

## Dual Language Learning Institute Webcast Part 3 - Social and Emotional Development

Carol Bellamy: One day she arrived late after a doctor's visit, and I showed her the doctor's kit that we had in the house area. I noticed a little while later that she ventured over to the house area for the first time, and began playing with some other children. I was sure to observe what went on in order to see if there were opportunities where I could support her with her peers.

Sharon Yandian: Carol, what you just shared is so important. I often ask colleagues or friends to imagine coming to work where nobody speaks their language, and I remind them of the strategies and resources for learning that they already have just by virtue of the life experiences they've had. Recently, I was in a classroom where there was a young boy who did not speak English. His mother told me that after the first week of school, her son came home and said to her, "Me odian," which means, "They hate me."

With pain in her voice, she explained to me that she told her son that the other children did not hate him, but because he could not speak with them yet, they preferred to talk with children they could communicate with, rather. This example clearly shows why the work of our teachers and staff in being able to effectively address the needs of dual language learners is so important.

Okay, let's move on to our next school readiness concept, approaches to learning. This term refers to aspects of children's responses to learning opportunities, such as the child's curiosity, flexibility, or persistence, and is very much connected to the concept of social and emotional development that we just discussed. We know that there is great variation among children, some due to personality but most subject to change depending on children's experiences and early interventions.

For example, shyness, which many consider a personality trait, may inhibit initiative and curiosity, but should not hinder success in school if teachers adapt their approach and support shy children in classroom interactions. Other characteristics include engagement and persistence, and reasoning and problem solving. When you think about this concept as it applies to children who speak languages other than English, it is extremely important that we find effective strategies to learn as much as we can about their approaches to learning, especially if we do not speak their language.

Children's approaches to learning contribute to their success in school, and interact with their development and learning in all other domains. Carol, can you give us some examples of this?

Carol Bellamy: Yes. Well, it's important to keep in mind that a shy child might not want to sing a song that was introduced to them as part of a large group setting. However, if you leave the song on a tape recorder with earphones, they may go over and listen. Also, felt-board stories should be shared with the children, and then put in an area where they can manipulate them on their own. During work time, there are many opportunities for small reading groups, or just one-on-one reading.

For example, the little girl who always played by herself in the writing area would trace stars in her journal every day. The assistant teacher working with her would ask her what she was drawing, and she responded very softly, "estrella." To support her interest in stars and to support her fine motor skills, the assistant teacher put a variety of star stencils in the writing area. She also put "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" in the library area, and made sure she could continue their conversations about stars, and extended these initial conversations into other similar areas.

I like to divide the classroom into areas such as art, science, and blocks, and I'll ask children to help me label each area in both English and Spanish, and other languages as appropriate. That way the environment is organized so children can independently choose their own activities for part of each day, including block play, dramatic play, simple games, and rough-and-tumble play. Organizing the classroom into different areas encourages children to take initiative in deciding what activities to engage in, and helps with categorization, which is related to cognition, that I will discuss later.

I always place items children are familiar with in all areas of the classroom. Ask your families and staff for items such as family pictures, scarves, food boxes, games and books with two languages. Another strategy is to provide an engaging curriculum and variety of learning experiences that incorporate different languages. For example, one year in the early fall, we found a butterfly outside and brought it into our classroom. The children watched in and talked about it, and their vocabulary expanded as they learned new words in English, like "caterpillar", and "mariposa" for the Spanish speakers.

We built on this learning opportunity even further by adding butterfly-related books, pictures and word cards to the writing area, scarves for wing dancing, butterfly-shaped play dough cutters and set up a painting activity. Eventually, we released the butterflies outside, and I went ahead and ordered seven caterpillars to hatch in the class. The children asked every day, "When will the caterpillars get here?" When the caterpillars arrived, there were many opportunities for discovery and language development.

We made a story book with illustrations for our class library, and one child -- a native Spanish speaker -- proposed that the book's title be, "The Corduroy Caterpillar, Chrysalis and Butterfly Book". What vocabulary and conceptual development are evident in this title! The whole process stimulated the children's curiosity and even helped in problem solving as they tried to figure out how many day it would take for the caterpillars to change into butterflies.

Sharon Yandian: What fantastic examples, Carol! There are so many examples here of how school readiness is so interwoven, as well. As we move on to our next concept, language and literacy development, I want to say that this is a big area we will only be able to touch on today. We all know that among the most important tasks in the first five years of life is the development of language. Children's language ability affects learning and development in all areas, and language strongly predicts later success in learning to read and write.

In short, children who are skilled communicators are more likely to demonstrate better social competence and school readiness, and this starts at a very young age. Because children seem to learn languages naturally, adults often assume that it is simply a product of maturation, but it is not. Children's development in any language does tend to follow a similar pattern, beginning with cooing and babbling and moving to words and sentences. And like all areas of development, learning to communicate is a result of cumulative experiences from birth.

Because of this, there is a lot we need to do to help support children learning languages at home and in Head Start. We want to increase both the quality and quantity of children's receptive and expressive vocabulary in their home language and in English. It is not enough that children speak a lot, and this is why it is so important to understand how children develop a first and second language, or two languages, at once. We are going to have many sessions at the Institute that address this topic, as well as a keynote session that will address the myths and realities about early dual language learning.

I think this will really help staff feel more comfortable about their work, and provide them with strategies that may be the most effective to use with dual language learners. There are many areas we identify when thinking about language and literacy development, and the Child Outcomes Framework provides us with several elements. For instance, under language development, there is listening and understanding, speaking and communicating. Under literacy and development, there is phonological awareness, book knowledge and appreciation, print awareness and concepts, early writing and alphabet knowledge.

Let's take a look at book knowledge, for example. As we are supporting children who are dual language learners, we're going to use all the information we have to work with to help them understand concepts such as the book has a title, author, illustrator; that print conveys meaning connected to the pictures; that there's usually a beginning, middle, end, et cetera.

What is most important in this example is not necessarily the language they learn the concept in, but that all these key concepts are mastered, so that when they do learn enough words in English, they will already understand the book knowledge concepts. Reading to children in their home language and English enhances their language development, especially vocabulary, because the structures and words used in books are more varied than those in speech.

Knowing more words, in turn, helps children make sense of print, and find what they are reading more meaningful and interesting. Talking with children about what is read further boosts both vocabulary and comprehension. We want to know that they are able to retell us the story, and we can encourage them to act out the story and predict what might be happening next.

We also know that children need purposeful conversations among adults and other children that supports their developing languages, access to many different high quality developmentally appropriate books, and other reading and writing materials in their home language and in English, and opportunities to playfully explore and engage in literacy activities including reading, writing, and learning letters and sounds.

Having said all this, engaging in language and literacy activities with dual language learners is a complex process, and we know that teachers are eager to know more strategies for doing this well. Carol, I know you will agree that there is definitely more than one way to do this. In the past, what have you done in the classroom?

Carol Bellamy: Well, let me first say that I am primarily a monolingual English speaker, although I know a bit of Spanish. When people learn that I work with children who speak little or no English, they always ask, "How do you communicate?" I always respond that all children understand love, and that they know when you genuinely care for them. Of course, I also intentionally use certain techniques or strategies for communicating with them as well.

I begin by establishing a relationship with my families and learning about their different cultures, languages and celebrations. I ask how many family members speak the home language only, or English as well. I also ask if the Head Start child has an older sibling in school who has exposed the younger child to English. This may mean that the preschooler recognizes some spoken words, but may not speak English yet. If I'm setting up a lending library in the classroom, I ask families if they prefer books in their home language.

-- End of Video --