



# MANY ROOTS MANY VOICES

Supporting English language learners in every classroom

A practical guide for Ontario educators



# CONTENTS

<b>Getting Started</b>	<b>3</b>
Making a difference in every classroom	4
About <i>Many Roots, Many Voices</i>	4
How to make the most of this guide	5
<b>Tips for the Classroom</b>	<b>7</b>
Begin with essentials: the language of everyday life	8
Build bridges: prior knowledge as a foundation	14
Get them talking: the value of oral language	19
Teach language everywhere: a cross-curricular approach	23
Measure success: monitoring and assessment	32
<b>Tips for the Whole School</b>	<b>35</b>
Put out the welcome mat: the welcoming school	36
Initial assessment: get it right from the start	42
Make connections: parents and the community	44
<b>Digging Deeper</b>	<b>47</b>
Understanding the English language learner	48
References and resources	52

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education's website, at [www.edu.gov.on.ca](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca).





# CONTENTS

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## Getting Started

Making a difference in every classroom	4
About <i>Many Roots, Many Voices</i>	4
How to make the most of this guide	5

# Making a difference in every classroom

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**As I sit here I wonder if you, my teacher, are able to tell when I am sinking in spirit and ready to quit this incredible task. I walked a thousand miles, dear teacher, before I met you. (ESL/ELD student)**

As educators, we share a deep commitment to the success of every student, and, as professionals, we are working to meet the challenges of an increasingly multicultural and multilingual society.

Across Ontario, educators are asking critical questions. Are we serving students effectively? What can we do in our own classrooms to create an environment in which students of varied cultures and languages thrive and grow, academically and personally? How can we deepen our knowledge and expand our professional practice not only to support these valued students, but to celebrate their presence in our classrooms and enrich the learning experience for all students?

*Many Roots, Many Voices* was developed to facilitate and continue this important dialogue and, in particular, to address the most critical question educators are asking themselves as individuals: what can I do right now, in this classroom and in this school, to ensure that not a single student is, as one student put it, “sinking in spirit and ready to quit this incredible task”? In preparing this resource, the Ministry of Education acknowledges the valuable work being done in schools and classrooms across Ontario, and the dedication of teachers throughout the province to creating an inclusive learning environment that supports the success of every student.

## About Many Roots, Many Voices

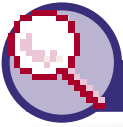
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*Many Roots, Many Voices* is designed to support teachers, principals, and other education professionals at the elementary and secondary levels in working effectively with English language learners. In it, you will find a rich source of practices and strategies that can be put to immediate use in the school and the classroom. You will also find an in-depth exploration of the English language learner, and an annotated list of references and resources for further reading and study.

Parts of this resource document were adapted, with the permission of the publishers, from Coelho (1998, 2004).

## Look for these text features

To make the guide as useful and accessible as possible, the following three categories of information have been singled out for special treatment. Each category is signalled in the guide by an icon, as shown below.



### Insight

Facts, concepts, and suggestions backed by solid research



### Effective practice

Effective instructional strategies that have been shown to achieve positive results



### Try it now!

Practical techniques and activities that you can use immediately in the classroom or school

## How to make the most of this guide

*Many Roots, Many Voices* has been organized in such a way that it can be used as a practical, day-to-day source guide. In order to get the most out of this resource, you may wish to begin by reading “Understanding the English language learner”, which is contained in the “Digging Deeper” section of the booklet. In the “Tips for the Classroom” and “Tips for the Whole School” sections of the booklet, you will find clear and effective techniques you can use to welcome and support English language learners, parents, and the community. As you explore the suggestions, keep in mind that it is important to adapt them to the specific needs of your students, classroom, and school. Finally, you can take advantage of the annotated list of references and resources at the end of this guide to learn more about specific topics and enrich your knowledge and understanding.





# CONTENTS

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## Tips for the Classroom

<b>Begin with essentials: the language of everyday life</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Build bridges: prior knowledge as a foundation</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Get them talking: the value of oral language</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Teach language everywhere: a cross-curricular approach</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Measure success: monitoring and assessment</b>	<b>32</b>

# Begin with essentials: the language of everyday life

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English language learners naturally want to develop a grasp of the language for social, as well as academic, purposes. To achieve that goal, they have to start with the essentials – the language of everyday life, in the community and at school. Through a variety of simple techniques, you can play a powerful role in helping students to add English to their repertoire of languages.

## Keep it simple

The following information deals with supporting students at the beginning stages of English language acquisition who have little or no proficiency in English. These students will generally be supported by their classroom teacher, sometimes with additional support from a resource teacher. These beginning English speakers could be in any grade, in elementary or secondary school.

### HELP THEM TO BEGIN SPEAKING IN ENGLISH

To find their way around a new environment and to begin communicating with their peers, students who are just beginning to speak English need to learn essential phrases such as:

- *My name is . . .*
- *Please repeat that.*
- *I don't understand/speak English.*
- *Where is my period two class?*

Teaching these essentials is a good place to start. At first, the students may understand these expressions only as complete units, not fully understanding the component words. You can accelerate students' understanding of these and other essential expressions by modelling them in the classroom. Associating essential phrases with actions or illustrations, for example, or involving students in role playing, can aid the learning process.

What is important is that [for] these children ... learning English is a necessity not only for becoming socially integrated into the life of the school and the community at large but also for academic success in school and ultimately for economic survival and well-being in adulthood. (Genesee, 1994)

### HELP THEM TO BEGIN READING IN ENGLISH

In addition to essential phrases, beginners need to learn simple words such as those related to food, the human body, clothing, animals, and physical action. As well, they need to know the names of objects in the classroom (*blackboard, desk, bunsen burner*), places in the school (*washroom, cafeteria, office*), and the names and job titles of the adults they interact with. As soon as beginners can recognize and produce these words orally, they can learn to read them.



Try it now!

#### Picture dictionaries

Students who are beginning to learn English, in both elementary and secondary schools, can make picture dictionaries of the words they need to know, devoting a page or two to particular topics, such as classroom furniture, items of clothing, weather, and sports, as well as specific curriculum areas, such as physics, Canadian geography, or music.



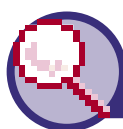
Try it now!

#### Match the word to the object

Label objects in the classroom and point to them, saying each object's name and asking students to repeat the word. Or write the names of objects in the classroom on index cards, and ask students to match the words with the objects.

## HELP THEM TO BEGIN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Some English language learners arrive in the classroom with limited or no experience of the Roman alphabet, and may be unable to recognize individual letters. As well, some may be unfamiliar with the left-to-right direction of written English and English in print. Regardless of age, students need to learn the letters of the alphabet, be able to speak the name of each letter, and begin the process of forming letters in print. You can help by showing students explicitly where to begin and end each letter. You might also help students practise this new learning by copying familiar words and labelling images of common objects.



### Insight

#### The challenge of cursive script

Many languages do not have cursive forms of script. No matter how old they are, beginning English language learners whose first languages do not use the Roman alphabet cannot be expected to recognize, read, or write cursive script. In fact, the transition from working with printed characters to recognizing and using cursive script represents a major transition on the path to full English literacy. You can help by printing rather than using cursive script when writing on a blackboard, putting up notices, or giving students written comments on their work. Because students now use computers to produce their assignments, some English language learners may never learn to produce cursive script. This need not be a cause for concern, unless it interferes with a student's ability to demonstrate learning.

## Be resource rich

Found materials, used creatively and imaginatively, offer all students critical support for learning. Students of all ages who are just beginning to learn English benefit greatly from visual resources and hands-on activities that help them understand new words and concepts in English. The following suggestions are only a few of the ways you can use a wide variety of resources to promote language acquisition.

### PHOTOGRAPHS

Use photographs (for example, take photos of neighbourhood scenes with a digital camera at the grocery store, at the bank, and at the gas station) and have students create photo-essays, collages, stories, or booklets based on the images.

### PRINTED MATERIALS

Use brochures, pamphlets, and posters to help beginners develop vocabulary they need to function in everyday life, and as a basis for talking, reading, and writing about their new country and community.

### FOUND OBJECTS

Use household and found objects (for example, products with expiry dates) to explore descriptive language, to stimulate discussion, and to celebrate cultural diversity.

### MANIPULATIVES

Use manipulatives (such as blocks, counters, tessellation tiles, and rods) to teach the language used for counting, sorting, and patterns.

