

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Head Start
and
Early Head Start



April 8-9, 2002
Washington, DC

IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN
HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START PROGRAMS

For many years, the Head Start Bureau has engaged in major initiatives as part of the nationwide implementation of its educational programs and comprehensive services to be responsive to the realities of cultural and linguistic diversity among children and families. These practices are in accordance with the Head Start Act and supported by the Head Start Program Performance Standards, the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs, the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, as well as research studies, training, and publications. As the communities of children and families served in Head Start become increasingly diversified racially, ethnically, and linguistically, the Head Start Bureau's efforts to improve the quality of services provided in the areas of language, early literacy, and cognitive development are an increasing priority.

“As a child who was a second language learner from first generation immigrants, being culturally competent in English, and in the home language, has been essential and invaluable. This is because one cannot help but feel a deep sense of loss when one's home language cannot be passed on to our own children. It is something that is so essential to one's identity and self-esteem.”

- Focus Group Participant

BACKGROUND

Today, approximately 27% of the children served by Head Start speak a language other than English at home, and more than 140 languages are represented in Head Start programs nationwide. The linguistic representation of English language learners enrolled in Head Start programs is predominantly Spanish speaking. The 2000-2001 Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) data on 900,000 children by dominant language indicated that 201,486 were Spanish language speakers; approximately 13,419 were speakers of Asian languages; 2,416 were enrolled as Native American language speakers; and 26,827 were speakers of other languages.

In October 2001, a National Forum on Second Language Acquisition was held by the Migrant and Seasonal Program Branch and its Training and Technical Assistance providers to support grantees in the delivery of educational services provided to the growing population of non-English speaking farm worker children and families. A panel of educators, child development specialists, and local migrant program staff met to discuss and identify specific issues and needs in the field of first and second language acquisition. As a result, a technical paper was developed (see Appendix D for summary of technical paper) describing the limited research available on the process of second language acquisition among children ages birth to five years old.

Early Head Start and Head Start programs, in partnership with the Head Start Bureau, are in search of the most appropriate ways to offer a comprehensive array of services to an increasingly diverse linguistic and cultural population. For this reason, the Head Start Bureau convened an English Language Learners Focus Group of parents, local staff, researchers, and other experts in the fields of first and second language acquisition, bilingualism and biculturalism, on April 8-9, 2002, in Washington, DC.

The goal of this two day focus group was to solicit specific recommendations regarding effective approaches for addressing the opportunities and challenges presented by working with young children and families who are English language learners in all Head Start and Early Head Start programs nationwide.

The linguistic and cultural diversity of children enrolled presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Given that a large number of children enter Head Start with a foundation in a language other than English, the potential exists for these children to become bilingual and biliterate, skills that will become increasingly valuable in the global economy of the future. At the same time, proficiency in English is essential for success in school, necessitating that young children make progress toward the acquisition of English. Fortunately, research indicates that the early years of life are the most opportune period for learning a second language. To utilize the opportunity of bilingualism while also addressing the challenge of acquiring a second language, the process of second language acquisition must be seen as "additive", that is, learning a second language should not mean losing the first language.

The meeting began with parents, program staff, and researchers giving short presentations on what they are doing to meet the needs of English language learners. These presentations addressed the following focus questions:

- **What do we know about how children are currently doing in the area of first and second language acquisition?**
- **What do we know about the opportunities and challenges for programs, staff, parents, and children in the area of first and second language acquisition?**
- **What do we know about what works for young children in the area of first and second language acquisition?**

Facilitated discussions after each presentation aired different perspectives. On the following pages are some of the presentation highlights from these researchers regarding first and second language acquisition.

"The only way that we can affect real change - genuine, positive change towards the area of cultural diversity - is by having cultural sensitivity and appreciation for everyone, which is the foundation for self-respect and respect for others. Once we have self-respect then we can understand who we are, why we are here, and where we are going."

- Focus Group Participant

Because research should guide the direction of programs serving English language learners, several reports were presented on the status of current research regarding English language learners in Head Start.

Sylvia Y. Sánchez, Ed.D., Associate Professor and Researcher at the Graduate School of Education at George Mason University, shared insights on the cultural processes that naturally surround families in a community, influencing a child from birth. Dr. Sánchez emphasized the powerful role that language plays in the lives of young children and how the spoken language is a very powerful primary vehicle for many children to make sense of the world. The child uses not only verbal cues, but culturally infused non-verbal cues as well. She stressed that when young children enter early care and educational settings where the intonation is not familiar, their understanding of what is said is seriously affected. When familiar cultural norms are not available to support children's development it is more difficult for them to make sense of the world.

