

## Spring 2021 newsletter

### From English Learner to Multilingual Learner

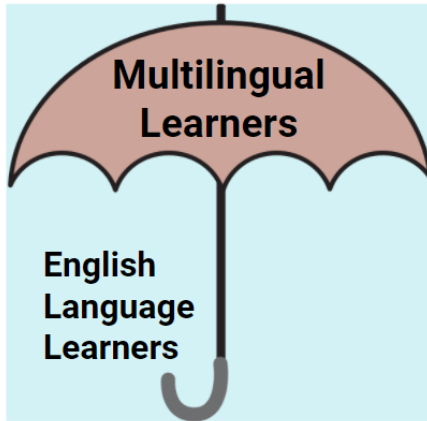


**From English Learner to Multilingual:** You may have noticed that OPI is now including the term Multilingual Learner (ML) alongside English Language Learner (EL) throughout our site, professional development, and other resources. You can view our statement here: [OPI update](#).

As part of the asset-based belief system implemented by [WIDA](#), we stand by the new term Multilingual Learner to describe all students who come in contact with and-or interact in languages in addition to English on a regular basis.

Multilingual is a strengths-based label that recognizes students who have the ability to become bilingual or multilingual through instructional support, and it acknowledges the ability to speak more than one language as a **highly valuable asset to be celebrated**.

The term emergent bilingual (EB) was also introduced in 2008 through the research from [Ofelia Garcia](#) but was not as widely adopted. Through her research, she demonstrated that equitable education for ELs must focus on their emergent bilingual abilities. It is important to note that not so long-ago multilingual students in Montana were referred to as Students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and we applaud the strength-based language embraced throughout our state.



#### Multilinguals are:

- Current ELs,
- Students who were once ELs but have exited out of the EL status,
- Students who were never ELs but are heritage speakers of another language, and
- Students of world languages.

---

## ML/EL Instructional Tip: End the Year Strong



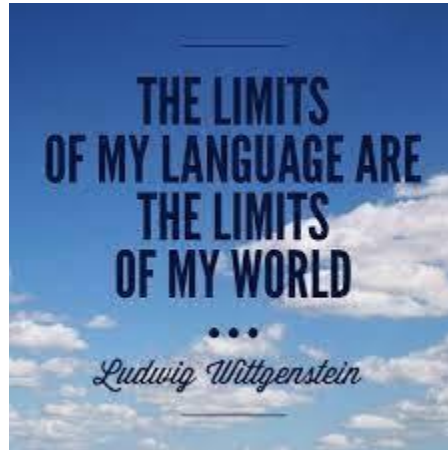
Although the last several months have presented epic challenges for educators of ML/EL students, the end always provides an opportunity to “finish strong,” by setting goals and plans to allow students to experience success. Here are some ideas from Larry Ferlazzo’s new book, *The ELL Teacher’s Toolbox: Hundreds of Practical Ideas to Support Your Students*.

1. Have students individually draw a picture or create a storyboard of their most memorable moments in class during the year. (They can include important learning topics, memorable activities, school events and celebrations.) They can use it as a springboard for writing about the experience.
2. Students can make a top-ten list of most important vocabulary words, concepts, facts, and skills they have learned. They can make these together with a group.
3. Students can be divided into groups with each one being assigned a topic the class has studied. Students work as a group to create a poster containing facts on the topic.
4. Have students design a visual representation of their reading journey, such as a chart or timeline, a map, or bookshelf, which contains the titles of the books they have read.

5. What not to do: Don't do a countdown of the number of days left in the school year. For some of our multilingual/EL students, the summer doesn't represent a carefree time of relaxation. School might be a safe place that they don't want to leave for the summer.

---

## Culturally Responsive Connection



Nurturing the heritage languages of our Multilingual students is at the foundation of a culturally responsive instructional space. The goal of our school districts with ML/EL students should not be to replace L1 (native languages) with L2 (English) but rather to advocate for these student's biliteracy and bilingualism. To access some resources on fostering heritage language development at school and home for ML/EL students, please check out resources on our website: [Heritage Language Retention Resources](#)

These efforts align with all the current research regarding the impact that nurturing the culture and language of our students will have on their brain. "Culture, it turns out, is the way that every brain makes sense of the world. That is why everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity, has a culture. Think of culture as software for the brain's hardware. The brain uses cultural information to turn everyday happenings into meaningful events. If we want to help dependent learners do more high order thinking and problem solving, then we have to access their brain's cognitive structures to deliver culturally responsive instruction." [Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain](#).

We will be hosting a book study this summer that will include discussions on culturally responsive teaching. Email: [evelyn.paz@mt.gov](mailto:evelyn.paz@mt.gov) to sign up.

---

## Spring Teacher Spotlight- Irina Mills



This spring, we were able to record our first ML/EL Educator Spotlight with an incredible EL student advocate in our state. We got to chat with the ML/EL coordinator and educator in the Great Falls District, Irina Mills.

Irina Mills was born and grew up in Russia. Since childhood, she was curious about other languages and cultures, so she decided to pursue a dream of becoming a Foreign Language teacher. After Irina completed her BA and MA in Linguistics with focus on teaching ESL from Nizhny Novgorod Linguistics University, she moved to the US. In 2005, Irina began her teaching career with Great Falls Public Schools as a German teacher. When Great Falls Public Schools started an English Learner program to support the needs of a growing EL population, Irina stepped into her current role as an English Learner Specialist. She has now worked with ELs for over 10 years. For Irina, the most gratifying part of working with multilingual and multicultural students is being constantly reminded of our shared humanity while celebrating our differences.

Together we discussed many important details on how to create and run EL committees. We discussed important details such as the inception of the EL committee in Great Falls, which is now 11 years old, how they organize their meetings, how often and for how long they meet, and Irina even shared agenda samples that she uses during meetings. If you have been wondering how you can possibly support your ELs on your own, YOU CAN'T. You need to create a team of advocates who work together to work through many of the struggles that come up when supporting and teaching ELs.

**Watch Spotlight**