software.

Note: See Wohlwend (2008) for additional resources.
Respect Families
Accept that children are members of diverse family and community systems and that they bring multiple gifts of language, culture, and wisdom. Recognize that families know their children in ways that can enrich and enlarge your understandings. Strive to build lines of communication among linguistically diverse families so that they can support one another.

Analyze Beliefs and Attitudes
Set aside negative myths and common misconceptions. Assure the child and family that their native language and culture are valued. Be aware that not all families are eager to have their children cared for outside the home and may not be entirely convinced of the value of early childhood education.

Acquire Specialized Skills
Seek out on-the-job training concerning issues such as the politics of race, language, and culture; strategies for furthering cross-cultural communication (e.g., effective use of translators); and assessment strategies suited to English language learners.

Reach Out to Families
Become better informed about each child’s and family’s language history. Make personal contact in the family’s native language, if at all possible. Hold meetings at convenient times and in locations that families do not find intimidating, and give them support and incentives for participation (e.g., child care, transportation, snacks).

Offer Comprehensive Services
Take a family literacy approach and provide classes in English for parents/families so that they can participate more directly in literacy learning and see its positive effects.

Create a Sense of Community
Warmly welcome every member of the classroom community. Reflect diversity and give children authentic, integrated opportunities to participate in a vital learning community.

Become a Keen Observer
Collect evidence of the child’s language use both in the native language and in English. Report these findings in ways that can be shared with families during conferences. Accept children’s errors as a normal part of language development.

Be an Advocate
Endorse policies that address the needs of young, diverse language learners by working with organizations and leaders capable of addressing these needs.

Sources: Bouchard, 2001; Eihorn, 2001; Garcia, 2008; Harvey, 2001; Obiakor & Algozzine, 2001; Schwartz, 1996.
Cheryl is a public school teacher in urban California. This year her class includes Victoria, a child from Venezuela who speaks and writes Spanish but almost no English; Caitlin, a child with a severe vision impairment called *macular degeneration* that will eventually lead to blindness; and Mei, a bilingual Hmong child, the son of two Vietnamese Hmong graduate students at the university. Cheryl uses a wide variety of strategies to facilitate the language growth of these children and give them a sense of belonging.

In Victoria’s case, Cheryl reads about ways to support dual language learners. By getting to know Victoria’s extended family, she finds out that the first-grader has an aunt in high school who has been in the United States for several years. The school day for secondary students ends early, so Victoria’s aunt volunteers in Cheryl’s classroom each afternoon from 2:30 to 3:30, a plan that also benefits her because she is enrolled in the childcare training program at the vocational school.

For Caitlin, the child with the vision impairment, Cheryl builds her understanding of vision problems and consults with special education teachers in her school district to plan appropriate activities. Additionally, she works with the local Association for the Blind to get Caitlin’s family in contact with a program that trains guide dogs for the blind so that Caitlin can get on the waiting list early. As Caitlin’s vision deteriorates, she will need learning activities matched to her capabilities, such as electronic books designed for this population (Grammenos, Savidis, Georgalis, Bourdenas, & Stephanidis, 2009). These activities, planned by a professional team and shared with Caitlin’s family, are referred to as an IEP. It is her right, under federal law, to have a *free and appropriate* public education and to be educated with her peers to the extent appropriate to her individual needs.

In the case of Mei, who is fluent in two languages, Cheryl involves him almost like a teacher’s aide to help other Hmong children in the school who are newly immigrated to the United States and are just beginning to learn English. This arrangement has provided Mei with many challenging activities, such as translating some easy readers and recording the accompanying audio. The book/audio combinations created by Mei have been made available to be checked out of the library. Cheryl has also helped Mei locate a bilingual pen pal on the Internet.

As a result of Cheryl’s efforts, all three of these children are progressing well in school and have a respected place among their peers.

**Contributions and Consequences**

- *Contributions of the teacher:* How did the teacher play an active role in the lives of these children?
• **Contributions of the family:** How did each family support their child and get involved?
• **Contributions of other professionals:** How did professionals in other fields contribute to addressing the needs of these children and families?
• **Consequences of collaboration:** If the adults had refused to work together, what might have been the effect on the children's literacy learning?

Clearly, Cheryl is making every effort to promote collaboration in her daily classroom practices. The remainder of this chapter provides detailed information about how you, too, can become a successful teacher in diverse early childhood settings. To begin, look at Figure 1.3 to get a preview of the general recommendations for working with diverse learners in the language arts classroom.

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### Meeting the Needs of Children with Language Differences

Without question, the United States is a diverse society, yet our nation’s track record in working with language differences in the classroom is not a source of pride. When my mother, Felicia, attended public school in the city of New York in the early 1930s, it was customary to punish children for speaking their native languages (e.g., by forcing them to write “I will speak English at school” 1,000 times). One day Felicia was caught speaking Italian to a little boy who had just moved to the United States from Italy and had asked her for help in finding his classroom. While she stood frozen with fear, awaiting her punishment, her teacher said, “Oh, Felicia. You speak Italian. I think it would be wonderful to learn another language, especially one as beautiful as Italian!” When little Felicia shared this incident with her mother, the teacher was invited to the most sumptuous six-course lunch that my Italian grandmother could prepare, complete with her hand-crocheted table linens and real china and crystal!

Even though there were some enlightened teachers who went against common practices, the prevailing attitude toward any language other than English prior to the 1960s was to extinguish it. As support for this point of view, educators pointed to the bilingual child’s tendency to mix the two languages as if they were one, combining words from each (e.g., a Spanish-speaking child who says “I like el gato” for “I like the cat”). This *code switching*, as it is called, was cited as evidence that a child’s first language interfered with learning English; however, we now know that skill in one language supports and complements learning another language (Conteh, 2007; Jalongo & Li, 2010).

When young children are faced with a new culture where the predominant language is associated with high prestige and social success, their first language may be sacrificed (Fillmore, 1991; Gathercole & Thomas, 2009). Yet, if this happens before these children have mastered English, they often become fluent in neither language. Moreover, when children abandon their native tongue, it is in some ways a rejection of the culture represented by their first language (Bunten, 2010; Fillmore, 1991; Ogbu, 1988). Nevertheless, many places throughout the world continue to violate children’s
**Attitude**
Maintain a positive attitude and focus on children's strengths rather than their limitations, saying, for example, “Ask Jon. He can answer you on his Vox,” rather than “Jon can’t talk.” Be patient and encourage children to do likewise.

**Fairness**
Realize that being fair is much more than “treating everyone the same.” Actually, you will need to treat children differently while being fair and just. It isn’t fair, for example, to criticize a child with Tourette’s syndrome (a physiological disorder that causes people to have unpredictable verbal outbursts) for talking when you have asked children to listen quietly to the story.

**Rules**
Make expectations clear and establish a very small number of rules with the children. For instance, have rules about health and safety, such as “No hurting other people,” to include hitting, biting, kicking, shoving, and so on.

**Directions**
Give directions in clear, concise, and sequential fashion and support the directions with demonstration. For example, show children how to use the listening center and walk them through the procedures, one step at a time, instead of merely telling them about it.

**Manner of Presentation**
Use concrete examples and demonstrate how to proceed whenever possible, such as showing children how to form the letters of the alphabet by writing with a finger dipped in paint, in sand, with a marker on chartpaper, on the chalkboard, with a laser pointer, on an overhead transparency, and so forth. Use multisensory approaches.

**Time**
Break up instructional time—for example, a 10-minute large-group discussion in the morning and 10 minutes at the end of the day, rather than 20 minutes at one time. Give children more time to complete a task if they need it.

**Adaptations**
Individualize activities; for example, a child who has great difficulty writing might be asked to write just the first letter of his or her name. Others in the class might be expected to write their entire names. Give every child a chance to be successful.

**Narration**
Interpret the behavior of children with special needs for the other students so that they begin to understand them better. For instance, you might say, “Shannon is coming over to play house with you. Look, she’s starting up her wheelchair. Now she’s ready to be the mother. Give her a baby doll to put on her tray.”

**Encouragement**
Instead of using stock phrases (e.g., “very good,” “good job”), give specific feedback that urges the child to move to the next level, such as “Tony, I noticed that you know so many things about trucks when we talked about our story today. I’m going to loan you this book to take home and show to your mom and grandma. Tomorrow, there will be a story about airplanes that I think you will like.”

**Small Spaces**
Many children prefer small, comfortable spaces where they can read, work without distraction, or simply “get away from it all.” Designate a quiet area. It could be a corner with pillows and a book center with low shelves, for instance.

**Parents and Families**
Dispel fears that the child will be excluded or caused to feel incompetent. Share successes often so that parents and families can really see how their children are benefiting from the program.

**Professionals**
Know who to turn to for particular types of support and when it is appropriate to do so. Do not consider it a personal failure if you cannot “make it all better” for a child who has profound problems.

**Celebrations**
Celebrate successes, large and small. For a child with autism, it might be a note that reads “Gabriel talked today! He knew the answer to a subtraction problem.”

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**Figure 1.3** Recommendations for Working with Diverse Groups of Language Learners
linguistic rights and fail to respect their first language (Cummins, 2003; Reyes & Azuara, 2008).

As teachers, we must be aware of our language biases. Why is it that the same adult who cringes when hearing an Appalachian child say “I didn’t do nothing” or a Hispanic child pronounce chocolate as “shoclate” is thoroughly charmed when hearing a British child pronounce schedule as “shedule” or finds the New England pronunciation of idea as “idear” appealing? Evidently, some language differences win social approval because they are associated with individuals who have higher social status.

If you doubt that you have such biases, consider what occurs when a college teacher is not a native speaker of English. College students will sometimes complain about or even ridicule instructors who do not speak English as their first language and protest that they do not understand these instructors. It is more often the case that some college students are not willing to make the extra effort to communicate, look down on those who are not fluent speakers of English, and/or feel superior because their families “were here first.” Everyone possesses some language biases; the challenge for teachers is to be aware of language discrimination and embrace the language differences that they encounter in their students (Batt, 2008; Murillo & Smith, 2011).

Early childhood educators are required to respect the child’s home language, even if no one in the community speaks that language (Nemeth, 2009, 2009b). Some excellent resources on second-language learning are in the ELLs feature of this chapter on pages xx–xx.
Overview of Children’s Language Differences

Six major categories of linguistic differences exhibited by children can be identified.

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Autism spectrum disorders are pervasive developmental disabilities that have an effect on verbal and nonverbal communication as well as social interaction (Branson, Vigil, & Bingham, 2008; Hyman & Tobin, 2007; Warren et al., 2010). Autism is generally evident before age 3 and is believed to be the result of a neurological disorder that occurs in nearly 1 in 100 births (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Autism is a spectrum disorder; this means that it ranges in severity from total absence of speech to language that is adequate in form but disordered from the perspective of social appropriateness and meaning (Hall, 2009; Zager, 2004). About half of children on the autism spectrum do not speak at all, while others have some speech but may avoid social interaction and eye contact. Children with autism spectrum disorders may have difficulty being understood by others because they do not make the connections between old and new information explicit. Some behaviors displayed by children with autism may include repetitive movements (e.g., rocking, waving fingers in front of the face), meaningless repetition of language (called echolalia), a resistance to environmental change or change in routines, unusual responses to sensory experiences, and an inability to interpret and respond appropriately to social cues. Some children on the autism spectrum are gifted in one or more of the curricular areas. Autism is a very complex condition and appears to be increasing. Organizations such as the Autism Society of America (www.autism-society.org) and the National Professional Development Center on Autism (http://autismmpdc.fpg.unc.edu/) provide helpful resources for families and educators.

English Language Learners

The designation English language learner is commonly used to refer to children who do not have English as a first language and who are working to acquire proficiency in English. The most common example of an ELL is the newly immigrated child who is enrolled in a school where English is the dominant language of instruction. Research supports the practice of maintaining this child’s first language (L1) while building skill in the second (L2) (Huennekens & Xu, 2010; Lugo-Neris, Jackson, & Goldstein, 2010). Opportunities for talk in smaller, relaxed groups that lessen fear of making a mistake and for discussion of picture books also appear to support ELLs (Howes, Downer, & Pianta, 2011).

Children with Gifts and Talents in Language

Children with high verbal/linguistic intelligence may evidence exceptional strengths and abilities that set them apart from peers. These children use language in ways that
are more advanced and more creative than those of most peers; therefore, the language activities in which these children are engaged need to offer intellectual challenges. Characteristics of these children may include mastering the letter symbols and sounds early, exhibiting intense curiosity, displaying extraordinary memory, showing great persistence at language tasks, learning multiple languages, or attaining highly advanced conversational abilities. These children may speak their first words at 9 months of age, read before age 4, and understand advanced language (McGee & Hughes, 2011). It is also possible for a child to be gifted and talented in language and have a disability in another area (e.g., poor motor coordination of large muscles); these children are sometimes referred to as “twice exceptional” (Feeney, Moravcik, & Nolte, 2012). Suggestions for working with children who are gifted in language include working with the family to identify advanced abilities, selecting and discussing reading materials at these children’s level, engaging these children in conversations about their intense interests and allowing them to pursue them, and providing opportunities for them to interact with older children (McGee & Hughes, 2011). For more on gifted education, see the websites of The Association for the Gifted (www.cecag.org), which is affiliated with the Council for Exceptional Children, and the National Association for Gifted Children (www.nagc.org).