Dr. Sánchez emphasized that it is critical that Head Start and Early Head Start programs have accurate, up to date information as they plan programming for children birth to five years old. The important role of teaching staff was also acknowledged because adults are not immune to messages given out by the larger society that communicate that English is the only language of prestige in the community. She noted that parents are similarly affected by such messages. Many are being told that the reason their child is having difficulty learning English is because they do not speak English at home. Parents may cease speaking their home language to their children, thus interfering with the parent-child relationship and the child's linguistic and cognitive development.

She noted a clear need to think about these issues and observe what is happening to very young children in the educational context. It is critically important that young children have multiple opportunities for home language, and cultural and linguistic continuity in educational settings. If the primary task of very young children is to make sense of the world, they will be able to do so by having personal, caring, and nurturing relationships that include communication in a language they understand with people around them who are important in their lives.

Sharon Yandian, M.Ed., Project Director of the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Quality Improvement Center, provided an overview of the Migrant Head Start Quality Improvement Center and the Migrant Head Start Disabilities Quality Improvement Center technical paper titled, *Supporting the Home Language and Promoting English Acquisition Within Migrant and Seasonal Head Start*.

The technical paper describes the characteristics and needs of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs where, according to the 2000 Head Start Program Information Report, 92% of the children enrolled in migrant and seasonal programs and 23% enrolled in regional Head Start programs speak a language other than English at home. These children are expected to learn English by the time they reach kindergarten. Additionally, the paper provides specific strategies for promoting second language acquisition as well as supporting home language. These strategies include creating a language rich environment that fosters first and second language acquisition, using techniques that encourage children to interact as they further develop their first language and increasingly understand, use, and learn a second language.

Other strategies include the use of both verbal and non-verbal cues, modeling responses, and encouraging repetition and routines. Additionally, the development of a program wide language acquisition policy statement and tools for assessing oral language development are essential.

Ms. Yandian stated that there is clear research that supports the importance of establishing a rich foundation in the acquisition of a first language as a means of facilitating second language acquisition. In addition, young children must continue development in the first language as they acquire the second language, or they will lose proficiency in their first language. She also highlighted the need for ongoing professional development to increase teachers' knowledge and skills as they work with English language learners in early childhood programs.

The technical report underscores the benefits of exposure to two languages as an asset that should be fostered. All programs should possess the capabilities to provide support for children's home languages and implement effective practices that will assist children in becoming bilingual with the necessary foundation to develop their capacities to become biliterate as well.

Michael L. López, Ph.D., Lead Senior Social Science Research Analyst within the Child Outcomes Research and Evaluation (CORE) team of the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, addressed observations on the impact of the demographic constituency of Head Start and its increasing diversification with close to 27% of Head Start children coming from non-English speaking families. Dr. López underscored a number of issues related to the need to develop assessment measures and approaches that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for English language learners, at any single point in time, as well as capturing growth over time. Because the Spanish-speaking population in Head Start programs has the largest representation, he stated that much of what is being done in this area has been targeted to this language group, especially with respect to measurement development work.

Dr. López described two major national studies that provide snapshots of information on Head Start children and the progress they have made over time. The first round of data collection in the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) longitudinal study on program performance began in 1997 with a nationally representative sample of 3,200 children and families from 40 programs across the country. The second round of data collection that started in the fall of 2000, measured the progress of 2,800 children in 43 programs nationwide. Both studies follow the children from their point of entry into Head Start, through the end of Head Start, and then through the end of kindergarten and first grade.

In the first cohort of the FACES study, children whose home language was Spanish were initially assessed in the fall of their Head Start year in Spanish and then were assessed in English at the end of the Head Start year. Not surprisingly, the data from the end of the Head Start year indicated that while the Spanish-speaking children demonstrated some progress on a number of the assessment tasks, their performance on the English versions of the assessment measures still tended to lag behind the performance of their English-speaking peers.

In the second cohort of FACES, which started in the fall of 2000, the assessment strategy for Spanish-speaking children was revised considerably. The Spanish-speaking children are now assessed on vocabulary and letter identification in both English and Spanish at each data collection point, instead of switching to just English assessments at the end of the Head Start year. There are very few assessment measures available that are appropriate for three and four year olds. However, since the focus on language and literacy development of three to four year olds is a complex phenomenon to observe and document, both first and second language acquisition must be considered to capture their developmental trajectories separately for each language. A dual language administration of assessment could, therefore, help document the progress of children's language acquisition and development over time in each language more effectively.

