

Lack of South Asian Dual Language Programs in NYC

Course 210: Professor Diaz

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Immigrants arriving in the United States during the 1900s rapidly assimilated to the American culture because of citizenship status, social stability, and economic success. Many children of those immigrants may have lost a part of their culture due to their parents becoming “Americanized.” In today’s society, multiculturalism is highly encouraged, especially in early childhood because for many reasons. Children are urged to know more than one language because bilingual children have higher cognitive skills, language skills, and social skills. Many parents want their children to be bilingual because they know the job market demands for bilingual speakers have increased, and their children will have more job opportunities in the future. Families believe that learning and keeping their native language is important because it will allow their children to connect to their culture and people in their community and hopefully pass on their cultural history for generations to come.

New York City is one of the most diverse cities in the U.S, with a growing Asian population in Asian neighborhoods within Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. Although public schools have increased dual-language programs due to the Asian population growth in NYC, there is still a shortage of early childhood dual-language language in growing Asian neighborhoods such as Queens. Many Asian Pacific Islanders subgroups such as Filipinos, Koreans, and Indians are left out of dual-language programs in New York City. According to the NYC Department of Education 2020-2021 bilingual program database, there are only two early childhood Chinese dual-language programs in Queens, even though that borough has about 11% Chinese population according to the US 2019 Census. There are no early childhood dual-language programs for Southeast Asians even though 6% of Indians, 2% Filipinos, and Koreans make up the population in Queens.

Whether Asian families are new immigrants or have resided in NY for a while, many parents want to enroll their children in dual-language programs because they want to prevent their children from losing their language and disconnecting from their culture. Suppose parents hope for their children not to lose their cultural identity. In that case, families in the Asian and non-Asian communities will need to come together to advocate for expanding dual-language programs in NYC Queen's county. Families residing in the community will have to advocate for more dual-language programs by getting the NYC Department of Education Chancellor Meisha Porter and mayor Eric Adams to allocate city funding to their district public school programs.

Research

My research has suggested that the lack of early childhood Asian dual-language programs in growing Asian neighborhoods in New York City harms children. The borough of Queens has a growing Southeast Asian population. A shortage of dual-language programs for children of immigrants or children with families who speak more than one language can lead to disconnection with their families, heritage language loss, and cultural identity loss.

Article 1

The article "Khmer as a Heritage Language in the United States: Historical Sketch, Current Realities, and Future Prospects" by Wayne E Wright talk about the migration of Cambodian Americans to the United States, the demographics information related to Cambodian Americans, and the Khmer language in the United States. Wright's research showed that even though the Khmer language is kept alive in the US through families, the Khmer community in the US, and social media, the language is still at risk of language loss among younger people.

Many younger people can speak Khmer but are not proficient in it because of the lack of opportunities in heritage language education. Parents stress the importance of preserving the Khmer language because they associate their children's "loss of Khmer language as synonymous with losing their Khmer identity and culture." (Wright, 2010 p 136)

California is one of the states with a high population of Cambodian Americans. Wright's conducted a survey on English Proficiency for those who identify themselves as Khmer speakers between the ages of 5 to 17 in the California department of education in 2002. He surveyed 23,647 students, with 57% of children not fluent in English because they are immigrants and 43% fluent in English. Although this data shows that the language is alive, it does not tell if the children who identify themselves as Khmer speakers can speak it proficiently. As Wright's article illustrates, this data shows that younger people that are 1.5 generation may know the Khmer language and not be proficient, and second-generation Cambodians in the US are losing the Khmer language because of the "lack of heritage programs where students can develop/maintain their home language including learning how to read and write Khmer." (Wright, 2010 p.136) His article also stated that there are very few Khmer bilingual programs created in US public schools, and most in-school Khmer language programs are in secondary school, not early childhood.

Wright talks about the Cambodian American youths who maintain their Khmer language advantages over those who do not. Some advantages are youth having a greater sense of self-identity, better relations with non-speaking parents and relatives, communicating effortlessly with family and friends, and being eligible for employment in the US and Cambodia requiring bilingual skills. He proposes ideas needed to maintain the Khmer language in the US, such as the Cambodian American population actively creating bilingual school programs. This article relates to the topic of a shortage in dual-language programs that can lead to language loss and the

importance of maintaining heritage language. As Wright stressed in his article, losing a heritage language is synonymous with losing the cultural identity.

Article 2

In the article “Asian American Youth Language Use: Perspective Around Schools and Communities,” Shalini Shankar talks about the relationship between language use and issues concerning Asian American youths in social life, schooling, acculturation, and intergenerational relationships. In the Language and Identity section of the article, Shanker highlighted the linkage between language and identity. She wrote that “Asian American youths use their heritage language to express a sense of belonging and connection with their heritage cultures as well as their communities.” (Shanker, 2011 p 8). Youths who can speak their heritage language enables them to take advantage of social connection in their ethnic community. It is also believed that youth who retain their native language have a less generational clash with their family than those who did not.