Language Disabilities

Language disabilities include a wide variety of influences that seriously interfere with a child’s ability to use oral and/or written language. It may be a learning disability that makes it difficult for the child to write. It could be a physiological problem, such as a hearing impairment or deafness, that impedes the child’s ability to use speech. For example, children with profound hearing loss may find it difficult to initiate communication with hearing peers, make themselves understood, and figure out what to do after communication has broken down (DeLuzio & Girolametto, 2011; Raver et al., 2012; Toe & Paatsch, 2010). Assistive technology, defined as (1) assistive devices and (2) support services for persons with special needs (Kaczmarek, 2011), can help to address this situation. For example, a child with hearing loss could use the assistive device of a hearing aid, or a deaf child could be supported by services that teach him to use American Sign Language and/or finger spelling to communicate within the Deaf Culture. In order to communicate with hearing peers, the child might use a tablet computer type of device with a voice synthesizer; when buttons are pressed, words or even complete sentences are heard. Augmentative communication is any device, system, or method that improves the ability of a child with communication difficulties to communicate more effectively with others (Dell, Newton, & Petroff, 2011).

Another category of language disability is a language processing problem caused by difficulties in sustaining attention; retaining information in the “mental workspace” of the brain, called working memory; or understanding the meaning of words. Serious language problems can be caused by stress as well, as in the case of children who are neglected and deprived of normal opportunities to develop language or who are emotionally traumatized and shut themselves off from the world by remaining silent.
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Language Delay

Speech and language delays are the most common types of developmental delays among infants and toddlers (Stockall & Dennis, 2012, p. 36). A child with a language delay is acquiring and using spoken language at a much slower rate than do their age-mates; usually, they are a year or more behind. For example, most young children speak their first recognizable words around 12 months of age. If a 2-year-old child who appears to be developing normally in other ways has not yet begun to talk, there is cause for concern. Often these delays are attributed to undetected middle ear infections that interfere with the child’s ability to hear and process spoken words. Suggestions for working with infants and toddlers who have a language delay include the following:

- Establish a caring relationship.
- Take turns during interactions and respond to nonverbal communication; exchange gestures, gentle touches, and sounds.
- Supply information and describe ideas.
- Use a rich and varied vocabulary.
- Use “motherese”—speak clearly in a higher register, use repetition, and vary the pitch to sound more animated.
- Capture the infant's attention with mutual eye gaze, pointing, or motion (e.g., shaking a rattle or opening eyes wide after the infant responds).
- Ask questions, even if the child is not yet speaking—and wait for a response.
- Capitalize on social routines such as bathing, feeding, and play time. (Kovach & DaRos-Voseles, 2011; Stockall & Dennis, 2012)

Dialectical Differences

Dialectical differences refer to variations in the way the same basic language is spoken, as when an African American child speaks African American English (AAE). Some characteristics of this dialect may include substituting an “f” sound for a “th” in the middle or at the end of a word (“toof” for “tooth”; “aufor” for “author”), dropping the verb ending (e.g., “He see it” for “He sees it”), using different verb forms of are (e.g., “She be bringing it” rather than “She is bringing it”), and pronouncing particular words differently (e.g., “liberry” for “library”; “exspecially” for “especially”). Languages also have regional dialects; for example, people from the southern United States speak English differently from those in England, Australia, or even other parts of the United States.

Figure 1.4 is a summary of early childhood teachers' roles in supporting young children with language differences, delays, and disorders (Paradis, Genesse, & Crago, 2011).
Everyday experiences and conversations can be the basis for supporting children’s language development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE 1.4</th>
<th>Early Childhood Teachers’ Roles in Supporting Children with Language Differences, Delays, and Disorders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>For dual language learners:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect children’s cultural heritage and identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understand the progression of second-language learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Minimize barriers to language development in internationally adopted children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give children continuous, consistent, and rich exposure to both languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaborate with families to prevent loss of first language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make culturally, developmentally, and individually appropriate decisions about curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>For children with language delays and disorders:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect children’s communication challenges and find ways to communicate effectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Become familiar with speech immaturities and language delays that are typical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify language processing and language production challenges that are more severe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make curriculum accommodations as necessary to meet individual needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaborate with families, educators, and professionals in other fields to arrive at accurate assessments of language disorders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plan appropriate interventions and/or referrals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work with families to maximize the use of available services in the community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Concerns and Basic Strategies

Three teachers made the following comments about the children in their classes with language differences:

This year, for the first time, I worked with a 3-year-old foster child who was exposed to “crack” cocaine during his prenatal development. At first, he was wild. I have to admit that when I saw him come into the front door of my family child care, I wanted to run right out the back. But as he learned to use language to express himself, his behavior started to get under control. It’s funny, because at first, I had many sleepless nights thinking that it would be impossible to work with him. But now he fits in so well.

When I heard that Jesus, a 4-year-old boy with spina bifida who could not speak and was not toilet trained, would be in my prekindergarten class, I was worried that the children would make fun of him. But his mother would bring him just for the afternoon session, fresh from his bath and smelling of baby powder. The special education teacher worked with me to build my confidence and skill. Jesus would respond to us by smiling and cooing. He won all of our hearts.

This year I volunteered to teach in the school district’s summer program. There were two boys from Mexico who did not speak English assigned to my class. The first day, I overheard one of the boys say to the other, “La rubia dice que” (“The blonde says that”). I realized that they were referring to me! I hadn’t even introduced myself. That night I took out my old Spanish books from college. I also listen to Spanish learning tapes while I am in the car and watch some television programs in Spanish with the English captions at the bottom of the screen. I am using more visual aids than ever before and watch these boys to see if they are getting the gist of the activities. They are certainly quicker at learning English than I have been at learning Spanish, even though I studied it previously.

The following basic strategies will guide you in creating a sense of community in your early childhood language arts program.

1. Examine personal attitudes and beliefs about children and families that are linguistically and culturally different. Teachers must accept linguistically diverse learners because to do otherwise is to reject the child (Cummins, 2003). In order for all students to have equal opportunities for education success, teachers must be aware not only of what children need to learn but also of the knowledge and skills that they bring from their own linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Fillmore & Snow, 2002; Park & King, 2003). Do not assume that children who speak other languages live only in large urban areas. Just think about some of the situations that may bring dramatic language differences into your classroom or center. It might be children who are adopted from other countries, whose parents are on student visas and enrolled in college studies, who are indigenous peoples (e.g., Native Americans), who live in regions of the country (e.g., the Southwest) where another language is spoken, who have lived abroad and become fluent in another language, or who have studied a language as part of their religious training (e.g.,
Chapter 1 • Appreciating Diversity and Educating the Young English Language Learner

Hebrew). These are just a few of the possibilities, and the teacher’s role is to support them all (Dixon, 2008).

2. **Confront your language biases.** It is not possible to work effectively with diverse groups of students unless you genuinely welcome them into the classroom community, treat them and their families with respect and kindness, and advocate for their needs (Houck, 2005; Parker & Pardini, 2006). As teachers, we must be aware of our language biases (Bunten, 2010). The daily routines, traditions, and expectations for school of children and families from the nonmajority culture often can be a source of surprise to white, middle-class teachers (Baghban, 2007a). Therefore, teachers need to be open-minded and willing to learn from others.

3. **Strive to learn about and understand language differences.** There is a difference between behaviors that occur naturally during second-language acquisition and those that are indicative of learning problems. Without knowledge of such differences, teachers can misdiagnose young children as having learning disabilities and incorrectly place them in special education programs (Huennekens & Xu, 2010). Approach language differences positively rather than viewing them as problems or sources of inconvenience (Gregory, Long & Volk, 2008; Schmidt & Lazar, 2011).

4. **Embrace different methods of communication.** One important responsibility of teachers is to accept children’s efforts to communicate; every child’s language has to be valued and respected. A group of kindergarten children, for instance, was delighted to discover that they can use gestures to communicate a simple message: “I (point to self) want (extend arms forward, palms up, and bring hands up toward chest in a grasping gesture) cookies (do the motion of cutting out a cookie with a cookie cutter, using the left hand to represent the dough).” Teaching children some American Sign Language, allowing them to try out communicating with a picture board, and having them type messages are all ways to build children’s awareness and acceptance of alternative forms of communication. Do not assume that “everyone” has access to and uses the Internet. Many children are being raised by grandparents who may prefer more traditional forms of communication, and the cost of hardware and monthly fees can be prohibitive.

5. **Create a language-rich environment that gives students a chance to engage in meaningful activities.** Evaluate the classroom environment to make certain that books, supplies, postings, newsletters, and equipment convey positive messages about language diversity and disabilities. Provide models of good English language use as well as of the languages spoken at home by children and their families. Allocate time for peer interaction. Children’s language when engaged in play with peers tends to be varied, complex, and sophisticated. Therefore, it is important to give children a chance to engage in spontaneous and natural conversations.

6. **Develop a family-friendly program.** Establish a schoolwide support group of teachers, staff, families, and community members that meets regularly and frequently to promote the goal of effective programs for students with different languages
and language abilities. Approach families as knowledgeable and capable of making important contributions to your understandings of their children and cultures (Allen et al., 2002; Sandoval-Taylor, 2005).

7. Use a multifaceted approach to assessment. Combine different types of assessments—particularly observations of the child during play and in informal conversation with peers—to get a well-rounded picture of each child’s language capabilities.

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**Web 2.0 Teacher Tools for Working with Diverse Learners**

**Babylon 9**

www.translation.babylon.com/

This is a free trial version of this top-rated translation software; for $120.00, users can get a more sophisticated version that translates over 24 languages. Check to see if your school has this resource available.

**Defining Diversity**

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/

HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=286&id=2345

Teachers can use the child-friendly material on this site to better understand diversity issues and explore them with children.

**e-TouchEnglishLearning Lite**

This app includes 31 categories of words—nouns, verbs, adjectives, and so on. Just by touching the picture, children can hear a native English speaker pronouncing each word; they also can listen to sentences. Use this site to provide individualized practice for children.

**Google Translate**

translate.google.com

Make parents and families aware of this free resource that they can access readily with a home computer, or use it yourself to translate picture book texts for a child or communicate with families.

**Instant Multilanguage Translator**

www.freetranslation.com

Use this free translator to convert your messages to families into languages that they can understand; have a native speaker with proficiency in the language check it first to make sure that it reads well.

**Proloquo2Go**

Children who cannot speak and already have the Proloquo device can use this app to serve as a talking word processor, to listen to selections read aloud, or even to read and get help with the pronunciation of foreign languages.

**Smart Apps for Kids**

www.smartappsforkids.com

Teachers can consult this site regularly to see the best free app of the day, the top 100 free apps, the Editor’s top 10 apps, Readers’ top 10 apps, and more. It also features apps categorized by the age of the child—toddler, preschool, or primary.

**Spanish Dictionary**

www.spanishdict.com

This site translates material from English to Spanish, has interactive flash cards, and includes an extensive dictionary. Families and teachers can use this site to hear native speakers pronounce words in Spanish, practice and test their recall of vocabulary, and watch instructional videos.

**Teaching Tips for Working with ELLs**

www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/uploads/17/Accellerate4_2.pdf

This website of the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition offers many practical ideas on teaching young ELLs that are supported by research.
Classroom Activities to Support Diverse Language Learners

I Can . . .  Highlight children’s achievements beyond English on a bulletin board. For example, abilities such as “I can count to 10 in English and Spanish,” “I can say please and thank you in Farsi, Chinese, and Hmong,” “I can write your name in Arabic,” and “I can teach you some sign language” all encourage children to seek out the skills of their classmates so that they can contribute to the display. Many different types of texts produced by children can be a way to communicate with families as well (Lee, 2006). For example, a kindergarten class was studying pairs of opposites, so children drew on and labeled one half of the page, while their families drew on and labeled the other. One grandfather sent back a humorous self-portrait labeled with “my nose is long” in response to his grandson’s drawing of “my hair is short.”

Let Children See Themselves in Books  Picture books by Ann Morris (Loving; Shoes, Shoes, Shoes; and Hats, Hats, Hats) celebrate the universal as well as the particular. Likewise, books about food by Norah Dooley (Everybody Cooks Rice, Everybody Brings Noodles, and Everybody Serves Soup) show the many variations of these items. Activities that are familiar, yet somewhat different, help children to be more accepting of the differences they encounter. Book series such as those by Mary Lankford (Hopscotch around the World, Dominoes around the World, Birthdays around the World, Mazes around the World, and Jacks around the World), Beatrice Hollyer (Wake Up, World! A Day in the Life of Children around the World and Let’s Eat: What Children Eat around the World), and Edith Baer (This Is the Way We Go to School and This Is the Way We Eat Our Lunch) are sure to start discussions.