### IMAGES

Use images from magazines and posters as a springboard for role playing or writing.

### ART MATERIALS

Use art materials and art activities to teach verb forms and prepositions as well as colours and shapes. Have students create drawings, paintings, and sculptures, using a variety of common art supplies, and explain their creations. In addition to describing the colours, shapes, and images chosen, they can practise using various verb forms (tenses as well as singular and plural) – *this is, these are; I chose, I made, I used* – and prepositions – *on, into, under, through*.

### CLOCKS AND WATCHES

Use timepieces to teach the language of time. Digital and analog watches and clocks can be used to teach the English expressions for time.

### TIMETABLES AND SCHEDULES

Use timetables and schedules to teach expressions about time and to introduce routines. Have students extract information from the school timetable, the local municipal garbage collection schedule, television guides, or airline, bus, or rail schedules. These materials offer opportunities for students to practise expressions about time, using statements such as *The French class starts at ...*, *The bus leaves at ...*, and *We need to put the garbage out on ...*

## MAPS

Use maps to teach place names and the language of directions. Maps offer a variety of opportunities for learning and discussion. Working with maps also provides opportunities to expose students to the words for directions and the prepositions associated with them – *north (of)*, *south (of)*. Local maps can be used to practise giving directions: *To get to my house, turn right when you leave the school. Walk along ... until you get to ... Then walk/turn/cross ...*

## MONEY

Use money to teach the names of coins and bills and the language for counting. Have students calculate and give change, using English words. Money can also be a useful prop in role playing.

## ADVERTISING MATERIALS

Use local newspaper ads, flyers, and supermarket inserts to teach basic vocabulary, as well as the language used to compare price and quality and to make simple mathematical calculations. Typical statements might include *The meat costs \$15.50 a kilo* or *Twelve oranges at 90 cents for two comes to a total of ...*

## FORMS

Give students experience in completing a variety of forms. Typical forms include those used by schools to request information (for example, course-change requests, late slips), and application forms for library cards, part-time jobs, and social insurance numbers.

## MODELS

Use a variety of physical models to appeal to the kinesthetic learning styles of many students. In addition to the various kinds of images mentioned above, model animals, vehicles, and a variety of props can be used to help beginners develop basic vocabulary, understand verb forms and prepositions, learn the language of comparison, and develop stories.



## Effective practice

### Keep simple art supplies close at hand

English language learners may need visual aids to demonstrate their knowledge. It's useful for teachers of all subjects and grades to have a variety of materials on hand, so that students can make booklets (about interesting events), posters (displaying new learning), models (3-D displays about chemical elements), and other items that will help them to explain their ideas.



## Try it now!

### Involve students of all ages in using puppets to learn English

Ask older students to create a presentation using puppets for young children in a local preschool class or Kindergarten.

## Build bridges: prior knowledge as a foundation

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Students' first languages are a critical foundation, not only for language learning, but for all learning. You can build on English language learners' language skills, other prior knowledge, and cultural backgrounds to enhance their understanding of English and ease their integration into the mainstream classroom, while increasing all students' awareness of the benefits of cultural diversity.

### Welcome first languages in the classroom!

Students' first languages have an important place alongside English. Encourage English language learners to use their first languages in the classroom, as well as in homework assignments. This will enhance their development of English language proficiency, support their sense of identity and self-confidence, and promote positive attitudes towards language learning among all students, including English speakers. The following are just a few examples of classroom activities which lend themselves to the use of first languages:

- Completing dual-language assignments such as a bilingual advertisement, for example, to attract visitors to a country or region
- Working with same-language partners who discuss a problem and clarify information in the first language before switching to English
- Creating multilingual displays or signs
- Writing first drafts, notes, journal entries, and outlines
- Providing bilingual support for newcomers, such as room partners or cross-grade tutors, who can highlight key concepts you want taught or translated

**By welcoming a student's home language, schools facilitate the flow of knowledge, ideas and feeling between home and school and across languages. (Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu, and Sastri, 2005)**



## Use a dual-language approach

Many everyday classroom activities and assignments can be adapted – and enriched – by allowing students to approach them using more than one language. Inviting students to use their first language as well as English enables them to draw on their strengths, including their existing academic, linguistic, and cultural knowledge. This approach also enriches the class environment by exposing English-speaking students to the advantages of knowing more than one language and of cultural diversity in general. As an added advantage, it may enable parents to become more involved in their children’s education.



*Try it now!*

### Effective dual-language strategies

- Encourage students who are just beginning to learn English to write in their own language (example: initial journal responses).
- Invite English language learners to develop ideas in their first language (example: mind mapping).
- Give English language learners opportunities to work with same-language partners (example: think, pair, share in first language).
- Develop some learning activities that take advantage of the first languages spoken in the class (example: compare numbers in various languages).
- Invite students to produce dual-language assignments (example: create dual-language books).



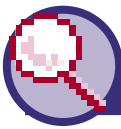
*Effective practice*

### Dual-language resources

You can view samples of student-created, dual-language books at the Dual-Language Showcase on the website of Thornwood Public School (Peel District School Board), at:

<http://thornwood.peelschools.org/dual/index.htm>

**From the teacher's point of view, planning and providing instruction on the basis of children's existing competencies and using experiences and knowledge that are familiar to the learner provides a solid foundation for extending children's skills and knowledge in new directions. From the second language student's point of view, learning on the basis of established skills and known experiences provides a reassuring context in which to acquire new skills and concepts. (Genesee, 1994)**



## Insight

### Why first languages?

Students benefit academically and socially, and their self-esteem is enhanced, when they are encouraged to maintain and develop proficiency in their first language while learning English. Research shows that language skills and conceptual knowledge are generally transferable from one language to another. First languages, therefore, provide a foundation for developing proficiency in additional languages. First languages also help students preserve vital links with their families and cultural backgrounds and a solid sense of their own identity. A strong foundation in their first language helps students:

- develop mental flexibility;
- build problem-solving skills;
- experience a sense of cultural stability and continuity;
- understand their own cultural and family values;
- become aware of the value of cultural diversity and multiple perspectives; and
- expand their career opportunities.

**[There is] ample evidence that, even at a pre-school stage, [English language learners] are anything but blank slates. They bring with them a dizzying array of life experiences which, along with their differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds, make them anything but a homogeneous group. (Handsombe, 1994)**

## Build on prior knowledge

Most English language learners have the skills and knowledge to complete classroom assignments and to engage in some classroom activities in their own language.

It is important for teachers to learn as much as possible about students' existing knowledge, skills, and interests, and to use this information as a foundation for teaching them English and other subjects. For example, you might have students present topics connected to their language, culture, and country of origin:

**Geography:** Have students present a climate graph on their country of origin to use their personal and previous experiences as a basis for information.

**Physical education:** Have students teach the class a game or activity from another country – including key words and phrases related to the game.

**Mathematics:** Allow students to solve problems using previously learned strategies and encourage them to share these with the class.

**English/language arts:** Invite students to read aloud poems in their first language, provide an English translation if possible, demonstrate/explain the significance of the poem within their culture, and analyse the poem using terms and concepts studied in the Language/English curriculum.

**All subject areas:** Ask English language learners and English-speaking students to work together to create dual-language posters or brochures on topics being studied.

**There may be a gap between what the schools expect and what students bring, but that does not mean that these students do not bring anything. They each have a language, a culture, and background experiences. Effective teachers draw on these resources and build new concepts on this strong experiential base. (Freeman & Freeman, 2002)**

## Celebrate diversity

It is important that all students have opportunities to share information about their languages, cultures, and experiences. In this way, they can develop an enriching awareness of both the differences and similarities among their cultures and languages, and all students can experience a sense of belonging.

For example, you might design language-learning activities that enable English language learners to draw on their own experiences, and to talk, read, and write about topics that are important to them. The project “We are all related” described here demonstrates how linguistic and cultural diversity can be used as a foundation for

building students' English language skills. You can adapt this project for students of all ages and varying levels of proficiency in English.



## Effective practice

### We are all related

The students from George T. Cunningham Elementary School in Vancouver were involved in an interdisciplinary project which included role playing, storytelling, reading, writing, and the creation of mixed-media works of art which reflected their cultural roots and family connections.

Before creating their mixed-media work, students spent time talking with elders in their school communities. The illustration below is an example of the published student work.

Copyright: Chad Lambert (from the book *We Are All Related*, p. 24).