Another highlight from the article is how heritage language changed throughout the generations, and heritage loss is due to generational change. Shanker states that heritage language loss usually occurs within three generations of Asian Americans because of the pressure surrounding assimilation. One reason for linguistic assimilation for these generations depends on their socioeconomic status. Generations higher in socioeconomic status are more likely to lose their heritage cultures than those who are not. Research shows that 1.5 generations have a good balance with the bilingual language, but if second generations do not use the language and are not proficient in it, it is inevitable that heritage language will be lost.

The article further indicates that language loss and generational differences in heritage language abilities may have “negative effects on family relationships,” and the gradual loss of heritage language process fills some youth with regret. In addition, it also forms intergenerational communication difficulties and criticism from relatives and communities (Shanker, 2011 p 11-12). This article relates to the topic because, as stated in Shanker’s article, children use their heritage language to express belonging and connect to their culture, family, and community. Research shows that many Asian Americans are not using their heritage language or lacking proficiency because of assimilation by the second generation. Suppose they still hope for their children and future generations to hold on to their heritage language and cultural opportunity. In that case, they need to have the choice to enroll their child in a dual-language program. A lack of dual-language programs will mean that they will not even be given an option to do that.

Article 3

The article “New York Representatives Urge City Schools to Add South Asian Dual-Language Program” highlights the lack of South Asian dual-language programs in New York Queens community. U.S representatives Grace Meng and Joseph Crowley stated that among the NYC DOE 182 dual-language programs, none are geared towards South Asian Americans. Queens County in New York is one of the most diverse communities in the country. It is the home to many Asians and over 60 percent of South Asians living there. The two New York Representatives urged the city to add more South Asian dual-language such as Hindi and Punjabi in a growing South Asian population in Queens County.

This article is relevant to the topic because the report shows that it is apparent that there is a lack of South Asian dual-language in NYC, especially Queens county, which is home to

many South Asian Americans. The report further states that the NYC DOE is aware of this issue and is committed to expanding its dual-language programs to this specific group. Even though the New York City Department of Education made a statement to expand South Asian dual-language 2015, data has shown that it has not developed yet. According to the NYC Department of Education 2020-2021 bilingual program list, it is apparent that you see more Bengali dual-language programs. However, it still does not include other South Asian languages.

Small Advocacy Action

One small advocacy action I can do to challenge the lack of dual-language programs for South Asian Americans will be to raise awareness of the effect that lack of dual-language programs can have on immigrant and non-immigrant children. I have to provide data to show the lack of dual-language programs in the NYC DOE for South Asians. I have to explain how lack of dual-language programs can lead to children's heritage language loss and cultural identity loss. It is also important to give examples of how children's heritage language loss can strain relationships between parents and the older generation, how being bilingual can benefit children in the future, and how they can use language to connect with their ethnic community.

Large Advocacy Action

A large advocacy action families can advocate for more South Asian dual-language programs would be working together with stakeholders to get fundings for dual-language programs in their school or center. Families have the most prominent voice regarding education, and they are the voice for their children and the liaison between other families, staff, and the community. Families can form a group to raise awareness of the lack of South Asian

dual-language programs in public schools by asking for support from teachers and school leaders. Teachers and school leaders also play an essential role because they know what students want and need in the classroom and provide information on how this issue can positively affect children. Together, they can go to the principal or directors in the school for help to bring this topic to the district council members.

The principal is the leader who advocates for the students, parents, educators, and community in which the school resides. The role of principals is not only to manage the school, but they are also community activists. Principals should recognize how public education impacts community issues, and in this case, how dual-language programs can help bridge culture and people. The district council members can then raise this issue to the NYC Department of Education Chancellor. District council leaders represent the people living in that district and negotiate city budgets with the NYC mayor. Therefore, they are the ones who have the power to convince the NYC DOE and mayor to allocate fundings for more dual-language programs.

Commentary

The lack of dual-language programs, specifically for South Asians, is important because I can see how not knowing your heritage language can lead to a disconnect between families and their identity. Working in a daycare with children who are first or 1.5 generation immigrants, I can begin to see how children are assimilating to the English language and gradually not using their native language. When talking to parents, they will express that their child would answer the questions they ask in English instead of their native language, and when asking them how to say that in their native language, they would just shrug or say I forgot. Although they may know

their identity as they get older, they lose a part of their cultural identity when they don't know the language.

Language loss or lack of proficiency will lead to a more intimate connection with families and genuine connection with their culture. As a 1.5 generation, my grandparents spoke a different dialect of Chinese. My parents never taught me their dialect, so I never understood what they said. I never communicated or had an intimate connection with them because I couldn't understand or speak their language. It wasn't until they passed that I realized that language could play such an essential role in family connection, especially for the older generation where they don't know the new language. Even though my story is about a different dialect, it is still relevant to the issue of how a loss of language can affect a family relationship. I hope children preserve their family's heritage and tradition, form connections with families and people in their communities, and form their cultural identity through English and their native language.

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