Our Names For  There are a surprising number of names used to refer to mothers, fathers, siblings, and other family members. For example, grandparents might be called abuela, papa, mawmaw, grandpa, dadima, grandpap, pap, poppi, papap, and so forth. Talk with children about the different names they have heard or used. Emphasize that those differing from their own are not strange; rather, they are a reflection of that family’s traditions, culture, and language. The children’s book Our Grandparents: A Global Album (Ajmera, Kinkade, & Pon, 2010) is a good introduction to this concept because it translates the words grandma and grandpa into 19 different languages. The book also supplies reasons that children love their grandparents, such as “Our grandparents love us. They give the biggest hugs and hold our hands. Even when we speak softly, they listen. They encourage us.” Have the children write their reasons for loving particular family members and create picture books to give to these family members as gifts.

Text Translation  Refer to Web 2.0: Teacher Tools for Working with Diverse Learners in this chapter, pages xxx–xxx. Type the text of a favorite children’s book as indicated on screen, page by page, and number the pages accordingly. After
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the book has been translated, ask a volunteer with proficiency in the child’s first language to proof it for errors. Make a copy of the book, paste the translated text below the English, and give it to the child to facilitate following the story as the book is read.

Job Descriptions Have children think about the classroom duties that need to be performed and the skill set best matched to each role. For example, what abilities are important in tending to classroom pets? How about plants? What about line leader? Story editor? Meet with small groups of children to develop job descriptions for each responsibility.

Seek Out Multicultural Concept Books Alphabet books such as the African *Ashanti to Zulu* (Musgrove, 1992), the British *The Queen’s Progress: An Elizabethan Alphabet* (Mannis, 2005), the African American *K Is for Kwanzaa* (Ford, 2003), the Native American *Many Nations: An Alphabet of Native America* (Bruchac, 2004), and two in both Spanish and English, *Gathering the Sun/Cosecha de Sol: An Alphabet in Spanish and English* (Ada, 2001) and *F Is for Fiesta* (Elya, 2006), encourage children to think beyond their own experiences. Likewise, counting books that expand children’s experiences beyond their immediate environment such as *We All Went on Safari: A Counting Journey through Tanzania* (Krebs, 2004) introduce children to cultures beyond their own. *Mung, Mung: A Fold Out Book of Animal Sounds* (Park, 2004) introduces children to the different ways that animal sounds are interpreted by various cultures.

Proverbs That Teach Older students or children who have high verbal/linguistic intelligence will find this to be a challenging task. Ask them to interview older family members and collect proverbs, adages, sayings, or (as in Spanish) *dichos*. For example, “Don’t cry over spilled milk,” “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket,” or “The early bird gets the worm.” After they have discussed and understood the meanings of the expressions with their family members, have them illustrate each saying, and make their illustrations into a big book or e-book to share with families at conference time. For websites devoted to proverbs throughout the world, see Proverbs by Country of Origin (www.famous-quotations.com/asp/origins.asp), Proverbs from 300 Countries and Cultures (http://creativeproverbs.com), or CogWeb’s Proverb Resources (http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Discourse/Proverbs/index.html).

Which Traditions? As Baghban (2007a) points out, teachers cannot assume families that immigrate to the United States observe all of the traditions of their culture. So a family from Mexico may be familiar with but not necessarily participate in the festivities that are depicted in *Clatter Bash! A Day of the Dead Celebration* (Keep, 2008). On the other hand, a family may elect to make some of the mainstream culture’s traditions a new part of their family’s traditions, such as having a birthday cake or celebrating the 4th of July with a picnic. Instead of assuming that you know, ask the child if and how traditions are observed. Put yourself in the role of learner.
 Apps and Sites for Children in Multiple Languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>123 Color HD</td>
<td>(Ages 3 to 7)</td>
<td>In this app, children use a color palette and the tip of their finger to color a picture; as this is done, the name of the picture that was colored is spoken in the language selected. (The basic version includes English, Spanish, and German; the premium edition adds French, Hebrew, and Russian.) Numbers, letters (upper/lowercase), colors, sound effects, and songs are included. A child who speaks some English can work with a partner who is learning English to teach one another basic vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chillola</td>
<td>(All ages)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.chillola.com/">www.chillola.com/</a> At this site, children can learn English, Spanish, French, German, and Italian. English words are arranged in categories, and there are resources for parents and teachers and a gallery of children’s work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Words: Spanish</td>
<td>(Ages 2 to 5)</td>
<td>This inexpensive app teaches toddlers and preschoolers over 100 common words describing colors, animals, shapes, vehicles, and household items in Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids to Kids International</td>
<td>(All ages)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ktki.org/">www.ktki.org/</a> Children can read stories created by other children around the country as well as contribute their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Red Hen</td>
<td>(Ages 2 to 8)</td>
<td>In this Kidztory version, the familiar folktale becomes an animated, interactive story presented in three different languages—English, Spanish, and Cantonese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monster’s Socks</td>
<td>(Ages 5 to 8)</td>
<td>This multilingual app is a story about a not-so-scary monster who loses his socks and goes on an adventure to locate them. The text can be narrated in English, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Turkish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picturebook</td>
<td>(Ages 5 to 8)</td>
<td>In this app for the iPad, children can use the interactive pictures in English and Spanish that are supplied or download original pictures to create characters and narrate a simple story. To see how it works, watch the video “Bear and Bear Make a Story” at <a href="http://bit.ly/picturebookAppVid">http://bit.ly/picturebookAppVid</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech with Milo</td>
<td>(Ages 2 to 7)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.speechwithmilo.com/">www.speechwithmilo.com/</a> With this app for iPads and iPhones, Milo the mouse teaches Spanish verbs and prepositions, sequence, and storytelling through animations and sound. It is designed for young children with some knowledge of Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddler Flashcards</td>
<td>(Ages 2 to 5)</td>
<td>This app supplies the names of common things—such as numbers, letters, colors, shapes, animals, and foods—in Spanish, French, or Chinese, in addition to English.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

As you consider your role in working with diverse language learners, keep in mind what Boyer (1996) referred to as the “centrality of language”:

We have this wonderful capacity to communicate with one another, using the most intricate systems of symbols. One of the most critical responsibilities of the elementary school is to help children lay the best possible foundation for a deeper understanding of the symbols of words and numbers and the arts that together make up language. (p. 6)

Research & Report
Visit a school's website, and search for information about the students' performance on tests of reading. Then use your college library or search engine to consult the publication Quality Counts, Education Week's annual report (or access it via the free website at www.edweek.org/). This group “grades” every state on various quality indicators. How does your home state compare with others?

Research-Based Literacy Strategies

Story Retelling Using Technology

After children are familiar with a story, they can retell it in their own words. Research suggests that story retelling is particularly effective with children who come from cultures with rich oral traditions (Au, 1993; Mason & Au, 1998). Inviting children to retell is an open-ended activity that allows for differentiation; children's versions of the story can range from simple to complex and therefore adjust to their developmental levels (Riley & Burrell, 2007; Sadik, 2008). Retelling is a good test of a child's memory, story comprehension, and attention to plot. Stories on CD-ROMs (see Shamir & Korat, 2006, for selection guidelines) are an avenue for retelling (Pearman, 2008); so are teacher-made electronic books (Rhodes & Milby, 2007). An online source for award-winning international books in various languages is http://en.childrenslibrary.org. Word-processing programs can also be used to generate computer images that stimulate children's imaginations and invite them to retell stories as well as build on the stories produced by peers. A worksheet to accompany retellings is posted at www.reallygoodstuff.com/pdfs/136442.pdf, and a scoring rubric to use with older students is available at www.louisianavoices.org/unit5/edu_unit5w_story_retelling.html.

Books for Children with Low Book Interest

Parents and families sometimes report that their young children are disinterested in picture books. One way of bridging the gap between playing with toys and reading books is to choose picture books that invite participation, such as print copies of books with flaps to lift, parts that move, cutouts to peer through, and textures to touch. For example, the book Tuck Me In! (Hacohen & Scharschmidt, 2010) has pages that are cut out to look like blankets so the child can participate by tucking in each of the story characters. Authors who have published several of these types of books are David Carter, Eric Hill, Steve Jenkins, Dorothy Kundhardt, Chuck Murphy, Jan Pienkowski, and Robert Sabuda. Some titles suitable for toddlers and preschoolers are Dear Zoo (Campbell, 2007), Open the Barn Door (Santoro, 1993), Pat the Bunny (Kundhardt, 1994), Ten Bright Eyes (Hindley, 1998), How Many Bugs in a Box? (Carter, 2006), and
Peek-a Who? (Laden, 2000). For kindergarten /primary children, try ABC 3-D (Bataille, 2008), Gallop (Seeder, 2007), Doors (Munro, 2004), and Tails (Van Fleet, 2003). Kaderavek and Justice (2005) found that such books generated longer sentences and more questions from children during in-home readings of storybooks. The opportunity to manipulate books offers ELLs a chance to label not only pictures but also their actions while operating the book. In addition, interactive books typically have simple texts and often are predictable—with repeated phrases, rhymes, verses, or questions—and this supports children with language difficulties. Books based on familiar folktales or songs provide another source of support for children with language delays or disorders.

Dolch Sight Word List
Approximately 50–75 percent of the words used in everyday reading are called “sight words” because readers are expected to quickly identify these words and their meanings (Smith, 2006). The Dolch sight word list consists of 250 sight words that often are used on spelling lists, flash cards, and various tests of knowledge of the English language (Liebert, 1991). It takes many, many repetitions of these words in order for them to become part of a sight word vocabulary, particularly for children with attention deficits and language disorders/delays. Working with the Dolch list over time can support ELLs as they build a larger sight word vocabulary in their visual memory. Children who are advanced in language can master the Dolch sight word list at a rapid pace as a way to increase their reading fluency. Activities to practice the words are posted at http://reading.indiana.edu/ieo/bibs/dolchwordlist.html. Visit www.mrsperkins.com/dolch.htm to download Dolch lists suitable for different grade levels, in different formats (e.g., Word, pdf, worksheets, computer software). There are many different sight word apps available, such as Ace Writer for the iPad.

Focus on The International Children’s Digital Library

**Courtesy of Rae Ann Hirsh**

The International Children’s Digital Library (ICDL) houses over 4,400 digital books in 54 languages representing 64 countries with applications for the iPhone and iPad. The library can be accessed through the ICDL tablet app or on the Internet at www.childrenslibrary.org. The library offers teachers opportunities to access digital books for ELLs in the children’s native languages. Using native language books improves young ELLs’ reading ability, increases their confidence, and validates their native cultures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Literacy</th>
<th>Beginning Readers</th>
<th>Independent Readers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ICDL can be accessed on digital tablets to provide young ELLs and their families access to stories in their native languages.</td>
<td>Students can access stories on the ICDL and practice reading in their native languages.</td>
<td>Students can access the ICDL, find stories in their native languages, and share the stories with other children. Intermediate students can also find stories in languages they are learning in school to practice, read, and translate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Is a Picture Book That Celebrates Diversity?

Part of the appeal of children’s literature is identification with the traditional story elements of characters, settings, plot, and theme. Where nonfiction is concerned, books about other cultures, ethnic groups, and geographic regions build interest and inform the reader beyond his or her immediate experience. For these reasons, children’s books that portray diversity are an essential part of any early childhood program. Some guidelines for choosing and reasons for using multicultural, multiethnic, and international literature are found in the following questions:

**Accuracy**
- Does the information in both text and illustrations accurately depict the culture?
- Is the information in stories with contemporary settings up-to-date?

**Portrayal of Characters**
- Are the characters portrayed as unique individuals rather than stereotyped representatives of a culture?
- Is the language spoken by the characters accurate and appropriate to their backgrounds and the social situation in which the action takes place?
- Do the characters have names that are authentic within their cultures?
- Are the characters’ lives enriched and guided by their cultural backgrounds?
- Do the characters demonstrate the ability to be leaders, to solve problems, to take the initiative?

**Language**
- Is the text free of words and images that are demeaning and offensive?

**Perspective**
- Is cultural diversity viewed as an asset?
- Does the book make it clear that it is not necessary to give up nonmainstream culture in order to be successful?
- Are characters from diverse cultures viewed as part of American society rather than as outsiders?

**Illustrations**
- Are the images culturally accurate? Do they avoid stereotypes and caricatures?
- Do the illustrations show a variety of physical features among members of a group?
- Do the illustrations present specific rather than generic aspects of the culture?

**Overall Effect**
- Does the book contribute to the self-esteem of members of the culture portrayed?
- Does the book inform and enlighten members of other cultural groups who read the book? Can they relate to the characters in the book?
- Does the story invite multiple interpretations and avoid preaching a message?
- Is the book worthy of repeated rereading and extended conversations about it?

Sources: Glazer & Giorgis, 2008; McName & Mercurio, 2007; Norton, 2008.

**How to Use Children’s Books about Diversity**
- Culturally diverse literature needs to be presented throughout the school year, not governed by the calendar.
- Rather than singling out books about diversity, try grouping them with other related books.
- Strive to pronounce words in other languages accurately. Ask a native speaker of the language to assist you in pronouncing words and phrases.
- When reading books that are written in dialect, practice the dialect until you know it, or do not attempt to read it that way.
- Be specific when referring to stories, authors, and illustrators.
- Invite children to participate in elaborating on and contributing to the group’s understanding of the elements within the book.
- Maintain good records of what you have read so that you can achieve a balance of topics.
Print Resources for Multicultural Books


Internet Sources

Celebrating Cultural Diversity through Children’s Literature

www.multiculturalchildrenslit.com

Children’s Books Online: The Rosetta Project Library

www.childrensbooksonline.org/library.htm

Children’s Literature Reviews

www.childrenslit.com/childrenslit/home.html

International Books Online

http://en.childrenslibrary.org

International Children’s Digital Library

www.icdlbooks.org

Oprah’s List

www.oprah.com/packages/kid-reading-list.html
The coding below refers to the age groups, generally speaking, that would be suitable for listening to and discussing the book. This system will be used throughout the book for this feature. Variables other than age, such as developmental level, language proficiency, and individual interests, should be taken into consideration as well. Always take the time to read the book first so that you can decide if it would work well with a group of children. 