TO ME "WE ARE ALL RELATED" MEANS IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT COLOUR WE ARE: WE ARE ALL HUMAN.  
YOU SHOULD ALWAYS BE YOURSELF.



NA SAUB, TA BID DA GA GWAE EH ZHI BI MA DIZ ZIN

## Get them talking: the value of oral language

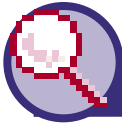
Oral language skills are a critical component of literacy in any language. When you give students frequent opportunities to converse in English, you stimulate the development of listening and speaking skills, give students a broad sense of the English language and its construction, and help English language learners connect with their peers and develop self-confidence.

**It is not an exaggeration to suggest that classroom talk determines whether or not children learn, and their ultimate feelings of self-worth as students. Talk is how education happens! (Gibbons, 2002)**

### Create a supportive environment

English language learners are more likely to participate orally in class and take a positive approach to language acquisition when they are supported by teachers and peers who are sensitive to their needs and bolster their self-confidence. Here are some suggestions for creating a supportive language-learning environment:

- Keep the needs of English language learners in mind when addressing the class and describing concepts and tasks.
- Assign tasks that are appropriate to the student's level of proficiency in English.
- Give English language learners positive feedback on their efforts.
- Purposefully connect English language learners with their peers (for example, make them partners in learning activities; introduce students with common interests to one another).
- Establish a supportive classroom climate in which newcomers' language errors are accepted as a normal part of the language-learning process.
- Engage English language learners (and all students!) in activities that appeal to their interests and that build on their existing knowledge, skills, and backgrounds.



## Insight

### Personal rapport is vital

The most important thing a teacher can do to support an English language learner is to take time to develop rapport. Learn the student's name and how to pronounce it, and greet the student by name at the beginning of each class. Express interest in the student's background and family.

**The most difficult problem to overcome is language. Although in Hong Kong some subjects are taken in English, sometimes when teachers explain to the class they use Cantonese instead of English. Here, everything is taught in English and when teachers speak fast, I cannot understand. Sometimes the teacher makes jokes and students laugh a lot, but I just sit on my seat like a stone. How embarrassed I am. (Hau Yu Wong, a student quoted in Porter, 1991)**



## Effective practice

### Speak so that students understand

- Use simple vocabulary to introduce new concepts.
- Speak clearly and pause often.
- Say the same thing in different ways.
- Avoid or explain idiomatic expressions such as “run that by me again”.
- Use images and objects to illustrate content.
- Use gestures and body language to supplement words.
- Print key words and instructions on the board while saying them aloud.
- Use overheads and charts where appropriate.
- Check frequently to ensure that students understand.
- Give students who are thinking in two languages sufficient time to process any questions you ask.

## Every student can help!

Actively encourage English-speaking students to support the language-learning efforts of newcomers.

- Explain to all students at the beginning of the year that your classroom is a language classroom as well as a place for learning the curriculum.
- Suggest ways students can help English language learners, and model these forms of assistance in your own interactions with newcomers.
- Communicate positive attitudes about language learning. Point out students, teachers, other staff members, and graduates who have succeeded in learning English, and hold them up to students as role models. Reinforce the benefits of being able to speak more than one language.
- Communicate positive attitudes towards newcomers and their cultures. Help all students understand the benefits of diversity and of broadening their horizons through learning about other parts of the world.

## Errors: handle with care!

Making errors is natural when learning a new language. Most English language learners require consistent long-term support to master pronunciation and grammar. Constantly correcting the English language learner may actually limit his or her development, increase anxiety, and discourage participation. You can respond to errors respectfully and appropriately by following these guidelines:

- When students make multiple errors, offer feedback on only one. Give priority to errors that interfere with communication.
- Understand that students may need hundreds of exposures to a particular language construction (for example, the past perfect tense) over a period of years, and in different contexts, before they master it.
- When students are engaged in a complex learning task, they may lose their focus on language and forget a language structure they learned earlier. Keep working on it with them as opportunities arise, until the structure becomes more internalized.



Try it now!

### Model correct usage

Rather than correct a student's language errors directly, respond by *modelling* correct usage. In this example, the teacher models the use of the plural form.

**Teacher:** *How many students are there in our class?*

**Student:** *There are twenty-five **student** in our class.*

**Teacher:** *Yes, that's right, there are twenty-five **students** in our class.*

## The silent period: no cause for alarm

Many English language learners – especially young students – go through an initial silent period. They may say very little, and what they do say may consist of well-established, comfortable English phrases. This period may last for several weeks or months. Keep in mind that, during this period, English language learners are absorbing language at a rapid rate.

Although interaction in the classroom is an important component of English language acquisition, students should not be pushed to speak in English before they are ready. Often, these students will be more comfortable participating in small groups, which offer them a “safe” way to make the transition to full participation in the classroom.

## Encourage partnerships and cooperative learning

Where language acquisition is concerned, there’s safety in *small* numbers. Peer partnerships can be an effective way to provide English language learners with opportunities for classroom talk. By partnering them with a supportive peer, you can ease their integration into the class, help them get to know their classmates, and give them a chance to use English in a non-threatening environment.

In addition to peer partnerships, cooperative learning groups are recommended by many experts as an excellent way to provide English language learners with opportunities to practise their oral skills in English and to receive the kind of feedback that promotes language acquisition. Cooperative learning, which emphasizes the process as well as the product of group work, gives *all* students opportunities to deepen their understanding and to develop their problem-solving skills through purposeful talk, to work effectively with others (from a variety of cultural backgrounds), to develop friendships that otherwise may not happen, and to experience the satisfaction that comes from helping others.



Try it now!

### Oral language practice with a partner

Here are just a few of the many appropriate partnership activities English language learners can engage in with their English-speaking peers:

- Making a sketch map or scale map of the local community
- Discussing key concepts or subject-specific vocabulary
- Labelling objects or equipment in the classroom
- Engaging in play related to new learning
- Telling a story based on a photograph or a newspaper or magazine article



## Teach language everywhere: a cross-curricular approach

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Most English language learners, including beginners – whether they take ESL/ELD programs or not – spend much of their school day in mainstream classrooms, interacting with their English speaking peers and studying the grade-level curriculum. The mainstream classroom offers opportunities for second-language acquisition, social integration, and academic growth that an ESL/ELD classroom alone cannot offer. In fact, it would be counterproductive to keep English language learners apart from the mainstream program while they learn English.

English language learners need to continue their education at the same time as they are learning English. By incorporating language learning into all subjects, you not only give English language learners an equitable opportunity to experience success in school, but also enhance the literacy development of all students.

A language is best acquired when it is used to do something meaningful, such as solving a mathematics word problem, creating a dramatic retelling of a story, planning a class outing, learning how to play a sport, or working on a group project. Well-planned integration also fosters a positive attitude in all students to cultural diversity.

Classroom teachers play a key role in helping English language learners develop proficiency in their new language and succeed in school. The influence of classroom teachers, working in collaboration with ESL/ELD teachers, board resource staff, and others with responsibility for these students, and supported by their school and board administrators, can be significant for these students.

### A visual can be worth a thousand words

*Key visuals* are graphic organizers that provide visual representations of important (key) ideas in a text, lesson, or unit. Examples include charts, Venn diagrams, classification trees, flow charts, story maps, and visual representations of timelines. They are essential tools for reducing the language barrier for English language learners.

You can present key visuals to students as a template, with some of the information filled in to help English language learners understand what is expected of them.

The example that follows shows a chart intended for use in comparing Canada with another country. This kind of comparison activity can be adapted for use in other subject areas and at a variety of grade levels. The chart sets out different categories of information. For English language learners, provide some of the information (you might have given English-speaking students a blank chart with no information filled in), and ask students to gather the missing information from reference books, CD-ROMs, or the Internet. They can gather the information for any other country – their country of origin or any country that interests them – and they may gather some of the information

from classmates who have an expert knowledge of a particular country. This activity presents a good opportunity to pair a newcomer with a student who has a good knowledge of Canada.

<b>CANADA AND ANOTHER COUNTRY: Similar or different?</b>		
	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Other country</b>
<b>Climate</b>	Temperate Colder in the north	
<b>Oceans</b>	Arctic Pacific	
<b>Lakes and rivers</b>	Great Lakes	
<b>Mountains</b>		
<b>Islands</b>	Vancouver Island	
<b>Resources and products</b>		

The completed key visual can then be used to help students develop specific vocabulary or language patterns while learning content. For example, the model sentences below are created by the teacher, using information from the students' completed charts. The model sentences show how to use specific words and phrases to make statements of comparison and contrast. Students then follow the models to create their own sentences about their own charts.

