

Time to Celebrate your Dual Language Learners!

It's snowing – *again*. Inside your classroom, the three and four year olds you teach are restless and frustrated. Their little noses are pressed up against the windows where paper snowflakes, which looked magical in December, now wilt miserably. “So much snow,” says a little girl who is growing up learning both English and Korean, her home language. The boy next to her, whose parents speak only Spanish, nods and says, “I want to play outside.” The children have been working (and playing!) so hard since September. Now would be a great time to do something to take their minds off the grey skies and slush and celebrate all the good things they've achieved since starting school – especially the progress made by Dual Language Learners. Whether you teach preschool or are supporting your class as they move towards their graduation from elementary, middle or high school, a Celebration Evening will really highlight everyone's success.

You may have already thought about putting together a Celebration Evening to recognize your DLLs/ELLs. Maybe you've planned something really special, really spectacular...and then you've worried about leaving out your monolingual students. But a Celebration Evening for DLLs doesn't have to exclude the children who only speak English! If you focus on home languages rather than just bilingualism, you'll be able to involve everyone in your classroom.

Start by working with your students to create invitations for their family members and friends. They could decorate them with flags representing the cultures of all the students in the class, including the American flag, or with the word “invitation” or “celebration” in all of the languages your children speak. If you have people in your school who can help you translate the text into the appropriate languages, that will encourage parents, caregivers and family friends to attend.

The next step should be designing awards for all of the students in the class. Your DLLs can get special Language Progress Awards or could be congratulated for completing any ELL programs your school has in place. Monolingual students could be recognized for other group or individual language achievements: awards for story-telling or vocabulary or reading, for instance. Each of the class teachers – especially any ELL teachers or classroom assistants with other languages — could introduce themselves and speak briefly about why they like working with this particular group of children and why the certificate they're about to give out is important. If they can do it in two languages, even better!

Having fun will be so important on the celebration night itself. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- Get local musicians in to perform as the students show their families and friends their classroom environment, or find out if some of the bilingual parents (or students) have musical skills and would be willing to perform.
- Let the children teach the adults games that they've learned and songs from other cultures, sung in different languages!

- Provide (or ask parents to bring) a range of kid-friendly food that will represent not only the American culture in your class but the backgrounds of all the children who attend.
- Set up a craft center with a focus on language: words in your class languages for adults and children to color or decorate, multi-cultural images and words to cut and paste into a collage, etc.
- A nice touch would be to ask several students to share how they've felt about the DLL/ELL program in your class – which parts have they enjoyed the most? Reading the bilingual books? Learning new songs and hearing stories from other cultures? These narratives could then be read out by teachers or older students during the evening to highlight the benefits of bilingualism for everyone, not just DLLs.
- Brainstorm with your students for their unique perspective on how to make the night a success!

Of course it is important to keep the celebration of Dual Language Learners going beyond the special evening. You want to help students build relationships throughout the year and give them the foundations for lifelong friendships. Books such as Karen Nemeth's New Words New Friends can be a great resource, giving children the tools they need to empathize with, support, and approach the DLLs in their class with snappy rhyming couplets and fun, colorful illustrations. Nemeth is a national expert on and advocate for DLLs; her website is full of helpful ideas and thought-provoking discussions for everyone working with children who are learning two or more languages.

Spring is on its way, but until we've put the snow and sleet behind us for good, let's focus on the positives and celebrate the achievements of *all* of our language learners– and help them to celebrate each other every day!

How do you celebrate the achievements of Dual Language Learners? And how do you include your entire class in the celebration? We'd love to hear your ideas!

This article was originally published on the Language Lizard Blog (blog.LanguageLizard.com). The blog supports educators and parents of language learners and helps bring multiculturalism to the classroom. Please visit our blog for more informative articles to help you teach children about diverse languages and cultures.