- **Toddlers** (ages 1–2)
- **Preschool** (ages 3–5)
- **Kindergarten** (ages 5–6)
- **1st grade** (ages 6–7)
- **2nd grade** (ages 7–8)
- **3rd grade** (ages 8–9)


This book and DVD set provides the English narration and an American Sign Language version. Children can learn several of the signs by using the vocabulary section of the recording and can learn more about Deaf Culture.

**Akin, S. (2010).** *Three scoops and a fig.* Atlanta, GA: Peachtree.

A child tries to help out in the family’s Italian restaurant but makes mistakes. Later on, however, she redeems herself by contributing to the celebration for her grandparents. Invite children to discuss how they were excluded because they were “too little.”


The message that all living things are unique is communicated against a wintry backdrop in this lovely, poetic book about celebrating differences.


An entertaining story that talks about the things children can relate to like messy hair and bad breath to show how we need to love ourselves no matter what and see what is really important in a person.

After sharing the book, children can talk about the things that make a person likeable.


This book reminds us that although we have things in common, it is our individual qualities that make us special. Children could create self-portraits as a follow-up to this book.


A boy reflects on the things that make his neighborhood special as his older sister prepares for her quinceañera (fifteenth birthday).

**Choung, E. (2008).** *Minji’s salon.* La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller.

A South Korean girl pretends, with her dog as a customer, to have a salon just like the one her mother visits. Use this book to inspire dramatic play themes from children’s neighborhoods.


A multicultural perspective on the many ways that the golden rule is promoted throughout the world.


This book communicates the message that people can see the same thing very differently as the main character uses labels to describe what he sees versus what others in his class see in artwork.


Using distinctive illustrations, this book focuses on the many similarities of children who come from very different places. Students can make a simple graph using cards with their names to see what they have in common with their classmates—shared interests, pets, physical characteristics, and so forth.
Chapter 1 • Appreciating Diversity and Educating the Young English Language Learner


This multiple-award-winning, interactive book uses artwork, stories, and music to celebrate diversity. It allows children to appreciate their differences yet see what brings us all together. (K/1st/2nd)


This Caldecott Award–winning book depicts a friendly young girl who is eager to greet people from different cultures in her diverse neighborhood using their native languages. Afterward, the children could contribute ideas about all of the different ways of greeting other people in English and in other languages that they know. (K/1st/2nd)


This book shows children how to say the word *peace* in 22 different languages. Teachers can ask what peace means to them and how they will express it to others. (P/K/1st/2nd)


Even though people may live in very different geographic regions with different climates and cultures, everyone experiences a day that progresses from dawn to dusk. After sharing the story, have children construct a class book to which each child contributes two pages. One page has a light background for dawn; the other page has a dark background to represent dusk. Children can draw, on the light page, what they do early in the morning and, on the dark page, what they do before going to sleep. (K/1st/2nd)


This book explains the customs and traditions associated with this Chinese festival. Have children compare it to other harvest celebrations throughout the world using a graphic organizer.


Two Latino children awaken to find their father singing a Spanish song and their mother dancing around to the music. The book includes many Spanish phrases and names of foods.


A diversity song from the PBS show *Sesame Street*. (All ages)


Photos from George Ancona depict celebrations throughout the world. Ask children to share their family’s traditions. (K/1st/2nd/3rd)


A young boy and his mother make Indian flat bread, chapatti, in this story about following the lead of a more experienced cook within the family. (P/K/1st)


Whether a person is silly, serious, big, small, funny, talented, athletic, smart, fun, or pretty, he or she has strengths and talents. (K/1st/2nd)


This book discusses race in terms that a young child can understand. Using skin-tone crayons, children can color themselves and see there are many shades of people. (P/K/1st/2nd)


In this multicultural book, the surprising ways in which books are shared in 13 different countries are illustrated through photographs. Privileged children may be surprised that books are neither abundant nor necessarily housed in brick-and-mortar buildings in many parts of the world. (1st/2nd/3rd)
Who Is the Young English Language Learner?

Teachers need to learn about the language back-
grounds of students by asking questions such as these: What languages are spoken in the com-

munity? In the home? For worship? For school activi-
ties? In which language is a given child’s receptive
language strongest? Expressive language? Is the
child’s first language firmly in place? (Tabors,
2008). Although it is customary to assume that
young ELLs are from families that have left
desperate circumstances to pursue a better quality
of life or that they reside only in urban areas, this
describes only some of the U.S. immigrant popula-
tion. Thus, the 10 million children in the United
States who speak a language other than English
at home can be surprisingly diverse—not only in
terms of their national origins and the amount
of exposure to and practice with the English lan-
guage they’ve amassed but also with respect to
their socioeconomic circumstances and the edu-
cational levels of other family members (Federal
Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics,
2012). Some children have been exposed to Eng-
lish since birth, while others are first introduced
to it when they enter school (Pena & Halle, 2011).

To illustrate just a few frequently overlooked
categories of young ELLs, they may be children of
international adoption who have varying levels of
familiarity with their native language (Meacham,
2007); children whose first language (L1) actually
consists of two languages (e.g., a tribal language
and a national language); economically privileged
children whose parents are employed in inter-
national trade, politics, science, or medicine; or
young children who use one language for worship
and a different language for conversation.

ELLs with Fluency in Their
Native Language

These children will be able to use their mastery
of the L1 as a “scaffold” on which to build their
knowledge of English; therefore, learning English
becomes an additive process, and the ELLs’ L1 is
considered a valuable asset (Gathercole & Thomas,
2009). Strategies for developing vocabulary in
English are essential (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2010).
Effective instruction draws on the sum of ELLs’
experiences in listening, speaking, reading,
and writing as a whole for their literacy growth
(Vandergrift, 2006). The support of teachers,
volunteers, and peers with proficiency in both
languages helps children in making connections
between languages and mastering content across
the curriculum (Parker & Pardini, 2006). Sharing
picture books at home in both L1 and L2 can be
another source of support (Roberts, 2008).

ELLs with Limited Knowledge of L1

These children may not have attended school due
to war, poverty, or geographic isolation and may
need additional time to become accustomed to
school routines and expectations. Because they do
not have proficiency in L1, it has limited value as
a scaffold for learning English. For these children,
begin with the enactive and iconic modes (Bruner,
2004). The enactive mode engages them in actu-
al doing something in order to connect it with
language (e.g., using a spoon to eat soup in com-
bination with the words spoon, eat, and soup).
The iconic mode uses concrete objects (e.g., fruit
or plastic replicas of fruit) or pictorial representations
of objects (e.g., photographs, clip art) to support
vocabulary growth and make the language that is
heard more understandable. Gradually, children
can begin to connect the symbolic mode (e.g., let-
ters, words, numbers, and other abstract symbols)
with the enactive and iconic.

ELLs Who Speak No English at Home

These children do not get practice with English at
home or perhaps in their neighborhoods, so school
may be the only place to practice English. They
may be members of “linguistically isolated house-
holds—homes in which no one has proficiency
in English”—and, as they acquire English profi-
ciency, these children may be called on by parents
to serve as spokespersons or interpreters. Inviting volunteers into the classroom who can speak the children’s L1 can be an important form of support for young ELLs. Offering special classes or workshops to raise parents’ awareness of the importance of supporting children’s learning at home or offering family literacy programs can increase the opportunities for families to learn together (Saracho, 2008a). Providing explicit instruction in vocabulary that supplies definitions of key words (Collins, 2010), using skillful questioning (Walsh, Rose, Sanchez, & Burnham, 2011), and sharing picture books (see ELLs, Chapter ?, pp. xxx–xxx) all are ways to support language learning (Christ & Wang, 2010). For more on working with young ELLs, see Educating Emergent Bilinguals (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010), and visit the National Capital Language Resource Center (www.nclrc.org).

Online Resources for Teaching English Language Learners

www.tpr-world.com/tpr-y2k.html

www.ncela.gwu.edu/resabout/ecell/earlyyears.pdf

English Language Instructional Support for English Language Learners (ODE)
www.ode.state.or.us/cifs/english/ellstandards.pdf

ESL Resources (from Blue Web’n)
www.kn.pachell.com

www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=660789

EverythingESL.net
http://everythingesl.net

Michael Krauss
www.lclark.edu/~krauss

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition
www.ncela.gwu.edu

Online Directory of ESL Resources
www.cal.org/ericcll/ncbe/esldirectory

World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA): A Resource Guide

World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA): CAN DO Descriptors
www.wida.us/standards/CAN_DOs/index.aspx

Print Resources for Teaching English Language Learners


High-quality picture books are a tremendous resource for planning lessons and designing learning activities that are well suited to children’s developmental levels (Dwyer & Neuman, 2008). As a first step, review “10 Quick Ways to Analyze Children’s Books for Racism and Sexism” from the Council for Interracial Books for Children, posted at www.birchlane.davis.ca.us/library/10quick.htm.

Consider the following questions when selecting books for children:

- Does the picture book compare favorably with other picture books of its type?
- Has the picture book received the endorsements of professionals?
- Are the literary elements of plot, theme, character, style, and setting used effectively?
- Do the pictures complement the story?
- Is the story free from ethnic, racial, or sex-role stereotypes?
- Is the picture book developmentally appropriate for the child?
- Do preschoolers respond enthusiastically to the book?
- Is the topic (and the book’s treatment of it) suitable for the young child?
- Does the picture book appeal to the parent or teacher?

Additional evaluation questions consider the illustrations:

- Are the illustrations and text synchronized?
- Does the mood expressed by the artwork (humorous or serious, rollicking or quiet) complement that of the story?
- Are the illustrative details consistent with the text?
- Could a child get a sense of the basic concepts or story sequence by looking just at the pictures?
- Are the illustrations or photographs aesthetically pleasing?
- Is the printing (clarity, form, line, color) of good quality?
- Can children view and re-view the illustrations, each time getting more from them?
- Are the illustrative style and complexity suited to the age level of the intended audience? (Huck, Kiefer, Hepler, & Hickman, 2003)

**Online Lists of Best Books**

American Library Association Notable Books for Children
www.ala.org/booklist/index.html

Award-Winning Links
www.magickeys.com

Award-Winning Picture Books and Recommended Authors/Illustrators
http://childrensbooks.about.com/od/ages610learningtoread/u/new_readers.htm#s3

Bank Street College of Education
www.bkst.edu/bookcom

Best Children’s Books by Age

Children’s Literature Sites
www.col.k12.me.us/teachers/sites.html

Children’s Literature Web Guide
www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown

Classic Picture Books
www.kidsreads.com/lists/pic-classic.asp

http://childrenspicturebooks.info/picture_book_link.htm

International Reading Association “Children’s Choices” and “Teacher’s Choices”
www.reading.org/Resources/Booklists/ChildrensChoices.aspx

www.reading.org/Resources/Booklists/TeachersChoices.aspx

Kirkus Reviews

National Association for the Education of Young Children
www.naeyc.org/families/childrensbooks.asp
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National Education Association (NEA)
www.teachersfirst.com/100books.htm

New York Public Library
http://kids.nypl.org/reading/recommended.cfm

New York Times
www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2008/11/06/books/20081109ILLUSTRATEDBOOKS_index.html

Notable Books for a Global Society (International Reading Association)
www.csulb.edu/org/childrens-lit/proj/nbgs/intro-nbgs.html

Publishers Weekly Children's Bestseller List
www.bookwire.com/AboutB/inside.html

Teachers First
www.teachersfirst.com/100books.cfm
Optimizing Every Child’s Language Growth through Family Literacy

FACT FILE on Families

• The 2012 federal poverty line in the United States for a family of four is a total annual income of $23,050. Extreme poverty is defined as living on less than $2.00 a day after government benefits years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

• Half of Americans are now low income or at the extreme poverty level; that number has doubled in the past 15 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).
• The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2012) reports that 65 percent of children ages 0–17 lived with two married parents, 27 percent with one parent, and 4 percent with no parents. Nearly half of those living with no parents are being raised by grandparents.

• Nearly one-quarter of all children between the ages of 0 and 8 years have at least one immigrant parent. Approximately two-thirds of the immigrant children live in six states: California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey (Golden & Fortuny, 2011).

• The most common languages spoken at home in the United States are, in descending order, English, Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, French, German, Vietnamese, and Korean. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

• When many families in the community speak a particular language, schools are more apt to provide instruction in that language (e.g., Spanish). However, literally hundreds of other languages and dialects are spoken in American homes, and, as a result, most children who do not speak English as their first language get little support (Espinosa, 2008).