Using information from your chart, write some sentences comparing Canada and the other country. Use some of the words and sentence patterns shown below.	
<b>SIMILARITIES</b>	
both	Canada and China <b>both produce wheat</b> . Canada and China <b>are both large countries</b> . <b>Both</b> Canada and China <b>are large countries</b> .
too	Poland produces steel, <b>and Canada does too</b> .
so	Poland produces steel, <b>and so does Canada</b> .
neither	Poland <b>doesn't</b> produce bananas, <b>and neither does Canada</b> .
neither ... nor ...	<b>Neither</b> Canada <b>nor</b> Poland <b>produces</b> bananas.
<b>DIFFERENCES</b>	
... than ...	Jamaica is much <b>smaller than</b> Canada.
not as ... as ...	The United States is <b>not as big as</b> Canada.
but	Canada has a lot of lakes and rivers, <b>but Somalia doesn't</b> .
whereas	India produces a lot of rice, <b>whereas Canada produces</b> a lot of wheat.

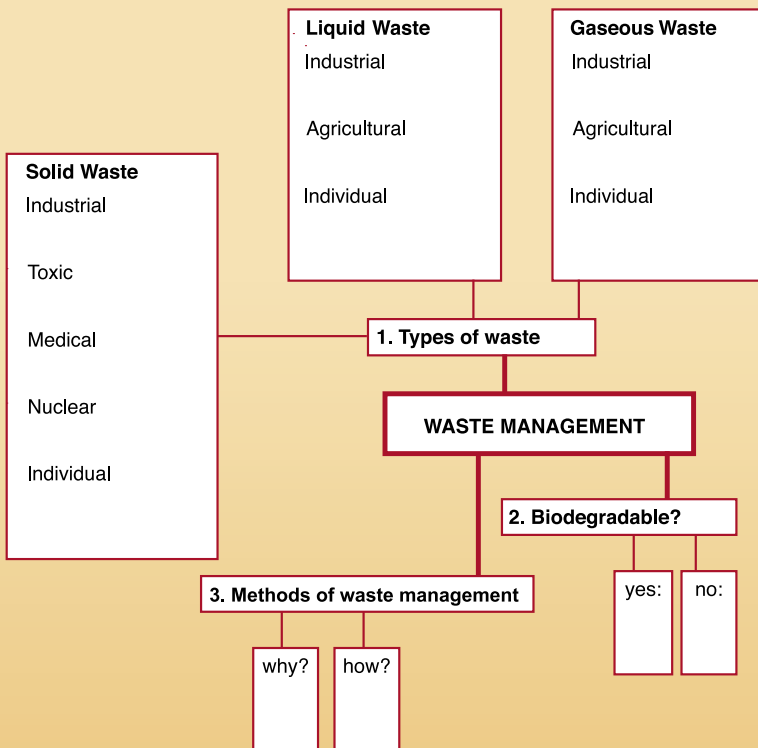


## Try it now!

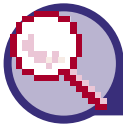
### Use a concept map to prepare students for new learning

A concept map can give students the “big picture” about a new lesson. Consider this example, for a unit on waste management in Grade 11 chemistry. The ideas here can be adapted to work in all grades and for all subjects.

- Before having students read the text, present them with a concept map that prepares them for the main ideas in the unit and indicates the relationships of the ideas to one another.



- After students have viewed and discussed the concept map, ask them to make predictions about the information that will be included in each box.
- Then have them begin reading the text, supporting their reading by following the guided reading process, described on the following page. Have them discuss each section, noting important concepts and new vocabulary as they proceed. For example, ask them to find at least three examples of biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste for each of the “yes” and “no” boxes in the concept map.



## Insight

### Key visuals convey the big picture

English language learners will understand concepts and learn more effectively if they see the “big picture” of the lesson or unit first. Key visuals can be especially valuable in helping students see how key ideas in a text or new lesson are related, before they begin to learn about details or components and before they become mired in new words. Key visuals can be used to introduce new content in many subjects and at many grade levels.



## Try it now!

### Use KWL charts to introduce and to review new learning

KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned) charts can be used in many subject areas and at all grade levels to determine prior knowledge and prepare students for a new lesson or unit, and, later, as an aid in reviewing new knowledge.

Know	Want to know	Learned

## Guided reading: a multi-purpose approach

*Guided reading* is a strategy that helps readers work their way through new and difficult text. Although guided reading groups are often small, consisting of five or six students with a similar level of reading skill, the strategy can also be used to guide a whole class through an academic text (for example, at the secondary level), with small groups formed later to discuss specific points or questions. In some contexts, you may choose to simply monitor the guided reading group, offering assistance only when needed; in other contexts, such as when working with English language learners, you may be much more involved, and the students much more dependent on your assistance.

In all cases, in guided reading:

- the teacher supports students by helping them to “unpack” the text;
- the strategy unfolds in three stages – before, during, and after reading (all stages are important, don’t skip any!); and
- the teacher models, or prompts students to use, reading strategies throughout the process.

Guided reading is a particularly helpful strategy to use with English language learners. They often read inefficiently in English, trying to understand each word as they read and, in the process, often losing track of the main ideas contained in the text. They require the support of a teacher to guide them through challenging text, demonstrating and prompting effective reading strategies, and focusing on specific aspects of the text, such as organization, the use of visual material, and new vocabulary. While this level of support is essential for English language learners, it will benefit many other students as well.

## Word charts: a vocabulary booster

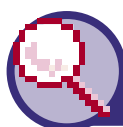
Through the use of *word charts* you can help English language learners with one of the most critical factors in their academic success – the acquisition of academic vocabulary. Like their English-speaking peers, English language learners have to learn new words, such as *denominator* or *photosynthesis*, that are used mainly in one subject area. They also need to learn, as quickly as possible, important words, such as *observe* or *accurate*, that are used in many subject areas. Keep in mind that even common words like *spin* may be unfamiliar to some learners. In addition, some familiar words may have quite a different meaning in the context of specific subjects – for example, the *face* of a cube in mathematics or *dribble* in physical education.

Texts, other resources, and tasks should be selected carefully, so as not to overload learners with new words. You can select key words that will be used in a lesson, and teach them before the lesson or explain them as they arise. English language learners also benefit from having the connections among words explained. For example, you could introduce the word *photosynthesis* in a science class, and explain its relationship to the word *photograph* and the meaning of the word root *photo* (light).

When you have selected the key words for a lesson, develop a word chart like the one below and display it on a wall in the classroom where it can be seen easily by students. Include information about various forms of the word as well as related words, word roots (when helpful), and sentences that show the word being used in relevant contexts. It’s also helpful to underline the part of the various words that is stressed in pronunciation. Below is part of a chart showing the “Top 10 Words” from a Grade 4 lesson on rocks and minerals, but word charts are helpful at all levels and in all subjects.

TOP 10 WORDS: Rocks and minerals					
Verb	Noun	Adjective	Related words	Word roots	Examples
form	form formation	formal	inform reform deform	form = shape	This book gives a lot of information about rock formations in different locations in Canada.
locate	location	local		loc = place	
describe	description	descriptive	scribe script prescription manuscript	scrib/scrip = write	Use some descriptive words to write about your sample rocks. Chinese script is completely different from English writing. If you need medicine, you must get a prescription from your doctor.
	mineral	mineral	mine miner mineralogy mineralogist		Mineralogists know all about oil, coal, diamonds, and other minerals.

- Only the ten most useful and transferable words from the lesson are included in the complete chart.
- It is not necessary to introduce all possible forms of a word at once. Keep the workload manageable, adding new forms of words later if necessary.
- Use the words in the chart to draw attention to prefixes and suffixes, and to teach useful generalizations. For example, you could point out the suffix “*tion*” in *rock formation* and encourage students to find other words that use the same suffix.



## Insight

### Myths about math

It is often thought that mathematics is not influenced by culture and that it is linguistically simple, and that English language learners will therefore not have difficulty studying it in English. This is not the case. The mathematics curriculum emphasizes communication, requiring students to explain their reasoning and justify conjectures.