Dr. López shared that there is a great need to capture all different aspects of language development and understand how to best provide appropriate services and language rich environments that can help all children develop in these areas, across all languages. Preliminary data from FACES 2000 show that Spanish-speaking children in Head Start showed significant gains in English vocabulary skills, without declines in Spanish vocabulary skills; however, they did not show gains in letter recognition against national norms.

The other major research project is the Congressionally mandated longitudinal study of the impact of Head Start, involving 5,000-6,000 three and four year old children from a stratified, national sample of Head Start grantees and delegate agencies. The National Head Start Impact Study will use measurement approaches similar to those used in the FACES study. The main difference between these two national studies is that the Impact Study will assess children who have been randomly assigned to either a Head Start or a comparison group prior to enrollment. Children who are randomly assigned to the comparison group will be served by a wide range of other care options that are available within their community, including center-based child care, family child care, relative care, and others.

Patton Tabors, Ed.D., Research Associate at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, presented information on a five year longitudinal research study, funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, on young children's language and literacy acquisition in Spanish and English from the time they start in pre-K programs, including Head Start, until they complete second grade. The study, the Early Childhood Study of Language and Literacy Development of Spanish-speaking children, will collect family and school data and will assess the language and literacy abilities of a sample of 350 children from homes where Spanish is spoken in Massachusetts and Maryland and a comparative sample of 150 Spanish-speaking children in Puerto Rico.

This comparative data will be potentially significant in helping early childhood educators better understand what children experience by age four and beyond in the process of learning a second language. The influential factors that impact this process will also provide guidance concerning what educational and instructional practices should be designed and implemented for the successful literacy development of English language learners in Head Start and other early childhood programs.

Small group discussions were held in the afternoon of the first day. Participants considered the following question as it related to four specific educational service areas in need of continuous improvement:

What are the issues, challenges, approaches, and successful strategies in the following areas regarding first and second language acquisition for children ages birth to five years?

- A. Curriculum and Teaching Strategies**
- B. Working with Parents and Families**
- C. Assessment and Documentation**
- D. Staff Development and Training**

The following are the major discussion points offered by each group on the challenges of promoting first language development, second language acquisition, and early literacy development. Selected strategies were also suggested for English language learners ages birth to five in Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

A - CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Challenge

Developing culturally specific and language rich learning environments, literacy interactions, and materials.

Suggested Strategies

- Create language rich learning environments that reflect the language(s) spoken by the children.
- Share family stories and involve community elders.
- Enrich personal cultural understanding through strong relationships with families and communities; learn *from* communities rather than about communities.
- Within the curriculum, affirm the children's culture and language through literature, music, learning materials, and resources that are age appropriate, and culturally and linguistically relevant.
- Introduce alphabet knowledge, early literacy skills, and phonemic awareness in the first or dominant language spoken by the child to support home-school, family and child linguistic continuity, and facilitate second language learning, since some languages are not written or do not use the alphabetic system.
- Offer opportunities for the development and dissemination of quality resources and materials in Native American languages to prevent language loss and promote cultural preservation.

"We want to create learning environments that are additive, not subtractive."

- Focus Group Participant

Challenge

Teaching concepts to English language learners by teachers who *do not* speak their home language.

Suggested Strategies

- Use simple sentences, repeat what is said, use gestures and facial expressions, and point to objects. Use everyday vocabulary and gradually expand vocabulary so English language learners continue to make progress in vocabulary development and are challenged.
- Help children link vocabulary to first hand experience with pictures, concrete objects, and real life events.
- Stick to predictable, comfortable routines so English language learners know what to expect.
- Use both verbal and non-verbal cues to communicate, model responses, encourage repetition, and foster consistent routines in adult-child and child-child interactions.
- Build the availability and access of children's literature and use of picture dictionaries in both English and the child's home language.
- Keep parents informed about the basic or new concepts to be learned in the program and ask them to introduce these concepts to the child at home and in their home language.
- Make available on loan early literacy and family literacy activity bags. Include writing materials, books, and tapes in the child and family's spoken language that can be read and listened to at home.
- Identify parents' strengths in their home language(s) and encourage them to become involved in program activities, special cultural events, and projects.
- Identify family, program, and community members who can help with oral and written translations.

B - WORKING WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Challenge

Building parent-school partnerships with families who speak other languages.

