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Implementing Developmentally Appropriate Practice for Bilingual Children

Not all children are at the same level of knowledge when they go to kindergarten. The standardized curriculum provided by the government works for one type of community but not for others. Emerging bilingual students have difficulties to adapt to this standardized curriculum that is designed for children whose first language is English. This issue is of great interest because many bilingual children perform poor in school year after year. Students whose first language is other than English struggle to pass the standardized test that determines if they are ready for the next level or not. The most affected by this issue are students from immigrant families whose language is other than English. Most of them live in low-income communities where they have no access to community-based programs or Prekindergarten that help them to learn English while keep learning their native language. These children go to kindergarten without academic knowledge, social skills, and barely understand and speak English. The early childhood program community must take action to solve this situation as soon as possible.

Currently, there are not specific procedures in the early childhood education programs to help these students to perform better in school and keep learning their home language. The consequences are that bilingual students do not receive the quality of education that they need and deserve to improve their knowledge and do better in school. In addition, early childhood schools need more bilingual teachers that can instruct students in English and in the student's home

language. This will help to have a better communication with students and their families. The inclusion of bilingual books in the school library is another tool that will serve to help students to improve their understanding of the new language they are learning. Furthermore, implementing developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) for bilingual children in early childhood education programs will help them to improve their English acquisition while also learning their home language. DAP is a program that focuses on helping the individual needs of each child. It is a tool to help bilingual children to improve in their learning. It has specific guidelines for teachers and families to support bilingual students in school and at home (naeyc.org).

With the help of teachers, parents, and administrators we will be able to provide the quality of education that our bilingual students deserve. Parents can support their children's home language by reading books in their native language at home. They can also volunteer in school to help monolingual teachers to make translation. Teachers need to implement activities in the weekly lesson plan that help bilingual students to improve their academic learning in both languages. For example, teachers could transform the dramatic area into a market and all children could engage in conversation that will improve their comprehension in both languages. Community organizations can support our bilingual students by organizing family activities to promote multicultural interaction. To make all this happen, the support of the early childhood programs administrators is crucial.

Bilingual children need access to a high-quality early childhood education to prepare them with the skills and the academic knowledge they need to successfully start kindergarten. According to Bilingual Research Journal (2019) 33% of children under the age of 8 are dual language learners (DLLs) and 29% of children ages 3 to 6 who attend head start are DLLs. Most of these students will perform poorer in school because the lack of professionally qualified early childhood

education programs. This article explains that the characteristics of qualified programs include well-qualified educators, a culturally and linguistically responsive and developmentally appropriate curriculum, a focus on native language and/or English as a second language development, and collaborative, mutually respectful family-school partnerships. The information in the article states the specific steps to follow to ensure the success of bilingual education. Family partnership is important because most of the children's education occurs at home and in the community. Teachers need professional development to get knowledge about their teaching approaches for bilingual students. The research suggests that implementing this practice will have a positive impact in the education of bilingual children.

In addition, children's daily observations are important to get to know their strengths and weakness in academics, social skills, and English language level. DAP Position Statement (NAEYC 2020) argues that teachers who engage in developmentally appropriate practice foster young children's joyful learning and maximize the opportunities for each child to achieve their full potential. Implementing DAP for bilingual children will take into consideration the child's background, culture, and ethnicity, language economic status to fully support their development and learning in an increasingly diverse society. Early childhood educators have the professional responsibility to be life-long learners and foster life-long learning in children. They need to keep learning from families and communities as well. It is important to make sure that students and their families feel welcome in the school community. To make this happen the physical environment of the school should reflect all communities: for example, educators can make welcome signs in each of the languages spoken in the classroom. All the ideas mentioned above will help to bring a better teaching approach for bilingual children.

To make this happen it is important that parents and teachers work as a team to make a better academic future for bilingual students. To start my small advocacy action for bilingual education I will look for the family's support. I will form a committee and organize monthly meetings. Each Friday parents and teachers will meet in one of the classrooms from 6:00pm to 7:00pm, to support each other and to learn more about why it is important that our children keep learning their home language while learning English. Also, we will discuss ideas on how each family can contribute to achieve this goal. Printed information will be available for parents to get the knowledge they need to support students at home. To make more families aware about the importance of bilingual education I will use social media. For instance, I will make a community page on Facebook and Instagram. The name of the group will be Advocators for Bilingual Education. I will use every opportunity to spread the word about bilingual education. We visualize our children as future bilingual citizens who will have better job opportunities and better communication with parents and close relatives, such as grandparents.

Of course, we need the support of the leaders of early childhood programs to make bilingual education a common goal for the school community. Directors are responsible for the curriculum and the philosophy of each program. For my large advocacy action, I will ask directors to support teachers with monthly professional development meetings to learn more about Developmentally Appropriate Practice for Bilingual Children. Directors need to work with teachers to develop a curriculum that includes bilingual children. Teachers can also make a weekly lesson plan that includes activities to improve students' academic knowledge in both languages. For example, reading multicultural books every day during meeting time. Program leaders can organize family activities to engage parents' participation. For instance, a potluck dinner every two months. Early childhood program leaders can talk to community leaders to ask for their participation in

supporting bilingual children's education. As I mentioned before children learn a lot from their community environment. Directors have the power to hire bilingual teachers and teaching assistants to bring a better-quality education for bilingual students. They have the power to implement a curriculum that helps the individual needs of each student. Directors can advocate with other leaders in power to make a meaningful change in favor of a more equitable education for our bilingual children, especially for those who come from low-income families and underrepresented communities.

As an immigrant and bilingual teacher, I have the responsibility to advocate for bilingual education. I have observed the frustration of children when they go to school and they do not understand what is going on in the classroom. I have also observed the monolingual teachers' frustrations when children are not able to follow the routine and activities properly because they do not understand English, and the teachers do not know the child's language. year after year our bilingual children encounter the same situation. Bilingual children deserve the same quality of education as their English- speaking monolingual peers. Working as teaching assistant gives me the opportunity to help the Hispanic community. I explain the routines to students whose home language is Spanish. I translate school information for Spanish speaking parents. From my own experience I know that if parents do not understand the English language, they are missing a lot of information that they can use to advocate for a better education their children. As a teacher I have the professional responsibility to advocate for these vulnerable children that come from low-income families. In many cases their parents do not speak English either. I hope that these advocacy actions bring awareness to this issue. I also hope that more people get involved to make meaningful change to bring justice for these students.

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/dap/contents>

<https://doi-org.bmcc.ezproxy.cuny.edu/10.1007/s40688-018-0209-7>