

The Multilingual Learner (MLL) Language Journey

How Pocketalk supports educators and learners throughout the path to fluency

As school districts across the U.S. serve increasingly diverse student populations, the need for effective, scalable language access solutions is more urgent than ever. Multilingual learners (MLLs) are among the fastest-growing populations in K-12 schools. Supporting their success goes beyond quality instruction—it requires clear, consistent communication with educators, peers, and families in a language they understand.

The journey of language acquisition is far from uniform; each learner progresses at their own pace. MLLs benefit from a variety of tools and strategies tailored to their needs at each stage of development. Pocketalk serves as a valuable support throughout this journey—helping students build comprehension, confidence and connection in and beyond the classroom.

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Entering Phase

AKA Silent Phase

MLLs are becoming familiar with a new language environment and may not speak, but they are listening, observing, and absorbing

Student Characteristics

Relies on gestures and facial expressions; focuses on listening; hesitant to speak; minimal comprehension and verbal output; may feel overwhelmed or isolated

Support Strategies

Visual aids and real-life models; labeling classroom objects; repetitive, predictable language; use of body language and non-verbal cues

▶▶ Pocketalk's Role

Provides immediate translations to reduce anxiety; supports comprehension of basic needs and instructions; builds confidence and safety through clear communication; models correct pronunciation during passive acquisition



Tip

Provide rich, contextual language modeling. Use visuals to make meaning more accessible.

Emerging Phase

MLLs begin to understand and use short phrases, signaling the start of verbal participation

Student Characteristics

Begins using short phrases and simple sentences; understand common vocabulary with visuals; still relies on context and repetition

Support Strategies

Illustrated texts and sentence starters; real-life objects (realia); peer modeling and vocabulary previews

▶▶ Pocketalk's Role

Encourages self-advocacy and peer interaction; enables direct, two-way communication; offers audio and visual reinforcement of vocabulary; supports classroom routines and transitions



Tip

Use short written texts with pictures to build literacy and word associations.

Developing Phase

MLLs are connecting words to meaning and start using language to express ideas and engage in learning

Student Characteristics

Begins forming full thoughts in new language; uses short and expanded sentences; participates in simple conversations; starts reading and writing meaningfully

Support Strategies

Graphic organizers; collaborative work; scaffolded sentence structures; activating prior knowledge

▶▶ Pocketalk's Role

Clarifies meaning in both academic and social settings; reinforces pronunciation for growing vocabulary; used to confirm understanding as independence grows



Tip

Provide regular opportunities for self-expression - speaking or writing.

Expanding Phase

MLLs communicate with fluency in most contexts and begin thinking in their second language

Student Characteristics

Communicates with confidence using complex sentences; understands abstract and academic concepts; increasingly fluent in academic and social language

Support Strategies

Grade-level texts with minimal modifications; independent reading/writing assignments; use of dictionaries and thesauruses

▶▶ Pocketalk's Role

Assists in translating unfamiliar academic terms; supports expanding vocabulary with proper context and pronunciation



Tip

Foster higher-order thinking with extended discussions and writing.

Bridging Phase (Fluency)

MLLs use language with ease and accuracy across all academic and social contexts

Student Characteristics

Demonstrates near-native fluency; uses idioms, sarcasm, and nuanced language; reads and writes with sophistication and precision

Support Strategies

Authentic grade-level materials; research projects and essays; participation in full classroom discourse without modification

▶▶ Pocketalk's Role

Used sparingly as a reference for rare or complex vocabulary; promotes autonomy while supporting continued accuracy



Tip

Push toward full independence while offering optional support tools.