Suggested Strategies

- Identify and listen to families' interests, desires, strengths, and needs. Use this information to guide their involvement in center and home activities.
- Provide translators for parents to ensure accurate communication, especially in situations where staff do not speak the home language of the family.
- Engage parents in their own second language development by providing English as a Second Language classes, offer information to them on adult education alternatives, and involve them in family literacy projects.
- Explain or share information with parents about the developmental process of learning a second language and their child's progress.
- Provide opportunities for parents of English language learners to learn about early childhood development, culturally related child rearing practices, and different learning styles.
- Encourage parents to talk, sing, and hold conversations with their children that extend and enrich their vocabulary in their home language and in English, if possible.

Challenge

Providing an environment of acceptance that supports and respects the cultures and languages of the families served.

Suggested Strategies

- Use the family's home language in verbal and written communication to the extent possible.
- Help parents understand the importance of using their home language regularly with their children, because establishing a solid foundation in the home language serves as a bridge to the acquisition of English as a Second Language.
- Encourage parents to read or tell stories to their child every day in their home language.
- Ask elders, extended family, and community members to visit the program and share stories with the children in their home language.
- Ask parents to bring items to share that are characteristic of their particular culture, which they can teach, learn about, and enjoy with each other.
- Because families feel most comfortable expressing themselves in their home language, use the home language instead of English as a basis, if possible.
- Collect stories from non-English speaking immigrants who have escaped from difficult situations and have gone through complicated circumstances to get to the United States. Their stories could be shared with others to develop a publication from which other programs and staff could benefit.
- Collect traditional stories from non-English speaking immigrant families that are brought from their country of origin and could serve to create books to share with others. Head Start programs could help in the publication of these stories.

“In the lives of Head Start children, and English language learners, what makes their lives rich and meaningful is their family, culture or cultures, and language. For us to do anything less than support all of those in as many ways as we possibly can, isn't like Head Start at all.”

- Focus Group Participant

C - ASSESSMENT AND DOCUMENTATION

Challenge

Assessing linguistically and developmentally appropriate assessment measures.

Suggested Strategies

- Identify measures that assess first and second language levels of proficiency.
- Measure the process of learning a language versus the process of learning in a second language.
- Conduct multiple sources of authentic performance-based assessment in the child's dominant or primary language.
- Use observation, recording strategies, and documentation procedures that are aligned with child outcomes and are meaningful for parents to interpret and understand in their home language. This process should help guide instruction and meet each child's educational needs and progress in English and in their home language.

D - STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Challenge

Developing and designing research-based training on linguistic and cultural diversity for staff.

Suggested Strategies

- Offer training seminars to keep staff informed about the history, latest trends, theoretical knowledge, and research-based practices relevant to bilingualism in the early childhood years.
- Design workshops, encourage staff to read online and enroll in courses related to language development, and to the process and phases of first and second language acquisition and learning.
- Offer cultural exchange opportunities that help expand the cultural knowledge related to diverse family and community values, cultural practices, and traditions. Teachers and children may want to visit each other's classrooms and neighborhoods to learn from one another.
- Plan professional development training sessions or seminars specifically related to cultural sensitivity that may address staff or adult attitudes towards home language retention and learning as well as cultural differences. Use journals and other strategies to document and learn from various cultural and linguistic groups, and to appreciate the cultural and language similarities and differences of children and families from various backgrounds.
- Identify and involve nationally recognized early childhood experts, theorists, researchers, scholars, experienced mentor-coaches, and parents who possess specific knowledge and skills related to working with English language learners.
- Establish partnerships with colleges and universities to offer college credit for staff participation in professional training and seminars.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE HEAD START BUREAU

The following is a summary of the Focus Group's major recommendations as presented on the second day of the meeting. The recommendations are grouped according to selected areas of need for ongoing support and further programmatic improvement of Head Start and Early Head Start's educational services for English language learners. These recommendations may help guide the design and implementation of research-based practices that impact the successful language and early literacy development of English language learners, birth to five.

Curriculum and Instruction

- ✓ Create and implement demonstration pilot programs of dual language instructional models and optional bilingual and multilingual education strategies, to promote first language development and second language acquisition for both English learners and English speakers.
- ✓ Promote the implementation of culturally and linguistically appropriate curricula to support children and families.

Child Assessment

- ✓ Support the development of age appropriate performance-based assessment measures in the child's home language to be conducted by staff who speak those languages.
- ✓ Employ multiple measures of assessment such as portfolios of children's work, observation, ongoing assessment, and parent input.

