

Mark

Mark is a fifth-grade student who arrived from China one year ago. It was his first time in the United States and his first experience with the English language. His parents came to the United States five years prior to his arrival to work and set up residency. In the meantime, Mark had been living with his grandmother in Chongqing, one of the largest cities in China, and had limited contact with his parents. When he arrived in the United States without his grandmother, he was angry to have to leave her. Mark and his parents did not know each other very well so the transition was difficult. For much of fourth grade, Mark seemed resistant to learning and communicating with his teachers. He would only speak to other Chinese peers. He often had emotional outbursts, from sadness or anger, which interfered with his learning. One year later, in fifth grade, he shows much improvement and demonstrates English language proficiency at the Emerging level.

He now addresses his teachers and attempts classwork. He participates in small-group work with non-Chinese students, especially when it is well supported with examples, scaffolds, and home language support. During independent work, Mark uses his electronic dictionary and takes great pride in completing tasks with little or no help. He seems to enjoy being challenged, and at times he even asks for additional work. His teacher calls on Mark whenever she is sure he knows the answer. She wants to set him up for success and to give him the confidence he needs to speak in front of the class, which he does more frequently. Since the beginning of the school year, he has been closely watching how other children contribute to large- and small-group discussions and has become a much more active participant in all his core content classes.



→ STOP AND REFLECT ←

Mark had a difficult transitional year after his arrival to the United States and reunion with his parents. What can teachers do to support students in similar situations? In what ways is Mark's current school year a success and what may have contributed to that?

Emilia

Emilia was born in the United States five years ago and is now enrolled in a dual language kindergarten class. Emilia has an older cousin in the same school, who does very well academically. He speaks both Spanish and English with great confidence and fluency, so Emilia's parents wanted Emilia to receive a similar, enrichment-type bilingual education. Prior to entering kindergarten, Emilia was taken care of by family and close friends, who predominantly spoke Spanish to her and read a lot to her in her native language. Although she has lived in the United States from birth, Emilia learned to make sense of the world primarily in Spanish. She was exposed to some English as well, especially through her favorite TV shows and frequent visits to a local playground.

At the onset of the school year, her teachers noticed that Emilia seems to have a weak hand grasp and has a hard time holding anything heavier than a pencil, such as markers or scissors. As a result of early assessment and interventions, she now receives occupational therapy to help her with fine motor skills.

Emilia enjoys spending part of her day speaking and learning in Spanish and part of it in English in her dual language classroom. She seems to be most eager to learn when the lesson centers around storytelling or opportunities for echo-reading, choral responses, chanting, singing, role-playing, and movement. To enhance her skills with letter formation, her teachers allow Emilia to trace letters and shapes in sand, which makes her giggle. Since she enjoys hands-on learning so much, her teachers use a range of creative resources and materials throughout the day as well as iPad apps that encourage her to swipe or tap to get to the correct answers.

→ STOP AND REFLECT ←

Consider Emilia's family background, and determine what assets the family possesses that the school can build upon. What have been Emilia's greatest personal, academic, and familial challenges so far, and how have her teachers been able to address them? What would you do to help Emilia thrive as an English learner if she were in your classroom?