• Preschool children from homes where literacy is supported have an estimated 1,000 to 1,700 hours of informal reading and writing encounters before coming to school, while children without such family support have only 25 hours of such experiences during the preschool years (Adams, 1990). National survey data suggest that children from literacy-rich homes are able to recognize letters and perform better in reading (Denton, West, & Walston, 2003).

• Literacy development is greatly influenced by family life (Grieshaber, Shield, Luke, & Macdonald, 2012; Paratore, Cassano & Schickedanz, 2011). Studies have shown that children’s literacy skills are enhanced when their family members read to them at home, model reading to children, make reading and writing materials available at home, and stimulate children to raise and respond to questions (Gillanders & Jiménez, 2004; Hood, Conlon, & Andrews, 2008; Huebner & Payne, 2010).

• More than one-third of children in the United States enter school with significant deficiencies in language, early literacy skills, and motivation to learn that place them at risk for developing long-term reading difficulties (Carter, Chard, & Pool, 2009; Neuman, 2006).

• Families influence literacy development through interpersonal interactions related to literacy, the physical environment and literacy materials in the home, and attitudes toward literacy, which affect emotions and the motivation to become literate (Braunger & Lewis, 2005; Lane & Wright, 2007; Neumann, Hood, & Neumann, 2009; Swick, 2009).

• The Harvard Family Research Project (2010) reports that technology can be used to promote literacy when it is focused on (1) positive parent–child communication, (2) home-school communication, and (3) parent responsibility.

Did any of this information surprise you? If so, what? Why? How will you use this information to become an effective teacher of young children?
What is Family and Community Engagement In Schools?

Traditionally, educators have assumed that it is the parents’ responsibility to attend school functions, such as meetings and performances by children, as well as to volunteer time to perform simple tasks, such as planning games for a party or chaperoning a field trip. Many of these expectations are problematic.

First of all, they tend to exclude nontraditional families and fathers or other male family members (McBride & Rane, 1997; Saracho, 2008a; 2008b). When a child-care center hosts a mother/daughter breakfast, for example, where does that leave the foster child or the child being raised by a single father? Another problem involves holidays. If the only times schools invite volunteers are connected with religious holidays (e.g., a Christmas pageant), where does that leave parents and families who are members of other religious groups? Evidently, some of the traditional activities that continue to be a part of many early childhood programs do more to communicate white, female, middle-class, Christian perspectives than to promote a sense of family participation in schools. It is important for early childhood educators to work to build a sense of community not only in the classroom but also beyond (Knopf & Swick, 2008; Rule & Kyle, 2009; Scully & Howell, 2008).

Without a doubt, parents/families play a significant role in children’s education (McCarthey, 2000; Pena, 2000). Today, members of the extended family—grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, foster families, and others who accept responsibility for the child—are invited to support children’s growth in literacy. The common denominator of such efforts is that everyone who contributes comes away with this clear, consistent message (Cavaretta, 1998): “My work counts. My voice is heard. I’ve made a difference in the lives of these children.” (p. 15)

Parents and families who do not have a strong command of English and who have no one in their household or community who can help them on a regular basis often find it difficult to communicate with school personnel, so teachers must make a special effort to connect with them (Batalova, 2006; Cheatham & Ro, 2011). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), a linguistically isolated household is one in which no person age 14 or over speaks English at least “very well,” and, using that criterion, 12 percent of children are linguistically isolated. As you read about the teachers in the next section, think about what you can do as a teacher to support literacy learning for young children in these circumstances.

Collaboration with Families and Professionals

Linda, a Head Start teacher who works with 4-year-olds, conducts home visits with families. No matter what time she arrives at some homes, the television set is blaring, even if no one is watching. Even if families have an opportunity to eat a meal at the same time, they
do so in silence. Often, the children are shushed to be quiet or even pulled away because they block the screen while adults are watching a talk show, the news, a soap opera, music videos, or some favorite program. She knows that some of her students are missing opportunities to develop language.

Linda decides to address the issue at the first large-group meeting held with parents in the fall. She wants to make parents aware of high-quality children's programs and recordings, to encourage them to limit the amount of TV, and to show them how to use the closed-captioned option so that, where available, families can see the words in English while they are listening in their first language. Next, she enlists the support of a newspaper, a bookstore, the public library, and community college students enrolled in a commercial art course. Linda serves as the content expert, based on her review of the research on the adverse effects of too much television (Erwin & Morton, 2008). Her collaborators provide the financial backing and design the materials that she needs.

With the support of this group, Linda is able to produce a professional-looking packet of materials that includes an attractive informational brochure; a list of books dealing with the topic of “taming the television monster” that includes Fix-It (McPhail, 1984), Mouse TV (Novak, 1994), The Bionic Bunny Show (Brown & Brown, 1984), and The Berenstain Bears and Too Much TV (Berenstain & Berenstain, 1984); and a list of recommended TV programs to support literacy (see Moses, 2009). As a culminating activity, she puts all of the parents' and families' suggestions on alternatives to television watching into a booklet called 100 Things That Are Better for Your Child than Watching Television. Parents and families have included suggestions such as read a book, take a walk, visit a friend, cook together, and play Go Fish. Finally, Linda adds some materials written for families about early literacy that emphasize the importance of literacy activities at home.

Contributions and Consequences

• Contributions of the teacher: What role did the teacher play in taking positive action?
• Contributions of the family: How did families support the project and get involved in it?
• Contributions of other professionals: How did professionals in other fields contribute to addressing the needs of the child and family?
• Consequences of collaboration: How might this story have ended differently if the adults had never reached consensus?

Overview of Parents’ and Families’ Contributions to Early Literacy

Parents and families affect the child not only through heredity but also through the type of language environment they provide in the home. Their attitudes toward education
and aspirations for their children, the language models and literacy materials they supply, and the activities they encourage all make a substantial contribution to children’s language development (Burningham & Dever, 2005; Schaller, Rocha, & Barshinger, 2007; Souto-Manning, 2007). As Comer (1998) observes:

Some families are closed out of the economic mainstream, and they cannot give their children the language experience, the social experience, the confidence that grows out of being able to operate in the society. Their children go to school unable to present themselves in a way that enables people to see their ability or potential. Teachers have lower expectations as a result. And so children lose their skills, their aspirations, and the potentials that were there, and they achieve at a lower level. A child’s intelligence level is not fixed at birth. Young children are “underdeveloped” or “differently developed.” (p. 12)

Four fundamental roles support and promote children’s language development. These roles are initiated in the home and later reinforced in the educational setting (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009). Those parents and families who are able to give their children the best chance at becoming literate have learned to observe children thoughtfully, arrange the environment to support language development, interact with children in ways that advance language growth, and motivate or encourage children’s efforts to master language (Goodman & Goodman, 1979). Figure 2.1 provides an overview of these four roles that parents, families, and community members can fulfill to support children’s literacy growth.

Families play a highly significant role in young children’s language development.
Figure 2.1 Roles for Parents, Families, and Community Members in Early Childhood Literacy Programs

**Audience Members for Literacy Events**
- In this role, parents, families, and community members are appreciative audiences for children’s demonstrations of their emerging literacy abilities. An example would be parents attending a puppet play children have created or family members attending the graduation of parents who have successfully completed their high school diploma equivalency test (General Education Diploma [GED]).

**Classroom Volunteers and Translators**
- In this role, parents, families, and community members with fluency in a child’s first language L1 can assist by providing explanations in L1 or support the child’s efforts to translate the words they want to write or read. For example, the official language of the Philippines is Tagalog. An adult fluent in English and Tagalog could offer invaluable support to a child with Tagalog as L1.

**Volunteers for Literacy Events and Programs**
- In this role, parents, families, and communities give of their time to assist children in becoming literate individuals. For example, adults might volunteer to help children “publish” their stories by typing each child’s dictated story or by helping children to assemble their paper or digital books.

**Literacy Teachers at Home**
- In this role, parents, families, and community members contribute to a child’s education at home. An example would be establishing a bedtime story routine or participating in the bookpack program.

**Paraprofessionals in Support of Language Learning**
- In this role, parents, families, and community members undergo specialized training so that they can take on responsibilities for teaching. For example, they might agree to go through a training program that will enable them to serve as adult literacy tutors to help children’s parents and families acquire workplace literacy.

**Decision Makers on Literacy Issues**
- In this role, parents, families, and community members serve on committees or serve in an advisory capacity. For example, they might be representatives to a committee that deals with censorship issues and responds to complaints about educational materials or serve on a committee to evaluate the reading program.

**Literacy Learners**
- In this role, parents, families, and community members advance their own literacy learning as a way to support children’s literacy learning. They might return to take a class for English second-language learners, take a Saturday workshop on “How to Read to Your Child,” or join a book discussion group.

**Contributors of Literacy Resources**
- In this role, parents, families, and community members donate resources to the program. It might consist of something simple, such as donating books that their children have outgrown or reading and recording a story read aloud. It could also be more involved, such as getting financial support from a local business or writing a proposal to obtain funds from the federal government or a private agency.
Engaging Families as Observers of Children

When parents and families function as observers, they monitor their children's progress, build on their strengths, and help them to meet new challenges in language. For example, in the following transcript of a tape recording of parents interacting with their 29-month-old child, notice how the parents observe what Georgie (short for Georgianna) does and then respond to her needs:

Georgie: I baby. (Singing.) Mary had a little lamb.
Father: Go ahead.
Georgie: How you talk about on it? Huh?
Father: Say what you want to say. (Adults tell her to move closer to microphone.)
Georgie: No. I don’t want to. Hold it this way? Two hands. How Mummy talk? (Pause.) Hi Mama. Hi Mommy. What's my friends' names, huh?
Mother: Debbie, Dana, Kristy, Marty, Michelle, Tammy.
Father (asking Georgie): Who else?
Georgie: And Glen.
Father: And?
Georgie: Who?
Father: How about who lives over here? (Gestures next door.)
Georgie: I don’t know—Heidi.
Mother: What about her baby brother? What's his name?
Georgie: Baby brother.

When families learn to take notice of what children can do, children get the support they need to build confidence and skills as learners of language.

Engaging Families as Environment Arrangers

Parents also contribute to children's growth in literacy by creating a print-rich environment (Schickedanz, 2008). This richness need not come from costly materials; it can include books borrowed from the library, recycled paper, and simple writing implements.

The Morrell family is a good example. They recently returned from a family reunion/camping trip a few hours' drive from their urban home. Four-year-old Carl has been using the snapshots that were taken to identify family members and the activities they shared together. His mother suggests that they make a book about their vacation, and with a little glue and the backs of some recycled greeting cards, they assemble a durable booklet, complete with captions dictated by Carl. Before long, Carl has learned to read the entire book aloud so his father uses the free software VoiceThread to record and share it with family and friends. Carl's parents have provided an environment for literacy.
Engaging Families as Interactors

When parents carry on extended conversations and really listen to what their children have to say, they are functioning as interactors. The following conversation occurred between David (nicknamed Boomer), who is 3 years 8 months old, and his mother as she was cooking dinner. Although this rural Appalachian family’s income falls far below the poverty line, it is clear that Boomer has rich opportunities to develop his oral language skills.

**Boomer:** I’m gonna be like Daddy when I grow up.

**Mother:** How will you be like Daddy?

**Boomer:** Simple, change fur (meaning that he will have body hair) and my hair will be black. My legs will be big, and even my foots will be big.

**Mother:** What are you going to do when you’re a daddy?

**Boomer:** Fix things and play with you when I’m a dad.

**Mother:** What else?

**Boomer:** An’ maybe take a glue gun an’ fix stuff.

**Mother:** Are you going to have kids?

**Boomer:** Yeah.

**Mother:** Boys or girls?

**Boomer:** Oh, simply I’ll play with Steve when I grow up.

**Mother:** You’re going to play with Steve when you grow up like Dad?

**Boomer:** I hate Steve and I like Steve. (Steve is a neighbor who is two years older and has been calling Boomer a “pipsqueak.”)

**Mother:** You hate Steve and you like Steve. Yeah, that’s probably the way it is with a lot of friends, huh. What else are you going to do when you’re a daddy?

**Boomer:** Oh, when I grow up, you’re going to hang on my arm.

As this dialogue illustrates, young children need others who function as interactors. However, parents and families may mistakenly think that, if they cannot direct the child in school-like activities (e.g., quizzing them, buying workbooks or digital study aids), there is little that they can do at home. However, there are many informal ways of encouraging children to think and speak during daily living—while riding in the car, shopping at the store, or visiting an exhibit (see Riedinger, 2012).

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### Engaging Families as Motivators and Encouragers

In their role as motivators and encouragers, parents and teachers recognize children’s functional language needs, stimulate children’s interests, and encourage and respond to children’s efforts to communicate. Marjorie, age 3, is visiting her aunt and an
elderly neighbor. The preschooler looks at the neighbor curiously and then hands
her red Mickey Mouse sunglasses to her aunt and says, “Here, hold these.” After
the aunt obliges by folding the glasses and placing them on her lap, a conversation
follows.

Marjorie: No, not fold, hold.
Aunt: But I am holding them.
Marjorie: No, I wanna hold them like Peg’s.
Aunt: Oh, you mean you want them to hang around your neck, like Peg’s?
Peg: Honey, they’re on a chain. See? (She lifts the collar of her dress while
Marjorie inspects.)
Marjorie: I want one of those so I can hold my sunglasses.