Qualified Staff

- ✓ Increase the recruitment of qualified bilingual and English as a Second Language staff at all levels and create incentives for their retention through continuing education, ongoing professional development, and pay deferential.
- ✓ Hire qualified staff of each language of instruction whenever possible.
- ✓ Promote the efforts to hire bilingual and English as a Second Language speech pathologists to prevent inappropriate diagnosis of language and speech difficulties of children who are English language learners.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE HEAD START BUREAU

Staff Training

- ✓ Offer research-based professional development for new and experienced teachers, teacher assistants, home visitors, education managers, parents, administrators, other service providers, and caregivers on topics such as:
 - theory and practice of second language acquisition for children birth to five;
 - effective teaching and learning techniques that impact language and cognitive development;
 - early literacy skills;
 - observation and assessment of English language learners;
 - cultural influences in child-rearing practices;
 - designing and creating effective language and literacy rich learning environments;
 - inter-cultural sensitivity and awareness;
 - child and family literacy for English language learners;
 - culturally and linguistically appropriate curriculum design and implementation; and
 - observation, documentation, and assessment aligned with curriculum as defined in the Head Start Program Performance Standards and the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.
- ✓ Establish partnerships with institutions of higher learning that can provide college credit incentives to improve bilingual and English as a Second Language teacher qualifications and enhance ongoing professional development for staff in this field.
- ✓ Develop and support funding and initiatives that offer bilingual, dual language, and English as a Second Language early childhood teacher preparation.

Partnering with Parents

- ✓ Share information with parents about the current research regarding how the process of first and second language acquisition takes place and their important role in it.
- ✓ Inform parents of ways to support their children's language development and learning, using the home language as the basis for the development of English, without compromising their first language and culture.

National Leadership

- ✓ Build the Head Start Bureau’s capacity to serve as a visible national leader in offering guidance and resources in the area of bilingual and multilingual early childhood first and second language development and learning for children birth to five.
- ✓ Establish partnerships with other federal agencies and organizations in the area of second language acquisition for young children.
- ✓ Articulate and clarify existing Head Start policy that supports and promotes the need for linguistic and cultural continuity between children and families and program-home interactions and communication in Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Research

- ✓ Develop additional research initiatives on the bilingual, dual language, and multilingual development of children birth to five and the preparation of personnel and skilled leaders in this area.
- ✓ Establish partnerships that can help to identify, evaluate, and assist with the development, replication of methods, best practices, and approaches to improve the early literacy development of birth to five English language learners.

“The whole issue of bilingualism, and language, and culture, is really a global perspective, especially when we think about the trends in this nation. We really need to think about the children we are working with, and 30 years from now, the kind of world they are going to be working in, and living in. We all need to understand the value from the language and economics point of view as one world, and as one humanity, in a very positive way.”

- Focus Group Participant

The recommendations of this focus group will help guide the Head Start Bureau in developing strategies to provide cultural and linguistic consistency and support between home and program, to create opportunities for children to continue to develop their home languages as they become English language users, and to design and implement curriculum and assessment strategies to support positive child development and school readiness for all children in Early Head Start and Head Start.

As follow up to the focus group, the Head Start Bureau will develop an edition of the National Head Start Bulletin which will be devoted to the topic of English Language Learners in Head Start and Early Head Start. This bulletin will serve as an in-depth resource for Head Start and Early Head Start programs serving linguistically and culturally diverse children and families.

The Head Start Bureau would like to thank the focus group participants for sharing their wide range of knowledge, observations, experiences, and perspectives regarding English language learners in Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

“I’d like to see in many small communities, not just on Indian reservations, the enthusiasm of Head Start programs for the acquisition of language, retention of language, and literacy in general. I’d like to see community leaders excited about the kinds of things that need to be done in educational institutions, with well coordinated training, so we can have continuity of learning.”

- Focus Group Participant

APPENDIX

Appendix A	Participant List	Page 18
Appendix B	Focus Group Agenda	Page 24
Appendix C	Historical Overview	Page 28
Appendix D	Summary of Technical Paper	Page 32

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**English Language Learners
Focus Group - April 8-9, 2002**

*Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill
400 New Jersey Avenue NW
Washington, DC*

Focus Group Goals and Outcomes

- To identify research-based strategies to improve Head Start and Early Head Start services for children and families from non-English language backgrounds; and
- To solicit recommendations regarding effective approaches that support the development and learning of linguistically diverse children and to assess their progress over time.

