Dual Language

The subject of bilingualism provokes strong emotions. Religion, politics, and money evoke the same passions as does language. Language is the cultural framework with which we process information based on meanings and phrases of the language. To learn a new language means adapting to another culture. Keeping my heritage and passing it on to my children is very important to me. Involving my elementary school aged children in a dual language program is a difficult decision. As a parent involved in their academic success, I would want access to resources that support family literacy in both languages.

Where did bilingual education get its start in the public school system? “Funding for bilingual education programs in U.S. public schools was first authorized in 1965….” by President Lyndon B. Johnsons (Huerta-Macia 218). “The Purpose of the program was to meet the needs of what were considered ‘educationally deprived children.’ The intent was to teach these children subject matter in a language they understood while gradually teaching English until they were able to make the transition to all-English instruction” (Huerta-Macia 218). The migrant worker had the greatest benefit from the program (Huerta-Macias; Branz-Spall et al. 4). Today the migrant worker is an integral part of the Wenatchee Valley economy. The migrant worker is the backbone of the orchard industry located in this region. The migrant worker in this region is typically of Hispanic descent.
Families of migrant workers’ children utilize the program by enrolling their children into the public school system.

“There are more than five million children in the United States who speak 400 languages other than English as their first language. Approximately 80 percent of these children speak Spanish. Nineteen states have reported an increase of 50-200 percent English Language Learners [ELL] over the last three years, and that growth will likely continue” (Ferrier 5). Asians, Africans, and Europeans are all in mainstream classes and receive extra training in English-as-a-second-language programs for a few hours a day. Hispanic students, in contrast, are taught in Spanish 70 to 80 percent of the time” (Duignan). Today’s immigrants “are harder to integrate than earlier immigrants were because there are fewer pressures on them to assimilate and learn English. Instead, bilingual education, multiculturalism, and ethnic clustering slow up the workings of the so-called melting pot” (Duignan). All of this cultural preservation and money invested in the migrant ELL becoming successful implies that the Native Speaking Learner (NSL) is not as important as their counterpart is (Sumaryono et al.).

Americans have to “assimilate” the cultures and language of the dominant ELL (Duignan). American traditional English culture and language is being replaced by a bilingual generation of Spanish-English speakers. This trend is forcing the Native English Speaker to become bilingual.

In an attempt for equality in the Wenatchee Public Schools, Abraham Lincoln Elementary is proposing a Dual Language program. The motive behind such a program is that the parents of the Native English Learners (NEL) are interested in their children receiving the gift of bilingualism (Thompson-Cockle).
As a parent of young children, I desire them to grow up and stay in this community. The Wenatchee job market’s primary qualification is to be bilingual. As an adult, I am finding this to be true and see the trend continuing in the future. The relationship of bilinguals and the migrant minority dominated the research findings for this paper. Yet not all bilinguals are migrant or a minority. My children will be participating in a dual language program to accomplish bilingualism. They do not fit the research as a migrant or a minority. More research needs to address the affect on the NEL in a dual language classroom. Putting this aside, my concern is having the ability to support my children in their academics. “Goldenburg’s (1989) research reveals the importance of parental involvement in the school. Children who’s parents are involved in school have more positive attitudes about school, have improved attendance, and show better homework habits than children whose parents are not involved” (qtd. in Sheffer, 2003). Currently the migrant parent involvement is low in the school. These parents usually have little education or bad experiences with educational systems, preventing their involvement (Lopez). Communication is difficult due to language barriers. This language barrier will be affecting the majority of the students in the dual language program because ELL and NEL are now learning a language not spoken in the home.

How do parents get involved when one of the languages taught is unknown? There needs to be a “component” to the curriculum providing support for the families in both languages (Zuniga et al.). I suggest that an after school program be included in the dual language curriculum. This program would facilitate all language learners, student and parent alike, working toward literacy in both languages.
“Strong parent education components should have a school coordinator who serves as a liaison to the parents” (Zuniga et al.). This person would “bridge the gaps created by language” (Zuniga et al.). The coordinator would work with the parent, teacher, and student triangle in understanding their needs, then take this information and coordinate with resource agencies in the community. Colleges, federal, state, and locally funded programs may help address and fulfill those needs.

The coordinator would also seek support from the business community. The financial support would help offset the financial burden on the school system for the after school program (Gadsden; Alamprese). The business community ultimately benefits from a bilingual literate work force giving them the motivation to participate. This in turn strengthens our community by producing productive citizens that “become an integral part of society (Bermudez et al.). All of this “brings us a step closer to achieving educational equality” for all children despite their economics or lack of minority status (Huerta-Macias).

“Schools cannot take on all of the work that is essential to supporting academic achievement” (Adger). Parents, teachers, students, and businesses are all interdependent in helping schools prepare our youth for adult life.

The gift of bilingualism for all students at Abraham Lincoln Elementary will require a support system that facilitates learning for the entire family unit (Mulhern et al.). Collectively we can achieve dual language literacy in the family. Embarking on such an endeavor heightens my desire to ensure that there is equality in the planning and implementation of the language program to include “equal participation for students, staff, and parents” (Howard et al. 30). My hope is that the equal participation will
include the needs of all participants and not focus solely on the poor, minority, or migrant culture.
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