Language in mathematics is very precise. For example, in the area of data management and probability, students need a clear understanding of words and phrases that express quantities and comparisons of quantities. Also, word problems in mathematics will be difficult for newcomers if the problems involve unfamiliar content and terminology (for example, sports terms) that must be decoded before the problem can be tackled.



## Try it now!

### Integrating language and math

The following process demonstrates how teachers can integrate mathematics and language instruction. It involves students in gathering and comparing information about each other, but the content and the complexity of the task could be adapted to a variety of grade levels.

- Begin by conducting a simple survey on the languages represented in the class. List alphabetically the languages spoken on the board. Create a bar graph illustrating the distribution of languages.
- Explicitly teach the language of mathematics by providing some model statements, using specific mathematical expressions such as “x% more than”, “twice as many as”, “most”, “x times more students speak \_ than \_\_\_”. Encourage students to contribute statements of their own.
- Organize students into small groups and give each group a different survey task, or encourage them to think of one of their own. Examples include favourite sports, the amount of television watched per week, or countries lived in or visited by students.
- Require each student in the group to survey the individual members of a different group, and to bring the information back to the group for collation into a graph or chart.
- Ask the groups to produce a final version of their graph or chart to share with the class. Then have them generate several statements about the graph, using the model statements and choosing from a set of mathematical expressions that you provide. Work with each group to suggest or explicitly teach the expressions they will need to use, such as the following: “Most of the students in the class ...”, “More than half of the students in the class ...”, “Almost 75% of the students in the class ...”.

## Construct scaffolds

*Writing scaffolds* are temporary frameworks that facilitate students’ ability to use new words and phrases, and to produce sentences, paragraphs, and various forms of writing of a quality that they would be unable to produce without this support.

The simplest kind of writing scaffold involves a *cloze procedure*, an instructional strategy in which the teacher produces a text in which some words have been deleted and asks students to suggest suitable words to insert in the blank spaces. The strategy can be used to assess reading comprehension as well as to develop and strengthen students’ comprehension skills.

In the example below, to help students apply new vocabulary and review content at the same time, a teacher has written a summary of the most important information in a social studies lesson, omitting key words that have been taught. Students are asked to fill in the blanks. The teacher has provided a bank of words from which students can choose, including two or three more words than they will need.

**Fill in the blanks in the summary, choosing from the following words:**

resources, products, service, produce, depend, population, manufacturing, transportation

Many jobs in Canada \_\_\_\_\_ on natural \_\_\_\_\_ such as trees, fish, and oil. In the cities, many people work in \_\_\_\_\_ industries, making \_\_\_\_\_ in factories. \_\_\_\_\_ industries such as finance, communications, and government are also important in urban areas.

*Sentence completion activities* provide students with a prompt or a framework that helps them construct sentences of various types. The example below is based on the content of an elementary-level science lesson, with a focus on cause and effect, but this kind of activity could be adapted to any grade and subject.

The plant on the window sill grew taller because ...

The plant in the corner received less light. As a result, ...

The plant in the closet received no light. Therefore, ...

We conclude that ... in order to grow.

*Paragraph frames* provide support for students writing opinion paragraphs, where the opinion is based on the content of a class discussion. The example below can be adapted for any grade or subject.

**Should we have a school uniform?**

In my opinion, **we should/should not** have a school uniform. For one thing/First of all, ...

Also ... Another reason is, ... In addition/Furthermore, ... Therefore, ...

## Correct with care!

*Constructive, systematic feedback* is one of the most important tools you can use to help newcomers learn English. To comprehend and internalize all the features of English vocabulary and grammar they need to learn, these students need many opportunities to talk, read, and write in English and to receive feedback about their use



of the language. It's important, however, that the feedback be delivered in a patient, respectful, and supportive way. The "Get them talking" section of this guide also contains suggestions for responding constructively to language errors in speech.

When reviewing student writing, take a "hands-off" approach to errors. If you read students' work with a pencil in hand, you may be tempted to correct every error. Instead of allowing yourself to become distracted by errors in language usage, focus on content – on what the student is trying to say. Once you have assessed and responded to the content (not the grammar), review the language errors. But rather than noting each mistake, focus on errors of a specific type, flag them, discuss the errors with the student, and encourage the student to fix the flagged errors.

In the following example, the teacher has flagged (with asterisks) errors related to the use of regular past-tense verbs.

Yesterday we went on field trip to Royal Ontario Museum.

- \* This was first time I ever visit museum in Canada. We saw
- \* dinosaurs who live million of years ago. There are not any
- \* dinosaurs in the world now, because they all die in Ice Age. dinosaurs are extinct. I saw one movie about dinosaurs that came back to life it was Jurasick Park. I hope that never really will happen. It was beautiful day and we had lunch
- \* outside. I very enjoy our trip to Royal Ontario Museum

## Decoding difficult texts

Many of the textbooks used in Ontario schools contain language that is difficult for English language learners, and some contain cultural references that mystify newcomers. Teachers may need to supplement existing resources with more accessible material, or create new resources, to ensure that English language learners can understand the subject.



## Effective practice

### Quick scan: choosing appropriate resources

- Look for print resources that are reader-friendly – for example, those that contain clear print, plenty of visuals, overviews and graphic organizers, chapter summaries, pre-reading questions, special treatment (such as highlighting) of key ideas or terms, and a glossary.
- Preview text for cultural content. Some may be linguistically accessible to English language learners, but make unrealistic assumptions about their cultural knowledge or prior experiences. For example, does a chapter on Confederation or on contemporary land claims require prior knowledge about Aboriginal history and the European settlement of Canada that recent arrivals may not have? If so, how will you provide the necessary background knowledge?
- Look for materials that reflect ethnocultural diversity in a positive and balanced way. Take the time to learn your students' perspectives. Class material may contain content that conflicts with some students' belief systems or values. It is important to be sensitive to cultural differences and to encourage those students to identify and discuss these conflicts in a non-threatening environment.

## Measure success: monitoring and assessment

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English language learners must be assessed on both their linguistic and their academic strengths and needs, with frequent opportunities to demonstrate what they know and what they can do. To get a clear and fair picture of these students, you will need to use a wide range of assessment strategies and tools, and learn to look beyond these students' limited ability to communicate in English to discover the true extent of their learning.

### Adapting the program

Throughout the year, English language learners need to be offered a variety of ways to demonstrate what they know and what they can do. Incorporate appropriate strategies for instruction and assessment to facilitate the success of English language learners in your classroom. These strategies include:

- Modification of some or all of the course expectations, based on the student's level of English proficiency;
- Use of a variety of instructional strategies (e.g., extensive use of visual cues, manipulatives, pictures, diagrams, graphic organizers; attention to clarity of instruction; modelling; previewing of textbooks; pre-teaching of key specialized vocabulary; encouragement of peer tutoring and class discussion; strategic use of students' first languages);
- Use of a variety of learning resources (e.g., visual material, simplified text, bilingual dictionaries, culturally diverse materials);
- Use of assessment accommodations (e.g., granting of extra time; use of alternative forms of assessment, such as oral interviews, learning logs, or portfolios; simplification of language and instructions).

Students who are no longer participating in ESL or ELD programs may still need program adaptations to be successful.

All teachers need to become familiar with the English language learners' stages of development – the rates at which they acquire English language and literacy skills – and adapt their instructional program, including their assessment and evaluation strategies, accordingly. Elementary teachers (Grades 1–8) can refer to the stages of second-language acquisition and literacy development outlined in the ministry publication *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: English As a Second Language and English Literacy Development, A Resource Guide* (2001). Secondary teachers (Grades 9–12) can refer to the expectations of specific ESL or ELD courses in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9–12: English As a Second Language and English Literacy Development* (1999).

## Evaluating the performance of English language learners

Students whose command of English is insufficient to demonstrate new learning early in the year or semester are nevertheless absorbing language at a remarkable rate. They may be learning more than you think! Their performance later in the year will usually surpass that of the early weeks, as they develop greater proficiency in English. In evaluating their performance, give special consideration to the more recent evidence of achievement. Consider basing your final evaluation on the last few weeks of work, which are likely to reflect the student's present performance level more accurately.

### FINAL MARKS OR GRADES

In evaluating the performance of English language learners who are working towards modified expectations, evaluate according to the modified expectations. Students will show a range of performance levels similar to those of their peers if the program has been adapted to meet the needs of English language learners.

