

Multilingual Voices Within a Multi-Tiered System of Support: An Inquiry Guide

The purpose of this inquiry guide is to help schools better anticipate the needs of their emerging bilingual students (EBs), create learning environments that foster their success, and to assess students' responses to instruction in a more holistic and culturally responsive manner. There are two sets of questions presented in the inquiry guide:

- Tier 1 Questions: to be utilized by school teams when examining the effectiveness of the systems, structures, and instruction at the school or classroom level for emerging bilingual students.
- Tier 2 Questions: to be utilized by school teams when considering individual emerging bilingual students who may need adjustments to their learning environment in order to be successful.

The questions are organized according to the seven integral factors presented by Hamayan et al. (2007) that may impact emerging bilinguals' academic progress, linguistic development, and response to instruction and intervention.

Tier 1 (Core/Universal): School or Classroom Level

Overarching Question: How are the systems, structures and instruction at our school or in the classroom serving our emerging bilingual students (EBs)?

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FACTORS

Teachers and Staff:

- Who are the individuals at our school who are knowledgeable about the acquisition of an additional language (including information about their official qualification to work with EBs)? Do our EBs have the opportunity to spend the majority of their instructional day with those qualified teachers?
- What professional learning opportunities are offered to all educators of EBs and how can we capitalize on opportunities available within our community?
- Are we routinely surveying all individuals in our school to determine their knowledge of linguistically and culturally responsive practices?

Services and Resources:

- Are the human, material and physical resources provided to our EBs comparable to those provided for all students?
- Is the programming our EBs receive coordinated and implemented in a cohesive manner throughout the day to maximize meaningfulness and comprehensibility?

Service Delivery Model:

- What are the program models and program designs offered for EBs in our school and school district? Does our model match the needs of our student population?
- Are there opportunities for students to utilize their home language for learning? When instruction is in English, are sheltered instructional strategies utilized to make content comprehensible?
- Are we providing maximum support for students who are in the early stages of language acquisition?
- Are we conducting routine observations to gather evidence of culturally and linguistically responsive instructional practices?
- Are teachers routinely and explicitly teaching language as well as content? Is instruction differentiated by the language proficiency level of their students?

Role of Home Language:

- How are we as a school raising the prestige of students' home languages? How are monolingual educators in our schools supporting multilingualism?

Role of Home Culture:

- Are students' cultural and ethnic backgrounds viewed as resources and funds of knowledge? To what extent does our curriculum reflect the diverse experiences of our students?

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND INSTRUCTIONAL FACTORS

- To what extent do we allow our emerging bilinguals to practice and show what they know using multiple modalities and in all of their languages both orally and in writing?
- How are we working collaboratively to plan how to best integrate language and literacy instruction in all content areas?
- Are we collecting longitudinal information on our emerging bilingual students' academic performance including things such as classroom observations, grades, credits earned, standardized test scores, language proficiency, etc.? Are we taking into consideration the potential limitations of standardized assessment tools?
- Are notices about progress regularly communicated to parents in the home language?

ORAL LANGUAGE AND LITERACY FACTORS

- To what extent does our staff who work with EBs on reading instruction understand the unique differences between learning to read in a first language versus in a second or additional language?
- How are we working to embed literacy instruction for emerging bilinguals into a meaningful context?
- To what extent are teachers incorporating oracy into instruction (oral language skills necessary to successfully meet literacy objectives)?
- To what extent does our English language development instruction include aspects of both social and academic language across all four language domains (reading, writing, listening and speaking)?
- How are we communicating with parents that literacy in the home language is crucial in helping students develop their identities as readers and writers in all languages?

PERSONAL AND FAMILY FACTORS

- How are we gathering information about students' families, communities and home lives in order to integrate students' funds of knowledge, experiences and skills into instruction, intervention and assessment practices at our school?

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

- How are we ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed, that they belong, and that they are valued and included in every aspect of school life?

PREVIOUS SCHOOLING FACTORS

- What types of information are we collecting on our incoming emerging bilinguals about their previous schooling and how are we incorporating it into instruction, intervention and assessment?

CROSS-CULTURAL FACTORS

- How are we working as a school to eliminate cultural and linguistic biases, prejudices, stereotypes and any other discriminatory elements from our school environment?
- How are we including diverse families in our school decision-making processes?
- Are we appropriately utilizing interpreters, translators and cultural brokers when communicating and collaborating with students and their families?