Later, when they leave to go to a discount store, Peg takes Marjorie’s aunt aside, gives
her some money, and says, “Buy Marjorie the gaudiest chain you can find at the dollar
store, and tell her it’s a present from me.”

Teacher Concerns and Basic Strategies

Nancy, a first-grade teacher, had this to say about early literacy:

Because I teach in a wealthy suburban school, people sometimes assume that my job
must be easy. But just because children have all the material things, that doesn’t mean
they don’t have problems. Working with the children of financially successful par-
ents, many of whom are doctors and lawyers, creates a different set of challenges. My
major concern is the pressure that I see on the very young. They are overscheduled,
with some sort of lesson or structured activity almost every night. They sometimes
arrive at school exhausted, and it seems to me that they don’t have much time just
to be kids.

Adults usually pressure children because they are fearful of the highly competi-
tive future children face, are anxious to have their children help with responsibilities,
or want to live through their children and fulfill their own needs for achievement in
particular areas (Hills, 1987). Language learning can put pressure on children in these
ways:

- By emphasizing being the best and competing fiercely with others, such as when a parent says,
  “You’re in the top reading group and you’d better
  stay there.”
- By comparing one child with another, such as when
  a parent says, “He should be reading at third-grade
  level. His brother could read almost anything at
  his age.”

Infants & Toddlers
The very young child may be more reliant on
gestures. Rowe and Goldin-Meadow (2009)
found that 14-month-olds produced 25
meanings through gesture within a 90-minute
session. Their conclusion is that adults need
to attend to gestures just as much as vocaliza-
tions when interacting with toddlers.
• By criticizing and punishing, such as when a parent says, “You should know how to read that word. I want you to sit right there until you remember it.”
• By exposing children to developmentally inappropriate practices at home, such as when a parent says to a kindergartner, “Look, I bought you a second-grade reading workbook at the store. If you do a couple of pages every night, you’ll be ahead of everyone next year.”

High-pressure tactics inhibit children and frequently impede them in becoming more fully literate. If children are afraid to take risks, their progress in literacy will surely be thwarted because language learners need to “experiment freely and try things unashamedly” (Shuy, 1981, p. 107).

Sean, who works with children in the Title I reading support program, expresses another common teacher concern:

Our turnout for parent meetings is usually disappointing. Sometimes, after we have worked hard to offer a program that the parents said they wanted, only two or three people show up. I can’t figure out what to do.

When developing programs, take into consideration the particular characteristics and circumstances of the families being served by the program. Treat parents and other members of children’s families as real people with multiple roles to fulfill rather than defining them only in terms of their relationship with the child in your class (e.g., Chad’s mother, Chelsea’s grandfather).

Create a simple survey so that families can respond anonymously. What are their informational needs? What are their concerns? What services and supports do they need? Might they contribute their time to an activity that would support the program? Which activities do they prefer? Following are important questions to ask parents and families at the beginning of the year during a home visit: What are your hopes for your child this year? How can we help? You might find that they would love to have a hotline to call with their questions about events and services. You might find that they would appreciate a calendar of summer learning activities, lists of recommended picture books, or a workshop on family stories. Figure 2.2 is an example of a program developed by Denise Skibinski and Missy Cessar in response to families’ needs for reading support for their children.

It may not make sense to parents who have little time to spend with their children to leave them with a babysitter and go to school for a meeting. It might make more sense to plan some activities that parents and children can enjoy together. Furthermore, a parent’s or family’s definition of an “expert” on early childhood may differ considerably from your own. Parents may feel that someone who has successfully raised a large number of children is more credible than a person with an advanced degree, for example. So you might get a better response with a panel discussion of parents whose children are successful. Generally speaking, if parents and other family members can see how what they are asked to do will provide direct benefit to the child, they will be more likely to participate enthusiastically.

Educators and families also need to work together to arrive at a consensus about what constitutes a quality education for young children.
January 3, 2013

Dear Parents,

Mark your calendar! Come and join us for an enjoyable and informative hour on January 20, 2013, from 6:30 to 7:30. The evening will involve a review of reading skills that are taught throughout the year in a fun board-game setting called Frog Games. Some of the game concepts include reading comprehension, phonics, vocabulary, synonyms, antonyms, contractions, verb tenses, syllables, and contractions.

The program provides wonderful opportunities for practice, repetition, and a review of literacy skills, all of which are essential in the reading process. Bring your child with you because we are going to demonstrate our new Family Fun-Pack learning games, and there will be time for you and your child to enjoy playing them together. Snacks will be provided, so hop on over to Slippery Rock Area School District (S.R.A.E)!

Sincerely,

Denise Skibinski & Missy Cessar

Please sign the information below and return it by January 14, 2013. Hope to see you there!!

__________ will be attending the Frog Games event
__________ # of people attending
FIGURE 2.2 (Continued)

PARENT INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

Dear Parents,

We would appreciate your taking a few minutes tonight to fill out the survey below about the Frog Family Fun-Packs Learning Games you have been using.

Child’s Name ___________________________ Grade ___

1. Did you enjoy the Family Fun-Packs? Why or why not?
   ☑ Yes! Fun games!

2. Do you think the games reinforce reading skills that are taught throughout the year? Why or why not?
   Yes! I watched Katie use the strategies she has learned to read the cards.

3. If given the opportunity, would you like to check the games out for family use?
   Yes! Katie was very interested in the game. She focused on reading the cards.

4. Have your child write one reading skill that was used when playing the game tonight.

   Sound out letters.

Please write any additional comments or suggestions you would like to share with us below: Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Parent’s Name _________________________ Date 1-20-13

PARENTS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TEACHERS CHILDREN HAVE!
Web 2.0 Teaching Tools: Language Games to Recommend to Families

**ABC Mouse**
www.ABCmouse.com

Family members can record stories that children can listen to over and over again at this top-rated site.

**Family Education**
www.familyeducation.com

A wealth of information for families is available here, but it does contain advertising. Select “School and Learning” and then “Reading and Language Arts” for literacy resources.

**LearningPlanet**
http://childparenting.about.com/

This site features free number and word games such as Sudoku, crossword puzzles, and vocabulary builders for children ages 3 to 10 years.

**Locating Children’s Books**
www.familyreading.org/i-recommended.htm

Parents/families can access appropriate books for their child by browsing through lists of children’s favorite books by age or topic.

**On-the-Go Resources**
www.walearning.com/resources/on-the-go/

This site from Washington Learning Systems, funded by a federal grant, offers free downloadable resources in English and in Spanish for families with young children.

**PBS Kids**
www.pbskids.org

There are many free, engaging games related to children’s favorite public television programs such as *Caillou* for toddlers/young preschoolers and *Between the Lions* for older preschool and primary students.

**Reading as a Family**
www.rif.org

This site from Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) has many resources to support reading at home.

**Reading Rockets**
www.readingrockets.com

Loads of resources for families are available at this site; just click on the “For Parents” section.

Classroom Activities to Support Family Literacy

**Using the Library**  One persistent concern among librarians is that children who have the least access to books and other literacy materials in the home may have families who do not use the resources of the public library (Gerbig, 2009; S. Smith, 2008). Figure 2.3 is a summary of the research on library use by diverse families and recommendations for teachers (Becker, 2012; Blasi, 2005; Lance & Marks, 2008; Margolis, 2001; Martinez, 2008). Work with parents and families of students to address these concerns, and get them library cards so that children have access to these services and resources.
### FIGURE 2.3 Collaborating with Librarians to Support the Home Literacy Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Findings</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
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| Families may be unaware of the range of nonprint materials at the public or school library | - Emphasize the wide range of choices and that librarians will help them locate something matched to the child’s interest and reading level  
- Make it clear to families that print books are not the only material available; DVDs, audio books, and music can be borrowed as well  
- Collaborate with librarians to distribute a one-page brochure about library resources; translate it into other languages  
- Invite the librarian to meet with parent/family groups and to distribute some recommended reading lists for children at various levels  
- Post a developmentally appropriate video that demonstrates interactive reading |
| Families may not know that services and programs are free of charge | - Share information about specific programs that are offered on a regular basis, such as summer reading clubs and toddler or preschool story times  
- Include announcements of special programs in class newsletters, on bulletin boards, and in other forms of home-school communication  
- For families unfamiliar with the concept of a lending library, emphasize the responsibility to borrow and return materials promptly  
- Keep families informed about library services that come to them, such as the bookmobile |
| Families may fear that, if their child destroys or loses material, they will not be able to afford to replace it | - Make the library policies on these matters clear; most libraries absorb some loss  
- Suggest ways that can prevent the loss/damage problem, such as supervising the child’s use of the material and using the drop box to return materials even when the library is closed  
- If families are reluctant to bring borrowed materials into their homes, suggest that they participate in some of the library programs or visit the library |
| Newly immigrated families may be concerned about their immigration status | - Let families know that they can visit the library with their child if they are fearful of supplying personal information in order to get a library card  
- Clarify the library’s responsibility to protect patron confidentiality  
- Make families aware of library services housed in the public schools  
- Build a classroom library and bookpacks that families can borrow |

**Everyday Conversations**  When parents and families want to help their children, they sometimes overlook naturally occurring opportunities for children to listen, watch, and participate in language (Beals, 2001; Galinsky, 2010). Provide parents/families with suggestions on how to make mealtimes the basis for talk about a variety
of topics, including such things as favorite meals and reasons for liking particular food items; vocabulary for utensils, foods, and colors; and how foods were selected, purchased, and prepared.

**Imagination Library**  Provide parents with information about how they can register for a free program sponsored by country singer Dolly Parton called My Imagination Library (Conyers, 2012). This program provides developmentally appropriate books, free of charge, to children and families in the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom. For more information, visit the website at [www.imaginationlibrary.com](http://www.imaginationlibrary.com).

**Limit Television Viewing**  Some children spend an inordinate amount of time watching television. Figure 2.4 offers some advice to families about this.

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**FIGURE 2.4** Advice to Families on Responsible Use of Media and Technology

**Select media and technology carefully**
When choosing technology, consider its appropriateness for your child and other children at that age and stage (Clements & Sarama, 2010). Read expert reviews of apps, sites, software, and other tools before you invest money in purchasing them or take the time to download the free tools. Common Sense Media and the American Library Association are reliable sources. Generally speaking, you will want to avoid sites with lots of pop-up advertising, sites that are not secure, sites with inappropriate content, and apps with loads of bells and whistles and little substance.

**Recognize the importance of interaction**
Avoid using media as a “babysitter” because studies show that it is adult–child dialogue and interaction that make even educational programs effective. Even though a child may enjoy being able to listen to a story over and over again, it is important for discussion to take place—that is what “stretches” the child’s thinking, answers her or his questions, and builds greater understanding. Simply handing the child a smart phone or tablet computer with a game downloaded is unlikely to contribute much to the child’s learning—particularly if he or she gets frustrated by not knowing how to use it or loses interest quickly. Expect to use these tools with the child—especially at first.

**Link with the child’s experience**
Whether it is a picture book, a video, or a television program, relating it to the child’s interests and experiences makes it more memorable. So if a story character goes on a picnic, a comment such as “Remember when we had a picnic at the park with your cousins?” extends the conversation, makes the book sharing more pleasurable, and builds vocabulary. It also can lead to the child’s original book as that family experience is recalled, photos or the child’s drawings are downloaded, and the child supplies oral or written captions for each one. Helping young children to see themselves as illustrators and authors is an important step in supporting literacy.
Think about who/why/what/how

Part of being digitally literate is assessing who created the material, why it was developed, what messages it is sending to your child, and how those messages are being communicated. The best technology tools are developed by those who really understand both the digital environment and young children’s learning. Their goal should be to support development, not the ulterior motive of persuading your child to ask you to buy other things. Think about the messages that are being communicated in the media and how they are delivered. Check out the claims that are made; for example, an app that merely requires children to drag and drop things on the screen is not “promoting creativity”! Rather, it is an electronic assembly task. Likewise, media that promise to “teach children to read” through what amounts to an electronic workbook are providing practice to children who already know how to read, not teaching them. Look for apps, websites, and games that are in synch with your values and actually offer opportunities to complement the child’s real-world learning.

Be a role model

If children see adults working in isolation, surfing aimlessly, remaining sedentary, multitasking with multiple technologies, and being too distracted to give other family members their attention, that example will speak much louder than words (O’Hara, 2010; Rideout, Hamel, & Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006; Wallis, 2010). Model responsible use of media and technology tools (Carlsson-Paige, 2012). Make an effort to designate certain periods of time when no one is “wired in” so that all family members have undivided attention (Gutnick, Robb, Takeuchi, & Kotler, 2011), or, conversely, use digital technology to bring family together, such as a Skype conference call to family in another location.

Recognize the limits of technology and the media

The media and technology are resources and tools, not panaceas. Young children need to amass “real-world” experience before simulations make much sense to them (Zack, Barr, Gerhardstein, Dickerson, & Meltzoff, 2009). If a child is learning to draw and write, for example, the experience of drawing with finger paint and writing with a stick in the wet sand will be extended and enlarged as they later draw or write on a smart phone or tablet device with fingertip or stylus. Above all, don’t expect the simple act of switching on the television, turning on the computer, or buying the latest electronic gadget to solve a complex problem with the child’s listening, speaking, reading, or writing.