## **REPORT CARDS**

When English language learners are working towards modified expectations, this must be indicated on their report cards (see ministry Provincial Report Card guidelines). To ensure that students and parents understand what the mark or grade really means, it is a good idea to meet with them in person, using an interpreter if necessary.

# CONTENTS

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## Tips for the Whole School

Put out the welcome mat: the welcoming school	36
Initial assessment: get it right from the start	42
Make connections: parents and the community	44

# Put out the welcome mat: the welcoming school

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Creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment for English language learners and their families is a whole-school activity requiring the commitment of the principal and vice-principal, teachers, support staff, and other leaders within the school community. The reward for this committed effort is a dynamic and vibrant school environment that celebrates diversity as an asset and enriches the learning experience for *all* students.

## Make a good first impression

How effectively do you welcome newcomers and their parents to your school? What first impressions do they take away? The three checklists that follow will help you identify your strengths, as well as areas where you may need to rethink the way your school welcomes new students and their families.

### A WELL-DEFINED WELCOMING PROCESS

- Our school has a specific process for welcoming newcomers.
- All staff members, including administrative staff, are aware of and understand the process.
- Our school has a designated reception team.
- Multilingual welcome signs, in the languages of the community, are posted in the school.

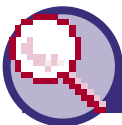
### AN EFFECTIVE INTAKE INTERVIEW PROCESS

- Whenever possible, we have competent adult interpreters available to assist parents and help them fill out forms.
- We allow ample time for the intake interview, taking into consideration the needs for interpretation and for the explanation of unfamiliar school-related terminology (for example, *home room*, *field trip*, and *credits*).
- We strive to make newcomers and their parents feel comfortable, regardless of their proficiency in English.
- We ask parents to provide the name of a person, such as a relative or family friend, who speaks English and whom the school can contact in case of an emergency.

### EFFECTIVE ORIENTATION FOR PARENTS

- We provide parents with essential information, such as the name of the principal; the school phone number; and the dates of holidays, professional development days, and parent-teacher interviews, and inform them about essential procedures, such as those that apply to student absences.
- We tell parents about basic routines.
- We inform parents of community programs, supports, and resources that may interest them, such as local adult ESL classes.
- We strive to establish a relationship with parents so that their orientation to the school can continue over time.

**It is hard to argue that we are teaching the whole child when school policy dictates that students leave their language and culture at the schoolhouse door ... (Cummins et al., 2005)**



## Insight

### Orientation resources for teachers and families

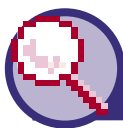
Citizenship and Immigration Canada funds a program called Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), which is now available in several Ontario school boards. In addition to locating settlement workers in schools to provide direct orientation services to newcomers and their families, SWIS offers resource material that all schools can use to provide these services themselves. Guides explaining the Ontario education system are available for newcomer families to download in various languages. Videos are also available on topics that are important to newcomers.

For more information, visit the SWIS program website.

See *The Newcomers' Guides to Elementary & Secondary School* at [www.settlement.org/edguide](http://www.settlement.org/edguide).

See *New Moves: A video for newcomer secondary school students!* at [www.settlement.org/site/ed/guide/videos](http://www.settlement.org/site/ed/guide/videos).

See *Your Library – a video about library services for newcomers* at [www.settlement.org/site/ed/guide/videos](http://www.settlement.org/site/ed/guide/videos).



## Insight

### Selecting an interpreter

When confidential information is being discussed – for example, during an intake or parent-teacher interview – the interpreter should be an adult member of the student’s family, a bilingual teacher, or a professional interpreter.

In less sensitive situations – for example, to help convey information to parents by phone or newsletter – adult members of the newcomer’s linguistic community may be willing to serve as interpreters.

Although many students interpret for their parents, it is preferable that teachers ask students to interpret only for their peers – for example, to help their peers with orientation, or when working as partners with them in class. Peers can also be used in emergency situations when necessary.



## Try it now!

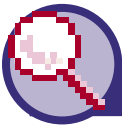
### Hand out school information sheets

Develop a one-page information sheet or a small brochure about the school, and have it translated into the languages of the community.

Personalize the information for each newcomer by leaving blanks where the name of the student’s classroom or home-room teacher can be inserted.

**“You never get a second chance to make a first impression”... is true of schools, where the first few minutes can be crucial. If the school seems to be a welcoming place ... parents and children may be reassured that the experiences that await them are likely to be positive. (Ashworth, 2001)**





## Insight

### Something to think about: the adjustment process

Immigration is an experience that some psychologists compare to bereavement. Even for newcomers who arrive as part of a planned, voluntary process, immigration is a significant dislocation. For those who leave their countries as a result of war or another crisis, the experience can be highly traumatic.

No matter what the circumstances, newcomers of all ages tend to go through a predictable sequence of stages in adjusting to their new circumstances. Within the same family, siblings and different generations may pass through these stages at different rates and with varying responses, depending on a variety of factors, such as their knowledge of English, the opportunities they have to experience social inclusion, their interactions with the larger community, and whether they experience success at work or at school.

- **Arrival and first impressions:** Newcomers are excited to be in a new environment and optimistic about new opportunities. Everything seems new and exciting. Refugees are relieved to have arrived in a safe environment.
- **Culture shock:** Newcomers are less optimistic as the challenges of resettlement become more evident. They find it difficult to make friends, and the challenge of learning in English may seem insurmountable. They miss friends, family, and everything that was familiar. Students may begin to wonder who they are. As a result, they may cling to their own language and culture or discard everything they feel marks them as different. Some children or other family members may get “stuck” at this stage, and even become clinically depressed. Students and their families need support and encouragement during this period, and special efforts must be made to help them feel part of the school community.
- **Recovery and optimism:** This period is characterized by renewed optimism. For students, the new mood is often prompted by a success in school, or by finding their first friend. Students who are well supported at school, and whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds are valued by their teachers and classmates, begin to feel more confident about learning English and about fitting in without having to abandon their cultural identity.
- **Acculturation:** Immigrants become comfortable with a new identity that balances their original culture with elements of the new culture. This balance is different for each person, and depends on many factors. To help students achieve this balance, schools need to enable them to become bilingual and bicultural, able to move effectively between their old and new linguistic and cultural worlds.

**It is never easy to come into a new school where everyone already seems to have friends, know the teachers, and understand the routines. But when that new school is in a new country, then the problems can be even more formidable.**  
(Porter, 1991)

## Be welcoming

Teachers can make new English language learners feel welcome, accepted, and supported in their classrooms by taking a few simple steps:

- Practise and use the correct pronunciation of the student's name.
- Seat the student where he or she can see and hear all classroom activities.
- Introduce yourself and the students who sit near the newcomer.
- Assign the student a classroom partner – someone of the same gender and, if possible, the same language background – to explain or model routine classroom tasks or to help the student in other ways.
- Ensure that the student understands school routines and is familiar with school facilities.
- Teach the student basic phrases, such as *hello*, *goodbye*, and *I don't understand*.
- Help the student learn to express important personal information in English – for example, to respond to questions about his or her name and address.
- Provide the student with some basic language learning materials, such as a picture dictionary or simple books on tape.
- Incorporate images and examples of linguistic and cultural diversity into all subjects in the curriculum, and celebrate diversity in all aspects of your practice.



Try it now!

### Appoint an ambassador

New students feel particularly welcome when introduced to the school by a peer. Select a student ambassador – preferably one of the same gender who speaks the same language as the newcomer – to take the student on a guided tour of the school and introduce him or her to its facilities, sports programs, clubs, and other co-curricular activities. Ambassadors will need some training for this role, and their contribution should be recognized in a public way.

## Get newcomers involved

Newcomers from all backgrounds have a wide variety of interests and skills, and often can contribute a great deal to a school's co-curricular activities. Some may have highly developed skills in a sport that does not have a long history at the school. Others may want to form a language club. Many newcomers will have talents and stories to contribute to school concerts, special assemblies, and other events. All of these activities provide opportunities for English language learners to participate in school life. Getting them involved at all levels – from rookies to leaders – can go a long way towards building a genuinely inclusive school culture.