Tier 2: Individual Student Level

Overarching Question: What can I learn about the child in order to adjust the learning environment to better meet his or her needs?

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CREATED FOR STUDENT

- What language supports are in place for the student when learning new content?
- What language supports are in place for the student when taking assessments?
- How does the environment of the classroom support the student? Does he/she feel welcomed, safe, and valued? Who are the students and adults that the child responds best to within the school?
- To what extent does the student have opportunities to collaborate with others when learning? Does the child have opportunities to collaborate with students with similar and different cultural and linguistic backgrounds?

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN BOTH, OR ALL, OF THE STUDENTS' LANGUAGES (IF AVAILABLE)

- What are the child's achievement levels across subjects, and in both languages?
- Does the child have the opportunity to access both (or all) languages during classroom activities? During assessments?
- To what extent is explicit instruction of language (including word/phrase meaning, function, pragmatics, etc.) incorporated into the student's instruction?
- What evidence-based practices for multilingual learners are in place? Have these practices been implemented over a sustained period of time?
- Are assessments measuring what has been taught?

PROFICIENCY IN ORAL LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN BOTH HOME LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH

- What information is available about the student's linguistic development (from birth to current age) in the home language(s)? Was the child's linguistic development similar/different to his or her siblings?
- What are the student's previous and current oral language and literacy scores? In what languages? Were assessments developed for and normed on bilingual populations?
- What are the similarities and differences between the child's home language and English?
- How is the child's language development compared to his or her "true peers" (students with similar linguistic/cultural backgrounds, schooling experience, age, etc.) in all four domains (reading, writing, listening and speaking)?
- To what extent are literacy skills taught to the child in context and with meaningful activities?
- To what extent is the child able to connect personal experience, expertise, and previous learning to the content of the reading material?
- In what ways is vocabulary taught to the student, both explicitly and when embedded in context?
- How does the student's teacher support his or her comprehension of the reading material (e.g., sheltered techniques, use of native language, etc.)?
- What opportunities does the child have to create dual language texts and stories?
- What opportunities does the child have to freely access both or all languages when speaking?

PERSONAL AND FAMILY FACTORS, SUCH AS LITERACY HABITS AT HOME

- What can we learn about the linguistic and cultural background and structure of the family?
- In what language(s) do parents/guardians/siblings speak to the child at home? In other settings?
- According to parents/guardians, to what extent does the child use each language? In what settings?
- What are the child's parents' occupations?
- What forms of print are available in the home?
- What is the form of discipline in the home?
- To what extent does the family have reliable internet? Computer access?
- What informal and formal support networks or communities does the family have?
- What do the parents hope for their children's education?
- What are the student's interests, hobbies, talents, activities, experiences, responsibilities?
- What are the parents' understandings of their role with the school? Their availability?
- How welcome do the family members feel in the school?
- Have parents received notification of the MTSS process in their native language?

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

- What is the child's health history and current status?
- Has the school screened the child for vision and hearing?
- Does the child have access to regular meals?
- What language does the child use with peers? With friends?
- How does the child interact with friends?
- How does the student react when he/she does not do well on an academic task?
- How has the child's temperament or social-emotional experiences influenced his/her language acquisition?
- To what extent is the child and/or child's family under stress (e.g., parent work schedule, traumatic experience before entering the country, financial problems, etc.)
- Did the child suffer any developmental delays?

PREVIOUS SCHOOLING/PERFORMANCE

- How many schools has the child attended before this one? Where? For how long?
- In what language was instruction at previous schools? Did the child have the opportunity to fully develop literacy in their home language?
- What was the child's attendance rate?
- What were the child's grades at the previous schools?
What assessment information is available, and in what language(s)?
- Who provided ESL and/or bilingual instruction at the previous school (teacher with certification and/or specializations in ESL or bilingual instruction, volunteers, paraprofessionals)? Has the previous ESL teacher been contacted?

CROSS-CULTURAL FACTORS

- How often does the child read an author from the same cultural background or race?
- To what extent is the curricular content aligned with the child's cultural background?
- How are the classroom's discursive structures aligned to the child's cultural background?

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Inquiry Guide Developed by Boele, A., Silva Diaz, E., Hurtado, M., & Slavick, J. for the 2016 Colorado Association for Bilingual Education Conference