Appreciate the family’s contributions to children’s learning

To a considerable extent, young children are “apprenticed” into becoming intelligent, critical consumers of the media and technology tools by learning from their families (Collins & Halverson, 2009). Parents and families sometimes underestimate all of the informal teaching that they actually do within a multimedia household—children learn many important things in informal, out-of-school settings (McPake, Plowman, & Berch-Heyman, 2008; Plowman, McPake, & Stephen, 2008, 2010).
Original Story Tapes  Make children’s homes more “print rich” with wordless picture books. Use an “I do, we do, you do” strategy. First, share a text that you have invented to go along with a simple wordless book. Next, have the class work in small groups with various wordless books to compose a text for each page. Finally, have each child choose one favorite wordless book and dictate or write a text to accompany the illustrations. These can be sent home for children to share, or the illustrations can be scanned and the children’s words and/or texts can be recorded and played on a continuous loop during an open house.

Family Journal  Invite families and children to keep a journal during an everyday activity and share it with the class. Emphasize that it should be a simple activity, such as a family gathering, food preparation, or a walk with a family pet that has humorous quirks. (For more ideas on family journals, see Edwards, McMillon & Turner, 2010, and Harding, 1996.)

Information Board  Create an information board for parents that includes brochures from physicians, nutritionists, counselors, psychologists, and various community service organizations. These resources can be collected at a health fair and/or downloaded and printed from authoritative online sources. Add a calendar of upcoming events in the classroom, school, and community, and post a daily “good news” item. Ask parents/families to suggest other items that would be helpful—they may request a “swap” section for toys, clothes, and baby furniture as well as a lost-and-found section.

Adopt-a-School  Work with local businesses to support school efforts by, for example, providing tips on how adults can promote literacy (perhaps inserted in pay envelopes), donating funds or materials to the school, or volunteering time at literacy events.

Bookworm Program  Seniors, high schoolers, family members, and community members can collect donated books, read aloud, share a talent related to a book theme, help assemble and keep track of bookpacks, staff a toy/book lending library, or talk with children about the books they have read.

Creating with Catalogs  Mail-order catalogs provide a free, colorful, and plentiful supply of pictures that can be used for various purposes that support language. Newman (1996–1997) suggests such activities as creating a picture dictionary, selecting an outfit of clothes suitable for the weather, making a picture shopping list, using catalog pictures to illustrate a story, playing classification games (e.g., sorting pictures by colors, shapes, sizes, or uses), collecting pictures from different seasons or climates, making a collage of pictures of hobbies and activities in other parts of the world, and filling out an order form.

For more strategies to promote communication with diverse families, see Gonzalez-Mena (2009a, 2009b).
## Apps and Sites for Early Literacy Resources

**Clifford’s Be Big with Words**  
*(Ages 4 to 7)*  
This app from Scholastic uses Clifford the Big Red Dog to teach children how to spell 115 different three-letter words.

**Don’t Wet the Bear**  
[www.netrover.com/~jjrose/bear/bearintro.html](http://www.netrover.com/~jjrose/bear/bearintro.html)  
*(Ages 4 to 7)*  
This interactive game is similar to Hangman, except that you throw a bucket of water over a bear. Word lists include Days of the Week, Months of the Year, Color Words, Dolch Action Words, and Number Words 1–16.

**Reading Eggs**  
*(Ages 3 to 8)*  
[http://readingeggs.com/?gclid=COiL1P63vK8CFUfc4Aodt38xlg](http://readingeggs.com/?gclid=COiL1P63vK8CFUfc4Aodt38xlg)  
These online reading games provide interaction for children of all ages. The games, songs, and golden eggs will motivate and encourage reading.

**Spell & Listen Cards**  
*(Ages 3 to 10)*  
Children touch letters to form a word, and, if it is spelled correctly, the app says the word and supplies a definition. Overall, it has 550 words, and children earn a star for each 25 that they complete.

**Super Kids**  
[www.superkids.com/](http://www.superkids.com/)  
This site offers many interactive word games for families to play together, such as Mumbo Jumbo, a sort of e-version of Scrabble.

**Typing Adventure**  
*(Ages 6 to 10)*  
This online typing tutorial gives students a way to increase their typing skills by going on an adventure around the world.

## CONCLUSION

Too often, there is an implicit assumption that the schools have all the knowledge about how to further children’s learning. Actually, educators can learn much from families about a more natural style of learning. There are at least five reasons that homes can be excellent learning environments (Tizard & Hughes, 1984):

1. There is an extensive range of activities within the home as well as various types of excursions from the home.

2. The parent and child share a common life that links past with present and present with future.

3. The interaction is usually one to one.

4. The daily experiences in the home have great personal significance for the child.

5. There is an intense loving, caring, sharing, trusting relationship between the adult and child.

In these activities and in any others you might initiate, remember that the real
challenge for parents/families and teachers is building mutual trust and respect. Parents/families need to appreciate the teacher’s ability to see the child in comparison to other students at the same grade level. The teacher needs to value the ability of the child’s family members to round out his or her view of the child by contributing a perspective on home and family. By blending these two very different viewpoints, we can gain a clear picture of the child and make well-informed decisions that further his or her development.

**Research & Report**

Interview several parents who have something in common (e.g., parents of infants/toddlers, newly immigrated children, children beginning kindergarten). Also invite them to ask your class questions about young children’s language and literacy growth. Then use your text and other resources to formulate answers and present them via a newsletter, brochure, or bulletin board.

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**Research-Based Literacy Strategies**

**Providing Access to Books through Pediatricians**

Children who struggle with reading often have limited access to interesting reading materials (Krashen, 1997, 2001). In a 20-year study of 70,000 cases in 27 countries, children with books at home persisted in their education, on average, three more years than those who did not. Although having a 500-book library in the home was ideal, having as few as 20 books in the home had a significant, positive benefit (Evans, Kelley, Sikora, & Treiman, 2010).

One strategy that has been surprisingly effective is enlisting the support of pediatricians who advise parents/families to share picture books with their young children and who distribute age-appropriate books, free of charge. One of the best known programs is Reach Out and Read (ROR), in which well-child visits to the clinic are used as an opportunity to encourage reading to young children, to distribute developmentally and culturally appropriate books to the families when the child is between 6 months and 5 years of age, and to have volunteers model reading aloud to children in clinic waiting rooms. For this program and others like it, the impact has been remarkable and significant (Weitzman, Roy, Walls, & Tomlin, 2004).

For some English language learners (ELLs), picture books distributed in this way may be among the only English language materials in their homes or the only materials written at their level of understanding. Access to books that the children own, rather than borrow, can promote book sharing and prepare them for literacy experiences at school. To illustrate the impact of programs that involve pediatricians, after low-income Hispanic American families were provided by their pediatricians with appropriate children’s books, easy-to-read suggestions for sharing books with toddlers, and encouragement for reading aloud at home during a well-baby checkup, the families were 10 times more likely to read with children at least three days a week in comparison with parents in a control group (High, LaGasse, Becker, Ahlgren, & Gardner, 2000).

**Training Parents and Families as Reading Partners**

The practice of sharing books at home and at school is a major mechanism for supporting linguistically diverse learners. Teachers should
not assume that parents and families already know how to share books effectively with children (Strickland, 2004). Programs that coach families in ways to read aloud to children have shown positive and significant outcomes (Annett, 2004; Barrett, 2012; Roberts, 2008; Sylva, Scott, Totsika, Erecky-Stevens, & Crook, 2008). Families involved children in more literacy activities after they were taught how to read aloud expressively; ask open-ended, friendly questions; and invite the child to participate (e.g., taking turns reading portions of the text, using echo reading). Some of the materials and activities that were most appreciated by parents were erasable writing boards, parent handbooks, a presentation by a professional storyteller, modeling of read-alouds, literacy games that could be played by the whole family, a zoo visit that led to a language experience story, and group trips to the library (Cook-Cottone, 2004). Other interventions for special groups—such as literacy experiences for children and training for their mothers (DiSanto, 2012), a lunch-hour family literacy program for ELLs offered in the public school (Harper, Platt, & Pelletier, 2011), and a program in which prison inmate mothers make monthly video recordings of themselves reading aloud and send them with the books to their children as a gift (Potok, 2012)—report positive results. Refer to Figure 2.5 for an overview of the interactive reading process that can be used with families. As a class or individual project, make a video that models this process for families.

By providing training and using materials such as those by Seedling Publications (www.seedlingpub.com), parents/families can see their children enjoying books and will be more inclined to make the time to do more reading (Yaden & Paratore, 2002). If parents and families have computer access at home or at the public library, they can find a wealth of resources and e-mail discussion listserves (such as Parenting-L), submit questions to be answered, or read an interactive electronic magazine focused on family literacy at the National Parents’ Information Network (NPIN). NPIN also provides strategies called Keeping Kids Reading and SMART PARENTING On-Line. Other online sources include the Electronic Schoolhouse, Family Village, Parents as Teachers National Center, Parents’ Place, and Family World.

**Building Vocabulary by Reading Aloud**

Although it has been argued that children under the age of 6 months are not ready to attend to a story being read to them (Murkoff, Eisenberg, & Hathaway, 2003), research indicates that, when infants are read to by parents and caregivers, important literacy skills such as book awareness, print awareness, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension are developing (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003; Manning, 2005). In a study involving several hundred parents who documented their 2-year-olds’ vocabularies, the range was enormous. Parents reported that their toddlers knew between 50 and 550 words (Fenson et al., 1994).

One way of building vocabulary in a meaningful context is reading aloud. Justice, Meier, and Walpole (2005) found that kindergartners who had been identified as at risk of academic difficulty were able to learn vocabulary effectively while sharing books. Moreover, the most effective way of accelerating vocabulary was for the adult to elaborate on the words in the story. In fact, the children with the lowest vocabulary made the greatest gains when the adult talked about the new words the children encountered in the book. Figure 2.5 provides an overview of the different levels of talk parents/families can use to support children’s literacy growth based on the research of VanKleeck (2003).
Focus on A Story before Bed

**Contributed by Rae Ann Hirsh**

A Story before Bed (http://www.astorybeforebed.com/) offers a way to produce digitally recorded stories, thereby promoting positive parent–child and home–school communication. A small video of the reader reading is displayed at the top right portion of the screen. Most of the rest of the screen displays the text and pictures of the book.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Prereaders</strong></th>
<th><strong>Emergent Readers</strong></th>
<th><strong>Independent Readers</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Story before Bed allows parents to record themselves reading a favorite story. The story can be played for a child before naptime, during circle time, or during other story times embedded in the program.</td>
<td>In the primary years, children can record themselves reading a story for a family member. A teacher can use the story to assess fluency and have the story e-mailed home to play for other family members.</td>
<td>A Story before Bed can be used in reading buddy programs. Older students can record stories for their younger book buddy partners. Children with proficiency in a language other than English can produce bilingual books.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Links with Literature
Multicultural Bookpacks

What Is a Bookpack?
A bookpack is an assortment of children's books suitable for reading aloud and a selection of accompanying materials in some sort of easily transportable container (e.g., a tote bag, backpack, large plastic bag, or small suitcase). It is circulated to children, parents, and families as a sort of miniature lending library (Cohen, 1997; Creamer & Baker, 2000; Reeves, 1995; Richardson, Miller, Richardson, & Sacks, 2008). The purpose of the bookpacks is to support literacy activities at home and give families access to high-quality picture books. Bookpacks are designed by teachers to suit the developmental characteristics of children. Topics and activities are matched to particular needs. Bookpacks also give children and families an opportunity to respond to the materials provided by evaluating their home literacy experiences with the bookpacks on various topics or themes.

What Is Included in a Bookpack?
A bookpack should contain the following five items:

1. A note to the parents and children introducing the bookpack. This note should (a) state the bookpack's theme and the purpose of that theme; (b) list ways that this particular theme/bookpack will support children's growth in literacy; (c) be clear, concise, and free of errors; and (d) encourage families to participate in the bookpack project.
2. Books specifically chosen for your students. Include books that represent a range of reading abilities; for example, you might include a wordless book so that the nonreader can use the illustrations to tell a story and an easy reader with controlled vocabulary to support the emergent reader. It is also important to include dual-language books (Sneddon, 2008a, 2008b) to support book sharing by families that do not have English as their first language.
3. An inventory card listing the bookpack's contents. This card will be used to keep track of what each pack contains and revised as the bookpack's contents are further developed.
4. A story prop that children can play with and retell the story. Select toys or invent games that complement the theme and the books you have selected. Ideally, these materials should encourage the child to engage in story play and retell the stories.
5. A collection of children's books and other materials related to the theme. Carefully select additional books that go along with the theme. You may want to collaborate with the school and public libraries to produce these lists. For additional information, see Zeece and Wallace (2009).

You might also consider having materials from home sent to school as a way of communicating; see Hughes and Greenhough (2006) for ideas.