## Be inclusive: reflect your community

Visual imagery conveys strong impressions about the culture, values, and makeup of a school community. Here are some ideas for making sure that the visual images your school presents to students, parents, and visitors reflect the diversity of the student population:

- Display a chart near the school entrance showing the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all students, including those who speak English or French.
- Post signs and notices in multiple languages.
- Ensure that photographic displays accurately reflect the student population, and that they depict students of various ethnocultural backgrounds engaged in a variety of school activities.
- Ensure that educational displays – for example, of famous historical figures – represent individuals from many cultures.
- Select materials for the classroom and library that contain illustrations of members of various ethnocultural groups engaged in a range of positive roles and situations.
- Incorporate cultural diversity into arts programs – for example, expose students to the work of artists, musicians, and playwrights from a variety of cultures, and give them opportunities to express themselves in a variety of artistic forms from other cultures.
- Have some books in students' languages available.



*Try it now!*

### A unity and diversity club

Students of all backgrounds may enjoy activities that offer fun and fellowship while promoting the goals of an antiracist education, one of which is to help students of all backgrounds learn to live, study, and work effectively in culturally diverse environments. Activities could include film nights, cultural celebrations, book reviews, or the creation of signs, murals, and exhibitions for display around the school. A popular name for this kind of group is STAR: Students and Teachers Against Racism.

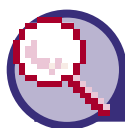
## Initial assessment: get it right from the start

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The initial assessment of newcomer students is an opportunity to obtain a clear picture of their educational, cultural, and personal backgrounds, their level of achievement in the subjects covered by Ontario's curriculum, their level of proficiency in English, and their linguistic, academic, and other needs, including any exceptionalities. Because this initial assessment is crucial, it's important to get it right!

First, ensure that the school offers newcomers and their parents a warm welcome (see the "Put out the welcome mat" and "Make connections" sections of this booklet). Here are some other suggestions:

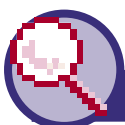
- Establish a consistent approach to the initial assessment of English language learners, and ensure that all members of staff who will be involved with the new student are familiar and comfortable with the process.
- To reduce anxiety for parents and students, consider doing the assessment informally over a period of days, rather than all on the first day.
- If possible, conduct at least part of the assessment in the newcomer's first language to aid in determining his or her overall cognitive and linguistic development. Ask the student to produce a writing sample in his or her first language. You can have it translated later, but you will also learn a lot by observing how the student approaches the task.
- Review the student's academic records, if available. If possible, seek the assistance of someone who can translate the documents and who is familiar with the education system in the student's country of origin.
- To assess a student's knowledge of math, begin with simple computation. Then show the student math textbooks from various grade levels and ask him or her to indicate the concepts that seem familiar. Because the sequence in which math is taught differs from country to country, encourage students to skip over topics that seem unfamiliar and to look for others that they understand.
- To assess proficiency in English, conduct a simple interview. Ask questions such as What is your name? to determine whether the student can respond appropriately and the degree to which he or she has a command of English grammar and pronunciation. If the student can speak some English, gather some writing samples in English. Begin by asking the student to write his or her name, then to label pictures of common objects. In this way, work up to more complex written pieces. To assess reading comprehension, ask the student to read a simple picture book silently, then ask some basic comprehension questions. Work up to short passages with more challenging vocabulary and sentence structure, asking questions that are more open-ended. Stop when the student starts experiencing real difficulty.



## Insight

### Assessing academic records from other countries

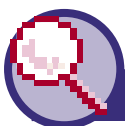
Some newcomers may have left their homelands under conditions of extreme urgency, and therefore may not have academic records. Where records are available, be aware that the marking or grading system varies from one country to another. A level 4 in Ontario may be a level 1 in another country. Also, keep in mind that the order in which curriculum is presented may vary from one jurisdiction to another, and the student's content knowledge may therefore be out of sequence with the Ontario curriculum.



## Insight

### Mathematics: a valuable place to start

It is often a good idea to begin an initial assessment with mathematical computation, a task that is less language-intensive and less culturally based than others. In addition to providing specific information about a student's understanding of math, assessing the student's mathematics knowledge and skills often provides information about the student's general academic background. This is a particularly useful technique, since it is often not possible to assess the student's proficiency in other areas of the curriculum unless the assessment can be conducted in his or her first language.



## Insight

### Assess the whole child

Many factors are involved in how well an English language learner will adjust to the new educational environment and perform a given task on a given day. Learning a new language, while at the same time learning *in* the new language, is stressful. In addition, the experience of immigrating (and, even more, the refugee experience) can cause major dislocations in a student's life and within his or her family. In assessing newcomers, planning for their needs, and determining their placement, consider the whole student as well as the work he or she produces.



## Effective practice

### Appropriate placement is critical

Elementary students should be placed in the grade that is appropriate for their age. Their academic and social development will be enhanced in an environment where they are learning with students of the same age.

Secondary students should be placed on the basis of their educational background, the extent of their “cultural” knowledge of the individual subject, if applicable, and the linguistic demands of the individual subject. For example, a student may have the necessary background for a Grade 12 college/university mathematics course, but may need to be placed in a Grade 10 Canadian history class and given additional support, such as background information about Canada and help with language.

## Make connections: parents and the community

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Parental involvement is a critical component of a child’s success in school. In serving culturally diverse communities, keep in mind that not all parents share the same ideas about how, where, and when they should be involved in their children’s schooling. Parents may also face barriers, such as limited time or limited proficiency in English. On the other hand, they, and their ethnocultural communities, may represent substantial resources that schools can draw on to assist English language learners and to enrich the cultural environment for everyone in the school.

### Making parents comfortable

There are many ways you can ensure that the parents of English language learners feel comfortable in the school environment and stay involved with their children’s education. Here are some guidelines to follow:

- **Check before planning:** Check your multicultural or multifaith calendar to ensure that you’re not planning events on days that conflict with significant dates in some communities.
- **Ask before acting:** Give parents an opportunity to tell you if they need to make accommodations for childcare during school meetings.
- **Recruit interpreters:** Ask school and community volunteers who speak community languages to invite parents to school events and meetings in their own language.

- **Be specific:** parents of newcomers could react with alarm to a phone call or note from the school, assuming that their child is in trouble. Explain the purpose of the call or note early in the communication.
- **Avoid using jargon:** using terms like *benchmark* or *credit*, or acronyms like *EQAO*, may discourage parents and cause them to be confused about the message you are trying to communicate.
- **Connect parents with similar needs, interests, or concerns:** newcomer parents, for example, may share an interest in a particular topic, such as parenting in their new cultural environment.

The materials in my language helped me and others participate in school activities. (newcomer parent, Hamilton)



Try it now!

### Use multilingual communities as a resource

When developing school materials in a variety of languages – welcoming signage, for example – draw on the linguistic resources of the community. Members of specific language communities may also be able to help find library materials in their own languages or work with students on dual-language projects. Some parents who are more established may appreciate an opportunity to develop a parent network to welcome and support newcomer families.



Try it now!

### Establishing networks: the telephone tree

To convey information about school events, call someone in a specific language community who speaks English. Ask that person to pass on the message in his or her own language to three parents in that language community, and to ask each of those parents to pass the message on to three others. Do the same for each language community you need to reach.

## Build understanding

Parents of English language learners may not be familiar with the Ontario curriculum and the expectations of Ontario's school system. Here are some ways to help parents support their children's learning:

- Explain the Ontario education system (such as graduation requirements).
- Demonstrate teaching techniques (such as student-centred learning).
- Provide suggestions for home activities (such as establishing routines for doing homework, household chores, going to bed).
- Be explicit about school routines and requirements (such as school timetables and calendars, and professional development days).
- Encourage parents to continue using their first language at home (for example, talking and reading in the first language enables students to continue building skills and understanding while they are learning English).

## Encourage community ownership

Many community organizations and agencies serve newcomers or specific ethnocultural groups in Ontario. Encourage community groups to make use of your school facilities for cultural and community events, as a courtesy and to help foster a sense of community ownership of the school. Consider inviting established organizations to play a role in providing or locating appropriate counselling and referral services that are not available through the school board. Both large and small community groups may be able to contribute resources for use in classrooms, such as cultural artifacts or guest speakers, and to recommend competent interpreters to assist in communicating with parents.



Try it now!

### Make community service a cross-cultural experience

All secondary school students in Ontario must complete 40 hours of community service as a graduation requirement. This requirement presents students with an excellent opportunity to hone their cross-cultural understanding by working with people whose background is different from their own. For example, some students may enjoy helping English language learners in a local elementary school. Former English language learners who are now proficient in English and who have maintained their first language can make special contributions to their school by acting as bilingual peer tutors for newcomers, helping with the translation of signs, notices, and newsletters, or acting as greeters and guides for parent-teacher meetings and events.



