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EC Advocacy Project

Dual Language Learners

Advocating for dual language learners is essential for our community. It is important for families as well as children to feel comfortable using their home language in school without being alienated. Throughout the years, we have all experienced the programs offered in our schools for Dual Language Learners. The children who are learning a second language are having difficulties developing their home language. Not only the children are being affected but the families in our community as well. Till this day we still see the struggle children go through being in a class where the primary language is not the one, they use at home.

Children, families, and communities are being affected because many children have difficulties adapting to a new language. For most people their national language is their mother's tongue. Which means at home children will speak the same language as the one they speak at school, at the hospital, with family members, at a neighbor's house and with friends. Children learn the first language they hear as they grow. Having frequent conversations with their family, asking questions at school, or even asking people random questions will be easy in their native tongue.

Many children experience challenges when they try to communicate with other people who do not speak their language. For example, at school some children feel intimidated when they are asked questions that they don't know how to answer, or they are afraid to mispronounce their

answer. Some children experience bullying at an early age for having an accent or not understanding English. This will cause children to be self-cautions and can discourage them from participating in class, which can lower their grades.

When it's time for parent teacher conference, parents feel clueless into what can be asked or will be discussed. When their child is having difficulties in school the parents don't know how to assist them in their assignments. Children and parents seek for help because of the language barrier. This becomes a big concern to all parties, children, parents, and teachers. If a parent doesn't understand the feedback or doesn't know how to support their child, then it becomes a greater challenge. This can be a negative outcome for children because they may have delays in their learning process.

The logical support that a parent can provide for their children is advocating for them, however, this is difficult in a foreign language. If a parent decides to address their children's needs, they might not have the vocabulary to express their concerns. Many immigrant families go through this struggle daily when their children are in school. Families can't communicate their concerns during parent teacher conference. For example, my mother felt the need to use my older brother to translate her questions and concerns during parent teacher conference. Families need support for their children's academic progress.

All these barriers when communicating with others can cause families to forget and ignore their home language. By doing so, the families lose what makes them special and can alienate them from their communities. Communities are typically made of families that share the same culture. When a child feels unwelcomed in their classroom setting the child can resent their families, their culture, and communities. Therefore, communities are affected when children and parents are struggling to adapt to a new language. Some families in the community will seek help

to assimilate better but others might struggle and erase their identity. If this struggle continues communities will lose families and eventually the communities will no longer exist.

Overall, this issue we are facing in the education system needs to be addressed now. Children should be able to learn comfortably at their own pace instead of being assessed and then categorized and placed in certain educational level due to their home language. Based on my own experience as a preschool teacher all assessments are in English. This makes it more challenging for children that are not used to speak nor hear the language at home. It is important for teachers to provide a welcoming environment for all cultures who speak different languages. Based on my own experience I have witnessed the amount of stress a child and families can go through due to the new language spoken in school. As an educator it is important to make children feel at home while learning in school.

To address this topic, I would like to add more support to our dual language learners. Having more supportive assessments and resources for children as well as for families and teachers in our community can help the situation for all in general. Some assessments that can be addressed is knowing what a child requires and what support a child needs regardless of their language barrier. Every child should be able to learn as they play and enjoy their learning process in school. Schools can offer parents resources to support their children while being in school. At my worksite we encourage parents to join our Parent Teacher Association (PTA) program to help teachers as well as children to come up with different ideas and strategies to help enhance their education. We also, work together to come up with family engagement activities such as fundraising. Fundraising can help raise money for new books, school equipment that children require to learn.

Another way to help dual language learners is by taking action. We need to advocate for all children dual language learners, and hereby have our concerns be heard by politicians. There needs to be a change in the system and only politicians can stand together with children, families, educators, and the community to fight in support of all children struggling to understand a new language. As mentioned in the article “Calling for Policies that Support Dual Language Education” policies can be created like, “in California, voters approved Proposition 58 the California Multilingual Education Act of 2016—that eliminated the state’s English-only law and opened the door to increasing DL education programs to serve students throughout the state.” (Colon’s Blog 2019). Colon explains how changing policies like other states can help meet children’s needs when being assessed. If we continue to advocate, similar policies can be created in New York City as well.

