

The WIDA Can Do Philosophy

At WIDA, we believe that everyone brings valuable resources to the education community. Linguistically and culturally diverse learners, in particular, bring a unique set of assets that have the potential to enrich the experiences of all learners and educators. As these young children and students learn additional languages, educators can draw on these assets for the benefit of both the learners themselves and for everyone in the community. By focusing on what language learners can do, we send a powerful message that students from diverse linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds contribute to the vibrancy of our early childhood programs and K-12 schools.

The efforts of every stakeholder in the school community, from home care providers to superintendents, can enhance the education of language learners. The more we know about their cultural backgrounds, home environments and formative experiences, and the positive contributions these experiences afford our school communities, the more effective standards-based instruction will be. We believe practitioners and educators have the power to recognize and unleash the potential that language learners bring to their learning communities.

Everything WIDA does is supported by the Can Do Philosophy. Our work begins with articulating examples of language learners' assets, and continues with how we support education systems, how we design our products, and how we conduct our research.

Assets	Contributions	Potential
Linguistic	Knowledge of multiple languages, varying representation of ideas, metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness, diverse strategies for language learning	Bi- or multilingual practices, abilities which learners utilize to communicate effectively across multiple contexts, multiple ways of expressing their thinking
Cultural	Different perspectives, practices, beliefs, social norms, ways of thinking	Bi- or multicultural practices as well as unique and varied perspectives, ability to develop relationships in a global society, ability to navigate a variety of sociocultural contexts
Experiential	Varied life and educational experiences, exposure to unique topics, diverse approaches to learning and expressing content knowledge	Enrichment of the school curriculum, extracurricular, and community opportunities, success in school and beyond
Social and Emotional	Personal interests and needs, awareness of/empathy for diverse experiences, knowledge and enrichment of community resources	Ability to form and sustain positive relationships, and broker meaningful interactions among peers and others within and beyond school

The Can Do Philosophy in Action

WIDA's Can Do Philosophy is visible in our products and services, but also extends beyond our organization into the educational systems and organizations interacting with us and our work.

WIDA supports education systems where the Can Do Philosophy empowers...

- **Linguistically diverse students and their peers** to share their experiences, knowledge, cultures, skills, and interests, while supporting one another.
- **Families** to advocate on behalf of their children's beliefs and aspirations about education and success in life, to share their social, cultural and linguistic capital with their learning community, and to nurture growth and learning at home and in the community.
- **Communities** to shape perspectives of educators, practitioners, students, and families through diverse experiences and offer resources and supports to build upon the learning happening in school.
- **Educators** to unleash learners' potential and serve as their advocates in culturally responsive ways, to continue to grow their capacities by learning from their students, to inspire active engagement of students and families, and to collaborate to promote effective strategies and seek solutions together.
- **Administrators** to build systems uniting schools and communities with a vision, time, and space for meaningful collaboration in support of language development and academic achievement of language learners.
- **Researchers and Policymakers** to positively influence the focus and direction of programs, schools, and systems in serving the interests of language learners, highlighting students' unique characteristics and needs to advocate for positive change.

WIDA enacts the Can Do Philosophy through its...

- **Standards** that allow educators to recognize and support their students' academic language development and academic achievement, serving as a foundation for curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
- **Assessments** that build awareness of language learners' strengths and provide valuable information to educators, students, and families. WIDA's assessment design includes built-in supports that allow learners to show what they can do and serves as a model for classroom, school, and district language proficiency assessment.
- **Professional Learning** that is sustainable and transformative, focusing on teaching and learning that supports language learners and their families by building on their strengths. Further, it promotes dynamic collaboration among educators and meaningful student engagement.
- **Research** that provides timely, meaningful, and actionable results to educators, advancing awareness of the role of language learning in achievement along with the unique traits attributable to language learners. Our research design concentrates on supporting data-based decision-making and sound policy throughout education systems.

Do & Don't ... When Working with English Learners

What's in a Name?

Do ask your students what they would like to be called and learn how to pronounce their names correctly. Names have incredible significance to families with much thought, meaning and culture woven into them. When the child enter school and teachers – consciously or not – mispronounce, disregard or change the name, they are in a sense disregarding the family and culture of the students as well.

Don't worry if you mispronounce a name the first few times; just be sure to let the student know that it's important for you to say their name correctly. This will make the students feel valued.

Modeling

Do model for students what they are expected to do or produce, especially for new skills or activities, by demonstrating the learning actions, sharing your thinking processes aloud, and showing good teacher and student work samples. Modeling promotes learning and motivation, as well as increasing student self-confidence—they will have a stronger belief that they can accomplish the learning task if they follow steps that were demonstrated.

Don't just orally explain and expect everyone to get it.

Provide Wait Time

Do provide students with enough time to formulate their responses, whether in speaking or in writing. Remember, they are thinking and producing in two or more languages. After asking a question, wait for a few seconds before calling on someone to respond. Once you call on a student, repeat the question. This “wait time” provides all students with an opportunity to think and process, and gives ELLs a needed period to formulate a response.

Don't just move on to the next student. Provide students with a sentence starter to answer the question. Always structure this so students are answering in complete sentences.

Use of Non-Linguistic Cues

Do use visuals, sketches, gestures, intonation, and other non-verbal cues to make both language and content more accessible to students. Teaching with visual representations of concepts can be hugely helpful to ELLs.

Don't stand in front of the class and lecture, or rely on a textbook as your only visual aid.

Giving Instructions

Do give verbal and written instructions (Anchor Charts). Use pictures when appropriate—this practice can help all learners. In addition, it is far easier for a teacher to point to the board in response to the inevitable repeated question, “What are we supposed to do?”

Don't forget to model step-by-step directions.

Check for Understanding

Do regularly check that students are understanding the lesson. Although thumbs-up, thumbs-down is a quick measure, it's not always accurate. Always have a student, or multiple students, repeat/explain the directions. Provide students with oral sentence frames to help them.

Don't simply ask, "Does everyone understand? Are there any questions?"

Don't assume that students are understanding because they are smiling and nodding their heads.

Encourage Development of Home Language

Do encourage students to continue building their literacy skills in their home language. Research has found that learning to read in the home language promotes reading achievement in the second language as "transfer" occurs. This transfer may include phonological awareness, comprehension skills, and background knowledge.

Don't "ban" students from using their native language in the classroom. Forbidding students to use their primary languages does not promote a positive learning environment where students feel safe to take risks and make mistakes. This practice can be harmful to the relationships between teachers and students, especially if teachers act more like language police than language coaches.

Explicitly Teach Essential Vocabulary

Regardless of your content you are responsible for teaching vocabulary. Create a word wall to use in your classroom. Use sentence starters and sentence frames. Use pictures to reinforce vocabulary. Provide students with opportunities to practice their new vocabulary.

Don't assume knowledge. Don't think everyone knows what a jump rope is.

Rate of Speech

Do speak slowly and clearly. Often, we are under a time crunch with our classes. Speaking quickly to get through the lesson isn't helping anyone. Speak deliberately when working with English learners. This means carefully choosing your words to express your meaning.

Don't repeat the same thing in a louder voice.

Don't use idioms without explaining what it means.