Names to Know
Recommended Books about Families

*A Chair for My Mother* (Anniversary Edition) (Williams, 1984) or the Hmong version, *Ib Lub Røoj Rua Kav Nam* (Williams, 2001); *Families* (Morris, 2000); *In Daddy’s Arms I Am Tall* (Steptoe, 2001); *My Dadima Wears a Sari* (Sheth, 2007); *The Family Book* (Parr, 2003); *What a Family* (Isadora, 2006); *And Tango Makes Three* (Parnell, 2005); *Jin Wu* (Bunting, 2001); *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes* (Lewis, 2000); *Rabbit’s New Baby* (Horse, 2008); *Flying!* (Luthardt, 2009); *Hey Daddy! Animal Fathers and Their Babies* (Batten, 2002); *Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers: A Collection of Family Poems* (Hoberman, 2001); *My Family* (Kincade & Global Fund for Children, 2006); *Your Own Big Bed* (Bergstein, 2008); *Welcome Baby! Baby Rhymes for Baby Times* (Calmenson, 2002); *I Can’t Talk Yet, but When I Do* (Markes, 2003).

### Picture Book Picks: Recently Published Books about Families


In this sequel to *Martha Doesn’t Share*, a personified otter with a pink dress and headband stubbornly refuses to apologize. She soon learns, however, that being nice is an important part of family life. Young children will appreciate the humor of this misguided, naughty character’s antics. (P/K/1st)


A mother uses the activity of making soup to teach her son the importance of loving people for who they are and not what color their skin is. This book could be used to have the children make their own classroom soup, and each of their special character traits (differences) can be used as the ingredients. (K/1st/2nd)


Although from different countries, age and language barriers are overcome by a young girl and her grandfather. (1st/2nd)


This book is a nostalgic look at the bond between grandson and grandfather as the pair returns to visit what once was the family farm and is now a suburban housing development. (P/K/1st)


A child is involved in a traditional family wedding and introduces others to Chinese customs in the process. (K/1st/2nd)


In this true story, twins are very different because Charlie is autistic, while Callie is not. The book presents a touching portrait of one family’s everyday experiences as its members strive to support a young boy with developmental challenges and strengthen their family in the process. (K/1st/2nd/3rd)


A favorite toy that is lost—and thankfully found—builds an even stronger relationship between grandmother and grandchild in this story that celebrates intergenerational bonds. (P/K/1st)


A young child plays with the brilliantly colored fabrics of her mother’s sari in this lovely book about a family from India. (T/P/K)

A power outage in a sweltering city is not so bad after all; it encourages neighbors to go up on the roof, dance, play games, and eat ice cream before it melts. (P/K/1st/2nd)


By working together with Dr. Sato, a scientist, an African community without sufficient food for people and animals grows a solution—the mangrove trees. Use this book to make children aware that not everyone has adequate food supplies. (1st/2nd/3rd)


The theme of this book is that it takes a village to raise a child. A group of animals pitches in when an egg needs tending in order to hatch. (P/K/1st)


Acceptance, friendship, and diversity themes are promoted in this book with a rhyming text. Illustrations show how people with differences continue to have some commonalities. Children can appreciate acceptance by discussing how they are all different but realize that everyone has connections. (K/1st/2nd)

### ELLs

**Internet Resources for Promoting Print Awareness at Home**

Parents who continuously interact with and read to their children enhance their children’s overall language development (Barton, 2004). Using the questions below as a starting point, interview several parents who have something in common (e.g., parents of infants/toddlers, bilingual children, children beginning kindergarten).

**Questions for Parents and Families**

1. How do you usually prefer to be contacted by the school (written messages, telephone calls, or face-to-face conferences)?
2. Have you participated in any of the parent involvement activities at your school (such as conferences, PTA meetings, programs presented by the children, fund-raising activities)? What influenced your decision about whether or not to participate?
3. What support services does your school offer? Are you aware of any programs that are specifically designed to promote early literacy?
4. Is there any item, contact, event, or program that you found particularly helpful or useful? Why did you find it particularly useful or helpful?
5. What suggestions do you have for improving home-school communication and cooperation?
6. What questions do you have about children’s early language development?

Now interview your peers in the class using the following questions:

1. What questions did families have about children’s early language development and literacy growth?
2. What efforts are you making to prepare yourself to work with parents, families, and communities? Have you been involved in any volunteer or service activities where you interacted with parents and families?
3. What goals and expectations do you have for your program in terms of working with families? What supports would you hope to see in place?
4. How are you going about understanding the various ethnic groups, cultural backgrounds, languages, customs, values, ceremonies, and symbols of the children and families in the community?
5. Have you done anything thus far in your studies or work that supports parents/families? What was a source of pride to you as an early childhood educator?
Teachers will also find materials designed specifically for parents and families that offer information on early language development and advice on improving young children’s listening skills to be a valuable resource (Lu, 2000; C. Smith, 2008). National organizations, such as the American Speech–Hearing–Language Association (www.asha.org), the International Reading Association (wwwира.org), and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org) offer free or inexpensive developmental charts, brochures about early literacy topics, and a variety of other resources, some of which have been translated into Spanish. Creating an attractive display of these materials or sending them home so that parents and families with limited resources can access them easily helps to explain and reinforce the work that teachers are doing at school to promote English language learning.

Websites for Parents and Families
The following sites offer authoritative information for parents and families.

- ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication
  - www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec
- Even Start Family Literacy Program
  - www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/CEP
- Family Education Network
  - http://familyeducation.com
- Family Strengthening Resources
  - www.cisnet.or/pubs/facts/webres.html
- For Families!
  - http://families.naeyc.org
- I Am Your Child
  - www.iamyourchild.org
- National Institute for Literacy (NIFL)
  - www.nifl.gov
- National Parent Information Network (NPIN)
  - www npin.org
- No Child Left Behind for Parents
  - www.nochildleftbehind.gov/parents/index.html
- Parenting Site
  - www.parentsoup.com
- Partnership for Family Involvement in Education
  - www.pfie.ed.gov
- The Partnership for Reading
  - www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading

How Do I ...

Conduct Meetings with Families?

Suggestions for a Start-to-School or Back-to-School Night
The purpose of this meeting is for parents/families to (1) see the classrooms where their children will be assigned, (2) get to meet the school staff, (3) learn about the school and the instructional program, and (4) set a positive tone for the remainder of the year. For very young children, you may want to try a “simulated day,” in which parents/families/children arrive together and children take them on a walking tour of what they do at school (Laverick, 2008, 2011).

Create a Friendly Environment
- Invite parents in person, in writing, and on the telephone so that knowing about the meeting does not depend on their proficiency in reading English.

- Provide name tags, and wear one yourself.
- Give family members an opportunity to tour the classroom. Display samples of children’s work, label centers, and create a photo essay of what children have done (or will do) during the year.
- Consider using technology, such as a video of classroom projects or a multimedia/computer presentation.
- Provide a web or map or month-by-month calendar of the curriculum, and make copies of the daily and weekly schedules.

For a Group Meeting
- Open with a sincere welcome for the family members. Mention that you understand how busy they all are and appreciate their willingness to give of their time.
• Present an overview of the daily routine and year-long plans. Consider including some short film clips that capture the essence of what children will be learning in your class.
• Explain general policies and procedures (e.g., child guidance strategies, attendance, assessment practices).
• Prepare a handout, handbook, or brochure on other important information (e.g., contacting parents/families when a child is ill, getting permission for walking field trips). Make certain that the tone of these materials is positive and supportive, and arrange to have them translated if some parents/families would benefit.
• Encourage parents to contact you with any questions or concerns, emphasizing that it is better to contact you early, before a small issue becomes a big one.
• Thank them for attending and end on a positive, caring note that stresses the importance of maintaining open communication and working as a team.

General Speaking Tips
• Present a professional image in terms of your attire, posture, and manners. Be warm and gracious, but do not speak with parents/families in an overly casual and familiar way.
• Have everything set up and arranged (e.g., PowerPoint presentation, handout packets, student work portfolios) well in advance of the event. Practice your presentation several times. Do not read from a script.
• Walk around and meet and greet people before the large-group presentation begins. This will relax you and help your audience feel more connected with you. Try to speak with everyone instead of engaging in an extended conversation with a few familiar faces.
• As you are presenting, draw on all of your best teaching behaviors (e.g., avoid distracting habits, use gestures, project confidence and enthusiasm, make a few comments that let them know you as a person committed to support all children's learning, get in close physical proximity to the audience, speak to people by name, avoid speaking in a monotone). If something unforeseen happens (e.g., the power goes out), just smile and go on.

Holding Parent/Family Conferences
The purpose for parent/family conferences is to give family members a chance to talk specifically about their child's academic progress, behavior, and social relationships with early childhood staff. Communication between families and teachers can be strained for many different reasons. Inexperienced early childhood educators frequently report feeling unprepared to work with parents, particularly if they are not yet parents themselves (Cantin, Plante, Coutu, & Brunson, 2012). Novice early childhood educators may sense that parents/families either lack confidence in them or think that their children are being shortchanged by having an inexperienced teacher. At the same time, some parents/families may feel that, as with medical doctors, teachers have a body of knowledge that is beyond their comprehension and that they should defer to educators where educational matters are concerned—a view that may conflict with educators’ ideas about family involvement (Ciabattari, 2010). As teachers gain experience, there is some research to suggest that they tend to take the role of “advice giver” and cast the parents/families as receivers of this advice (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011). Instead of assuming this role, try to make the conference a true exchange of information because there is so much that teachers can learn about a child from her or his family.

Follow these guidelines:
• Devote time to learning more about the cultural backgrounds of your students. Learn what is considered to be a sign of respect, and make it part of your interaction with families. Make a special effort to reach out to families who have recently immigrated to the culture and may not be familiar with national, state, and local customs, procedures, and policies regarding communication between school personnel and families (Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011; Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011).
• Get children involved in preparing for the conferences by selecting samples of their best work, making displays of their projects, preparing signs, planning the refreshments, and participating directly in the conferences. Explain the reason that parents/families and teachers meet to talk about a child's progress, and give
children an opportunity to ask questions or air concerns about upcoming conferences.

- Prepare parents and families for the conferences by asking them to make lists of anything they want to discuss.
- Prepare your early childhood setting for the event by making it look, sound, and smell inviting. Be certain that every child’s work is displayed prominently. Try to make centers and materials self-explanatory with posters, signs, directions, and explanations.
- When you meet, provide adult-size chairs for the parents/families. Do not position yourself at your desk and put them in child-sized chairs; this can be demeaning.
- Gather data such as your observational notes, individualized education programs (IEPs), student portfolios, attendance records, and progress reports.
- Become thoroughly familiar with the policies and procedures of the school or center, outline your main points, and prepare your responses to the most typical question: How is my child doing in comparison to others?
- Develop a schedule that meets the needs of busy working parents and families, and provides different time options. Collect parents’/families’ first, second, and third time-slot preferences so that a master schedule can be produced. Allow approximately 20 to 30 minutes, on average, for each conference. If you see that a conference is going to take much longer than anticipated, plan a follow-up meeting rather than having a long line of parents and families waiting. Save a difficult conference for a time right before a break or at the end of the day so that you can take additional time if necessary. To minimize interruptions, make and post a sign that reads “Please do not disturb. Conference in progress.”
- Greet family members at the door, and introduce yourself. Do not make assumptions that can backfire, such as assuming that a child has the same last name as parents, assuming that a man with gray hair is the child’s grandfather, or assuming that a teenager is a sister.
- Begin by reviewing the agenda so that the parents/families know what to expect. Remember that everyone is there for the same reason—to support the child. Use the “criticism sandwich”: If you have some difficult information to share, sandwich it in between positive or neutral information so that the conference begins and ends on a positive note. Reassure the families that their children are in good hands.
- Try to be specific in your comments, and avoid educational jargon. Listen closely, accept feelings and attitudes, ask for families’ opinions, and encourage collaboration. Give families ways to help that emphasize “everyday literacy,” or using literacy to get relevant, real-world tasks accomplished.
- Use positive body language (e.g., leaning forward slightly, smiling, nodding). If the parent/family member becomes angry, refrain from defending yourself. Hear the family out, and avoid being judgmental. When the conference closes, recap. Above all, don’t “tell tales out of school” and complain to others about parents and family members. Recognize that information about a child’s progress is confidential and should not be shared with anyone other than the parent or person legally responsible for the child.

Extensions of Meetings and Conferences

- Plan for follow-up. Send an e-mail, write a note, or call family members to thank them for participating. Try to keep the lines of communication open and stay in touch. Keep copies of all correspondence and records of contacts with families. Use both scheduled and opportune times (e.g., when parents pick up a child after school) to continue to build a working relationship. Plan workshops that give families ways to support literacy that are easily integrated into family life, such as cooking together and making a rebus recipe or working on letter identification with magnetic letters on the refrigerator door.
- Orient the families to the next transition. Prepare families for important events in their child’s life, such as starting kindergarten or first grade. You might create a simulated school day for families or work with colleagues to create a tour of the next grade level.
and record it so that children and families can see it even if they cannot attend the meeting.

- Look into family literacy initiatives. These programs offer literacy instruction to families, broadly defined to include parents, caregivers, siblings, and young children. Family literacy programs are founded on the belief that one family member's growth in literacy affects everyone else in the family. A recent meta-analysis suggests that, while the effects of these programs may be small in terms of statistical significance, the programs still have value and require more rigorous evaluation methods (Van Steensel, McElvany, Kurvers, & Herppich, 2011).