



FOCUS: DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE DISTANCE LEARNING FOR DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN

VOICES FROM THE FIELD — Insights on Developmentally Appropriate Distance Learning for Dual Language Learners in Transitional Kindergarten (TK): A Tale of Two TK Teachers

Tina Renzullo and Maria Lourdes Salazar are the protagonists in our tale of two Transitional Kindergarten teachers dedicated to ensuring their four and five year old students and Dual Language Learners (DLLs) receive equitable and developmentally appropriate distance learning. They describe implementation of best practices for DLLs as they prioritize what Tina terms “the hallmarks of Transitional Kindergarten – social and emotional learning and oral language development.” Maria Lourdes and Tina use intentional teaching strategies to create flexible learning experiences that promote creativity, oral language development, critical thinking, and joyful learning! Having served in leadership roles at the district, county, and state levels, both Maria Lourdes and Tina strive to maintain powerful interactions to support DLLs and their families during this difficult time. “Building relationships and communication with the families will allow us to be transparent and work through this,” says Lourdes. Tina embraces “this dynamically evolving timeframe” and is inspired to, “carry some of these learnings back with me when we return to the classroom.”

Social and Emotional Learning and Family Engagement



Maria Lourdes Salazar

Maria Lourdes asserts that social and emotional learning and family engagement are interrelated and critical to maximizing distance learning experiences for her students. She believes that the “biggest thing with early age students is that they know we are still connected. We are still the TK family.” Maria Lourdes uses multiple modes of communication to ascertain how students and their families are doing, socially and emotionally. For families that don’t respond to the bilingual messages she sends via ClassDojo, Seesaw, email, or text messages, she makes personal phone calls to ensure that they are safe and healthy and offers support to connect children to learning activities. She also provides mini-training sessions for parents to address the digital divide by empowering them to feel confident with devices, applications, and other distance learning tools. “The families have become so comfortable with the technology that they’ll set them up and trust the students are becoming more independent in their work. Parents are just a step away.”

Similarly, Tina’s virtual classroom is shaped by the logistical and social and emotional needs of families and students. She uses tools such as Screencast and Screencastify to create tutorials anytime she introduces a new platform. These include explicit instructions on how to access platforms, click on items, find lessons, view videos, and upload videos or photos. Although her district provides “how to” videos, she finds that this personal touch creates additional family and student ownership of their shared virtual classroom environment. Additionally, Tina values family and student assets. Flexibility has been really important for families and her responsiveness has been the biggest shift for her during this time. She reflects on the deepening of her relationship with families and students, and shares, “parents are my proxy for teaching at home.” When she prepares video lessons for students she considers the physical environment and invites families to highlight aspects of their environment with comments such as, “Welcome to my kitchen, what’s in your kitchen?” She invites students to describe items in their own kitchen to a family member prior to presenting a mini-lesson to develop language and mathematical skills while cutting up fruits and vegetables.



Tina Renzullo

Designing Oral Language Development and Integrated ELD for DLLs

To accomplish creating flexible learning experiences in a virtual environment Tina “needs to understand that not all of my students may be able to access that [digital platforms or tools]. Whatever I’m using for the high tech element, I also need to find a low tech option.” She plans thematic units and employs constructivist approaches, “with a constructivist view point children have their schema, pulling in what they can from the general circle right outside of them.” Tina provides a weekly planner and encourages opportunities for families to leverage the gift of language and emphasizes the importance of reciprocal conversations with students. When she records video lessons or read-alouds for students, she uses realia, visuals, wait time, repetition, and questioning scaffolds. She encourages repeated readings to facilitate active engagement, deeper learning, and comprehension. Parents report, “You’ve read this story TEN times today, and my children have laughed and laughed each time.”

Maria Lourdes employs similar strategies when she plans I-ELD for her students, 40% of whom are Spanish speaking DLLs. In addition to focusing on early literacy skills, she implements Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) for Mathematics. This engages students in productive problem solving while explaining their thinking. Maria Lourdes models Think Alouds and uses images to support understanding of problems. She does this through both synchronous (zoom sessions) and pre-recorded lessons. She previews lesson content in Spanish and reviews learning by asking students to reflect on their problem-solving process. This also provides opportunities for differentiated assessment processes. She has taught families how to record student’s oral responses and upload video files to Seesaw or text messages. Maria Lourdes also schedules one-on-one FaceTime or zoom sessions to provide feedback.