AGENDA- Monday, April 8th

8:00- 9:00 *Continental Breakfast*

9:00- 9:45 **Welcome and Introductions-**
Jessica Knight- Education Specialist

- **Opening Remarks**
Carol Whitten- Special Assistant to the Associate Commissioner
Tom Schultz- Director, Program Support Division

- **Historical Overview**
E. Dollie Wolverton- Chief, Education Services Branch

- **Purpose of Focus Group and Anticipated Outcomes**
Carmen DaCosta- National Head Start Fellow

9:45-12:30

Discussion of Focus Questions-

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT FIRST AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR CHILDREN AGES BIRTH TO FIVE

- What do we know about **how our children are currently doing** with first and second language acquisition?
- What do we know about the **issues and challenges** for programs, staff, parents, and children in the area of first and second language acquisition?
- What do we know about **what works** for young children in the area of first and second language acquisition?

10:00-10:45 **Parent presentations**
Ed Moore, Fort Belknap Head Start
Thuy Cao, Rosemont Head Start
Sahar Ali, Higher Horizons Head Start

Open Discussion

10:45-11:00 *Break*

11:00-11:45 **Program presentations**
Kathleen Sullivan, Peoples Regional Opportunity Program
Carol Bellamy, Higher Horizons Head Start
Graciela Italiano-Thomas, Centro de la Familia Migrant Head Start

Open Discussion

11:45-12:30 **Researcher presentations**
Patton Tabors, Harvard University
Michael Lopez, Commissioner's Office of Research & Evaluation, ACYF
Sylvia Sanchez, George Mason University

Open Discussion

FOCUS GROUP AGENDA

12:30-1:30 *Lunch*

1:30-2:00 **An Overview of the Migrant Programs' Technical Paper on Second Language Acquisition**

Sandra Carton- Chief, Migrant and Seasonal Programs

Sharon Yandian- Project Director, MSHS Quality Improvement Center

2:15-5:00 **Small Group Discussions-**

What are the issues, challenges, approaches and successful strategies in the following areas regarding first and second language acquisition for children ages birth to five years?

- Curriculum and Teaching Strategies
- Working with Parents and Families
- Assessment and Documentation
- Staff Development and Training

AGENDA- Tuesday, April 9th

7:30-8:30 *Continental Breakfast*

8:30-12:00 **Highlights from the Small Group Discussions**

- Curriculum and Teaching Strategies
- Working with Parents and Families
- Assessment and Documentation
- Staff Development and Training

Open Discussion

Recommendations for the Head Start Bureau

Closing Comments

12:00-1:00 *Lunch*



English Language Learners Focus Group Participants

HEAD START AS THE NATION'S EARLY CHILDHOOD LABORATORY
An Overview - Supporting English Language Learners

This list enumerates some of the major activities that the Head Start Bureau has engaged in to support English language learners in Head Start. In the early years of Head Start, English language learners were primarily Spanish-speaking, whereas now Head Start children and their families speak over 140 languages.

1972 - The Head Start Program Performance Standards required that classroom environments help each child build ethnic pride; an educational program individualized to meet the needs of children from various populations; and staff reflective of the racial and ethnic population of the children, including staff who speak the primary language of the children and are knowledgeable about their culture. The Standards also required that parents be involved in the planning and implementation of services and considered for employment opportunities.

1976 - Implementation of the Head Start Strategy for Spanish-Speaking Children included a Bilingual and Bicultural Early Childhood Development Research Workshop, which identified four priority areas: curriculum development, staff training, resource network, and research.

1976 to 1979 - Dissemination and Training based on four Bilingual and Bicultural Curriculum Models to support children's cognitive and social growth as well as individualization of instruction based upon a child's linguistic dominance:

ALERTA - A Learning Environment Responsive To All
 Teachers College, Columbia University.

AMANECER - A Multicultural Action Network for Early
 Childhood Education Resources
 Intercultural Research Associates, San Antonio

NUEVAS FRONTERAS de APRENDIZAJE - New Frontiers in Learning
 University of California, Santa Cruz

UN MARCO ABIERTO - An Open Framework
 High Scope Foundation, Ypsilanti

1978 - Dissemination of A Bibliography of Bilingual and Bicultural Preschool Material for Spanish-Speaking Children for use by staff in early childhood programs to identify suitable curriculum and other instructional materials.

1980 - Evaluation of the Head Start Bilingual and Bicultural Curriculum Models was the final report of a study conducted over a three and a half year period at eight Head Start centers in communities with relatively large Hispanic populations, focusing on the impact of the four bilingual and bicultural preschool curriculum models. Data from the evaluation were analyzed to answer three central questions: impact, implementation, and feasibility of transfer.

1981 - Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts was established in collaboration with the Head Start Bureau to develop drama, music, and movement activities to support children's learning through the arts. This institute provided professional development to staff in the practical applications of effective techniques. In 1995, the Institute and a group of Head Start programs developed the **Multicultural Program Artist and Administrator Guidelines** to promote and support multicultural learning experiences representing the cultures and languages of Head Start children and families.