# CONTENTS

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## Digging Deeper

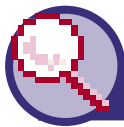
Understanding the English language learner	48
References and resources	52

# Understanding the English language learner

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English language learners are students in English-language schools whose first language is other than English or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used in Ontario's schools, and who may initially require educational interventions to assist them in attaining English language proficiency.

They may be Canadian-born or newly arrived from other countries. They come from diverse backgrounds and school experiences, and have a variety of needs.



## Insight

### New terminology

The term *English language learner* has come into increasing use internationally among educators and researchers because it distinguishes the students themselves from the programs that support their language learning needs.

## Canadian-born English language learners

Many English language learners were born in Canada, and raised in families or communities in which languages other than English are spoken, or in which the variety of English spoken differs significantly from the English of Ontario classrooms.

- Many children in Aboriginal communities speak a first language other than English, such as Cree or Ojibwe. Others speak a variety of English significantly different from that of the school environment.
- Children born in immigrant communities may come from families in which languages other than English are primarily spoken in the home, or where the variety of English that is spoken differs significantly from the English of the classroom.
- Children born in communities that have maintained a distinct cultural and linguistic tradition, such as some Mennonite and francophone communities, and who choose to enter English-language schools, may have a first language that is not English.

## Newcomers from other countries

Newcomers arrive from countries around the world at various stages in their educational careers. They may arrive in their pre-school years, or at any point between Kindergarten and Grade 12. Likewise, they may arrive at the beginning of the school year, or at any time during the school year. Depending on their ages and countries of origin, they may also have had varying educational experiences prior to their arrival in Canada, and will require varied levels of support in order to succeed in the classroom.

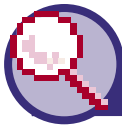
- Some newcomers have arrived in Canada with their families as part of a voluntary, planned immigration process. If they are of school age, they have most often received formal education in their home countries, and some may have studied English as a foreign language.
- Some children have arrived in Canada as a result of a war or other crisis in their home countries, and may have left their homelands under conditions of extreme urgency. These children have often suffered traumatic experiences, and may also be separated from family members. They may have been in transit for a number of years, or may not have had access to formal education in their home countries or while in transit.
- International or “visa” students have paid fees to attend school in Ontario, and often plan to attend a Canadian university. Most are of secondary school age. These students typically arrive in Canada without their families, and may live with extended family, or live alone. Because of the expense involved, and because in many cases they represent the aspirations of their families, these students are often under great pressure to do well and progress through school as quickly as possible. Most have had some instruction in English but still have considerable difficulty learning in Ontario classrooms.

## The rate of new-language acquisition

Research indicates that most English language learners acquire conversational fluency and day-to-day language proficiency within a year or two. For example, they can follow classroom directions and maintain simple conversations about familiar topics and routines. During this time they also acquire a basic vocabulary of high-frequency words (such as *old*, *food*, or *tired*). However, it takes much longer for most English language learners to catch up to their peers in using English as a language for learning.

Children for whom English is a first language take about five years to acquire a basic vocabulary of 2,000 to 3,000 words and to use simple sentence structures accurately. Once these children start school, however, they add about 1,000 words to their vocabulary each year. They are also exposed to increasingly complex sentence structures.

English language learners are working hard to catch up with a moving target. The older they are, the more they have to catch up.

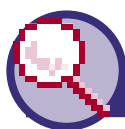


## Insight

### Acquisition of conversational and academic language

In observing English language learners, many teachers incorrectly assume that, once these students can converse in English, they are proficient in using the language and require no additional support or consideration. However, the research shows that, whereas students are often proficient in conversation and the use of day-to-day language within a year or two, they need several more years to develop academic language. During this period, they need support from teachers and encouragement to be patient and persist.

Conversational proficiency	Academic proficiency
Ability to maintain a face-to-face conversation	Ability to understand when there is less opportunity for interaction (for example: when listening to a presentation, when reading a textbook)
Ability to talk, read, or write about familiar content or about what is happening here and now	Ability to talk, read, and write about content that is less familiar, more abstract, and more distant in time or space (for example: studying the solar system, learning about the Canadian political system)
Knowledge of basic vocabulary/high-frequency words (for example: <i>old, food, tired, cars, trucks</i> )	Knowledge of more sophisticated/low-frequency vocabulary (for example: <i>ancient, nutrition, fatigued, vehicles</i> )
Ability to use simple sentence structures and the active voice (for example: <i>We heated the water.</i> )	Ability to use more complex sentence structures and the passive voice (for example: <i>When the water was heated ...</i> )



## Insight

### Language acquisition and age

Young children learn the sound system of a new language much more effectively than older learners. They may acquire a Canadian accent quickly, whereas their older siblings may always have an accent influenced by the sound system of their first language. But young children, like their older siblings, take several years to catch up to their age peers in vocabulary acquisition and in the accurate use of grammar.

Older students have an advantage in learning vocabulary and grammar because their first language is more developed, and they can draw on their greater knowledge of language and of the world. They are more likely to ask for explanations about language, and to understand grammatical concepts such as the past tense, but they have more to learn than their younger siblings.

## Support programs for English language learners

For their first few years in Ontario schools, many English language learners take one of two distinct language-support programs, where they receive direct support from teachers who specialize in meeting their language learning needs:

- English As a Second Language (ESL) programs are for students born in Canada or newcomers whose first language is other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools.
- English Literacy Development (ELD) programs are for newcomers whose first language is other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools. Students in these programs are generally from countries in which their access to education has been limited, or where they may have had limited opportunities to develop language and literacy skills in any language. They arrive in Ontario schools with significant gaps in their education. Some Aboriginal students from remote communities may also have had limited opportunities for formal schooling, and they also may benefit from ELD instruction.

*For more information on the current content of these programs, see the Ontario Ministry of Education documents The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: English As a Second Language and English Literacy Development, A Resource Guide (2001) and The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9–12: English As a Second Language and English Literacy Development (1999). These publications are also available on the ministry's website at [www.edu.gov.on.ca](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca).*

# References and Resources

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## Websites and online resources

Center for Applied Linguistics. <[www.cal.org](http://www.cal.org)>. Information and links to sites on language acquisition. Home to the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics.

Dave's ESL Café. <[www.eslcafe.com](http://www.eslcafe.com)>. Site for language learners and teachers; the "Ideas" section provides many activities and games that are suitable or can be adapted for beginners.

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English as a Second Language/English Literacy Development Resource Group of Ontario (ERGO). <[www.ergo-on.ca](http://www.ergo-on.ca)>. Resources and guidelines to support ESL/ELD programs in Ontario.

ESL Infusion. <<http://eslinfusion.oise.utoronto.ca>>. This site is for teachers working with English language learners in Ontario classrooms. Provides ideas for lesson adaptation and culturally sensitive teaching.

*ESL Magazine*. <[www.eslmag.com](http://www.eslmag.com)>. This magazine for K–12 teachers provides some articles online.

International Children’s Institute. <[www.icichildren.org](http://www.icichildren.org)>. Based in Montreal and Toronto, this organization supports the development of programs and services for children who are experiencing stress related to displacement, war, and immigration. Training workshops and materials are available for educators.

*Internet TESL Journal*. <<http://iteslj.org>>. Site for teachers and learners. The section for students provides many online puzzles and other activities.

Multi-Cultural Books and Videos. <[www.multiculbv.com](http://www.multiculbv.com)>. A large selection of books, videos, audiocassettes, educational materials, and computer software. Dual-language books are available in many languages, and a catalogue is available on request.

The Multiliteracies Project. <[www.multiliteracies.ca](http://www.multiliteracies.ca)>. This site documents a three-year Canadian research study about literacy and pedagogy in a pluralistic, technological society. The sample projects include dual-language books written by students.

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Settlement.org: <[www.settlement.org](http://www.settlement.org)>. This site provides resources for newcomers and for the people who work with them. The cultural profiles available on this site provide useful background information for teachers and can also be used by students working on school projects. In the “Settlement Workers in Schools” section of the site there are parent guides to Ontario schools, in various languages. There is also information about other resources, including an orientation video for newcomer youth in Ontario secondary schools. A video on using public libraries is available, and another on parent-teacher interviews is in development.





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