Having diversity in a classroom setting is important for children to feel comfortable as they learn through play. Children feel confident and encourage to learn when they can find similarities from home to school. According to the article “Supporting Language: Culturally Rich Dramatic Play” children learn through play by “reenact activities and observations from family life and share common events in their cultures” (Gonzalez & Alanis 2018). Gonzalez and Alanis explain how children can develop their language and vocabulary skills while playing in the dramatic play area. On this article it states the importance of listening to the children’s interest to help understand the wants and needs. Children learn through play and most of all they learn by communicating with one another of their interest. As an example, in this article we can see how children can make a connection from home to school. During circle time we saw how children made a connection of their culture by mentioning an anecdote of when they go to the bakery and

what they find in it. This develops and strengthens their communication skills. Dramatic play centers should always reflect children's cultures as well as outside experiences.

Parents play an important role in children's education. It is important for parents to communicate with their child's teacher in regards the children's primary language and interest; with this said children would be able to communicate and express themselves thirdly. According to the article "What Parents Have to Teach Us About Their Dual Language Children" it is hard for children to adapt to a new language "for DLL's, the knowledge and experiences are in their minds, but the language to share them with English-dominant teachers or peers may not be available; this makes sharing time a challenge for DLLs and teachers" (Luna 2015). It is difficult for children to learn how to express themselves using a language they don't use at home. On this article I've learned the importance of parent's role on a child's language development. It is important for parents to keep the home language in their children. However, teacher's try their best to involve parents in their children academic performance. Unfortunately, not all parents attend due to their language barrier. When assessing a child teachers tend to observe and make assumptions that the child has a delay in a certain criterion due to their language.

To bring attention to my audience parents, politicians and educators and everyone in the educational department, I would offer monthly meetings and send monthly newsletters for all parents, teachers and staff to bring awareness of different activities and meetings I along with my director, would be establishing to help our Dual Language Learners. All meetings would be recorded and sent to the Department of Education to establish families concerns and make changes for DLL. During the monthly meetings I will work hand in hand with the director in our center to establish credibility. We would both present all programs we offer in our site. All parents would have a role and opportunity to express their concerns and help one another with

different activities or ideas to help our children succeed. For example, we can think of having assessments given on their foreign language. Throughout these meetings we will have presentations of children's interest and have parents put in ideas on how to facilitate and enjoy children's learning experiences. The goal for these monthly meetings would be for everyone to know and have a better understanding the struggle children go through when not being able to meet the standards due to their home language. It is highly important for children to feel proud and comfortable using the language they speak. It is important for parents, caregivers to know their children's rights, and that children's voices should be heard. The children's parents have the power to make a change in the school's system.

Politicians can help fix this issue our dual language learners are facing now. Having more supportive assessments and resources for children as well as for families and teachers in our community can help increase children's grade just by obtaining the extra support they need. Politicians can make this change for all DLL to have a better opportunity for success. When a child has a better understanding of the assessment in their primary language there is a high percentage that the child will pass with a higher score. This is beneficial for the child, parent, and teacher, when a child is able to understand and feel confident is when a teacher and the parent knows it was all worth making a change. Screening children with the English Language Learners Assessment can be helpful to know what stage the children are in and what they need more support on. Teachers can assist children in their needs and facilitate there learning experience by knowing what they need more help in. In conclusion, politicians can help by supporting teachers with the accurate curriculum to know about the cultural backgrounds of the children. Teachers should be able to do a self-assessment with children by using the child's primary language. Approximately 8% of public schools get funded by the government. The funding's can go

towards DLL programs by adding more multilingual teachers and a learning environment to all children that are in need. Schools will need approximately 2.5 billion to fund private schools for bilingual teachers, equipment for parents to use in schools and establish new curriculums based on children's interest. In order to make this possible it is important for educators and professionals in the career to understand how to work with DLL. It is important to understand the process of the second language acquisition to determine the strength and learning needs of Dual Language Learners.

The topic I choose to write about is Dual Language Learners. Many children have difficulties learning a new language. Children that are taught their home language usually tend to find other languages throughout their path. It is a struggle for parents, children, and our communities to adapt to a new language that is not their native language. It is really important to create a safe diverse environment. Being an advocate for children in my community is important because children deserve to be heard and treated equally regardless of their nationality. Every child deserves a welcoming classroom where diversity is shown throughout the classroom. The reason why I choose this issue is because when I was growing up, I was placed in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class, where I had to take a state test in order to be in a regular class. I personally struggled throughout my first years in public school because I was placed in an ESL class due to my parent's background. I was not able to understand my teachers' questions or the lesson that was being taught due to the language barrier. Addressing this issue today is very important to children's families and the communities.

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