1982 - Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential Bilingual Specialization was established for candidates with a working knowledge of two languages, including the ability to speak, read, and write well enough to understand others and to be understood by others.

1988 - Development and Dissemination of a Special Issue of the National Head Start Bulletin entitled "A Look at Head Start's Cultural Diversity" to celebrate the diversity of Head Start, promote sound practices, and showcase successful approaches.

1988 - Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children served as a training tool widely used among Head Start programs and the Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Network to foster respect for diversity and to promote learning environments that support the cultures and languages of families served.

1990 - Development of the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs by a task force including representatives of the former network of grantees who provided training on the four multicultural curricula as part of the "Strategy for Spanish-Speaking Children" in the 1970s. The *Multicultural Principles*, extending beyond what takes place in a Head Start classroom, apply to all program services and form the foundation for Head Start families and staff to understand and respect cultural differences.

1990 to 1994 - A Network of Six Head Start Agencies Demonstrated the Infusion of the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs across all the program services, including health, social services, parent involvement, education, management, serving children with disabilities, and staff training. This network was comprised of a diverse group located in Fresno, California; Mahube, Minnesota; Seattle, Washington; Fairfax, Virginia; Southern Ute, Colorado; and Spokane, Washington. Among the family languages represented were Hmong, Chinese, Spanish, Navajo, and Arabic. These effective practices have been showcased at a number of events and in publications.

1991 to 1996 - *Padres Hispanos en Accion* was a joint effort of the Kraft General Foods Foundation, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Health and Human Services, developed and distributed multi-media nutrition materials with accompanying training to programs and families located in the twenty states with the largest number of Hispanic Head Start enrollees.

1993 to 1996 - A Descriptive Study of Head Start's Bilingual and Multicultural Program Services

determined that more than 140 languages are spoken by the children enrolled in Head Start programs. After English, the most common languages spoken by Head Start children are Spanish, Chinese, Hmong, and Vietnamese.

1996 - *The Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs* were incorporated into the revision of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, which were published as a Final Rule, November 5, 1996.

1998 - Head Start Act as amended in 1998, Sec. 648B(11)(e) requires that The Secretary provide training for personnel providing services to non-English language background children, including services to promote the acquisition of the English language.

2000 - NHA DIALOG a research-to-practice journal for the early intervention field, Volume 3, Number 3, 2000, devoted solely to issues of bilingual education for young children. Includes "Taking Stock of Research on Language Development and Emergent Literacy - Best Practices for Preschool and Kindergarten Second Language Learners" (NABE 2000); a peer-reviewed paper on linguistically diverse children's language development; and "Ask NHA Dialog," a question and response forum, focusing on bilingual issues.

2000 - The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework to guide Head Start programs in their ongoing assessment of the progress and accomplishments of children and to analyze and use the data in program self-assessment and ongoing program improvement. Congressionally mandated indicators for English language learners include progress in listening to and understanding English as well as progress in speaking English.

2000 - The National Head Start Child Development Institute for 3,200 education leaders included major presentations regarding language development, English language learners, and preserving native languages. A *Training Package for Ensuring Quality and Accountability Through Leadership* based on 29 key Institute presentations was created and disseminated to the field and is now posted at www.hsnc.org. In planning for this national Institute, the two most pressing needs identified through extensive consultation were for specific strategies to support programming for English language learners and strategies for guiding children's behaviors.

2000 - FACES - The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey launched in the Spring of 1997, is an integral part of Head Start's system of Program Performance Measures, an outcome-oriented accountability system. FACES collects data annually on a nationally representative sample of Head Start programs, classrooms, teachers, parents, and children examining the quality and effects of Head Start. Findings include:

- ✓ Spanish-speaking Head Start children show gains in some school readiness skills and in their performance on several tasks in English;
- ✓ By spring, most Spanish-speaking children in predominantly English language programs are able to perform a number of school related tasks in English; and
- ✓ Spanish-speaking children in predominantly English language programs have similar fine motor and early writing skills as their English-speaking peers, but continue to trail other children on tasks that require English language proficiency.

2001 - A Descriptive Study of Seasonal Farmworker Families focused on 40 Migrant Head Start programs, detailing characteristics of the seasonal and farmworker populations with important implications for Head Start program policy and practice. This report also documented the need for continuity of educational experiences and the importance of linkages with the public school. This study also underscores the importance of language proficiency in school success and the role migratory patterns play in the academic progress of children.

2001 - Supporting the Home Language and Promoting English Acquisition within Migrant and Seasonal Head Start is a technical paper from the Migrant Head Start QIC and DSQIC, which focuses on supporting Spanish-speaking English language learners within the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs and identified the benefits of exposure to two languages as an asset that should be fostered. It suggests that all programs should possess the capabilities to provide support of the home language and implement effective practices that can allow children to become bilingual with the necessary foundation to develop their capacities to become biliterate as well.

April 8-9, 2002 - A Focus Group to Identify Strategies to Support English Language Learners in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs involved staff and parents from local programs that serve diverse populations of children and families and subject experts in the field of second language acquisition to identify research-based strategies:

- ✓ To improve Head Start and Early Head Start services for children and families from non-English language backgrounds; and
- ✓ To solicit recommendations regarding effective approaches that support the development and learning of linguistically diverse children and to assess child progress over time.

**Supporting the Home Language
and
Promoting English Acquisition within Migrant and Seasonal Head Start**

*(Technical paper developed by Sharon Yandian, MSHS QIC Project Director
and Julie Jones, MHS DSQIC Project Director)*

This document was developed to address the strengths and needs of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs nationwide. According to data obtained from the 2000 Program Information Report, 92% of the children in migrant and seasonal Head Start programs and 23% enrolled in regional Head Start programs speak a language other than English in the home. Most of these children progress to kindergarten classrooms where they will be expected to know English. For years, the Head Start Program Performance Standards have required programs to support the home language and culture of children. Now, the 1998 Head Start Act requires programs to document progress towards English acquisition for those children who do not speak English. The intent of the paper was to: 1) Summarize the relevant research around first and second language development; 2) Provide guidance on creating language rich environments in both English and Spanish; and 3) Provide suggestions for achieving the mandated documentation on children's progress towards English acquisition.

RESEARCH

Research perspectives, supported and originated by well-known researchers, that offer insights on the process of the acquisition of a first and a second language are stated in this work. For instance, this paper addresses the concept that all children learn the language(s) present in their immediate environments and that the acquisition of a language follows a clear developmental sequence that is essentially the same for all languages learned.

SIMULTANEOUS VS SEQUENTIAL BILINGUALISM

The process of learning and acquiring two separate languages is further illustrated through the circumstances that impact the acquisition of a second language. Is the child exposed to the acquisition of two separate languages at the same time, or is the child's second language acquired after the first language has been learned? Research indicates that children who learn two languages simultaneously in a natural setting follow the same stages of development as monolingual children. They may progress at different rates in the two languages used or learned, as one may take precedence at certain times. It is also normal for children to mix languages or code-switch while speaking. Other factors that influence bilingual development are determined by the degree of exposure to the second language, motivation, teaching practices, and individual personalities, among other indicators.

During the process of sequential bilingualism, children acquiring a second language after the age of three, before completing basic acquisition of their first language, may experience a period when they speak neither language very well. The learning rate of the second language also depends on the child's need and opportunity to use the language to communicate.

A research-based four stage developmental sequence for second language acquisition for children learning the language after the age of three is also described. During the first stage home language use is observed, the second phase addresses the non-verbal period of communication, the third stage illustrates the use of telegraphic or formulaic speech, and in the final phase, a productive level of language use is demonstrated in the second language. Children who acquire a second language after three years of age have learned a great deal in their first language. The knowledge gained and concepts learned in the first language are transferred to the second language and do not have to be re-learned in the second language.

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

The connection between language and culture is also addressed. Families have a central role in transmitting and communicating cultural values, morés, and the home language. All children are cognitively, linguistically, and emotionally connected to the language and culture they come from. Supporting children's first language and culture helps them gain self-confidence and develop positive attitudes toward school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations include best practices and selected teaching strategies that support early childhood bilingualism, even when classroom teachers do not speak the language of the children. A language-rich environment fosters language acquisition by using techniques that encourage children to interact as they further develop their first language and increasingly understand, use, and learn a second language. The use of both verbal and non-verbal cues, modeling responses, encouraging repetition, routines, and other strategies are described. The development of a program wide language acquisition policy statement, and the promotion and support of ongoing professional development related to the process of first and second language acquisition are also recommended.

To conclude, the technical paper underscores the benefits of exposure to two languages. All programs should have the capabilities to provide support of the home language and implement effective practices that can allow children to become bilingual with the necessary foundation to develop their capacities to become biliterate as well.

“When the collection of brilliant minds, hearts, and talents come together, expect a masterpiece. The masterpiece will be the children.”

- Focus Group Participant



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