

Dual Language Learning Institute Webcast Part 2 - Physical Well-being and Motor Development

Sharon Yandian: We're providing these -- we're providing these strategies and tools during and following the conclusion of the Institute because Head Start staff have asked for them, and because Congress has given us the mandate in the School Readiness Act of 2007 to provide instruction and appropriate language supports to children and families who speak languages other than English. In fact, the Act provides many implications for Head Start, and we are in the process of drafting regulations that respond to these requirements outlined by Congress.

The Dual Language Institute planning committee proposed the idea of this webcast because they anticipated that not all management teams and other program leaders would be able to attend the Institute. We want to provide you with an overview of the concepts that will be covered in an effort to support your important work with dual language learners and their families.

We hope that you will hold a brainstorming session with your management team and program support staff, including those who will be attending the Institute, so you can agree on what topics will be most useful to helping your program maximize the post-Institute impact.

The Institute will cover a variety of topics such as implications for assessment, including progress towards English acquisition, attracting and retaining bilingual Early Childhood staff, communicating with parents, accessing family support services and providing ways to support the home language of the children in your programs even if you have few staff who speak those languages.

These are only a few of the topics that will be addressed during the Institute. A complete listing of all sessions scheduled is included as part of the viewer's guide that was developed to accompany this webcast. Today's webcast is going to focus on the five broad areas of school readiness as identified in the Child Outcomes Framework.

I will discuss these areas as they relate to children from various cultures who often speak languages other than English, and Carol Bellamy will provide some real-life examples of practical applications of the five areas. Now, what are some things we need to think about when we talk about school readiness? The first is physical well-being and motor development.

Throughout its history, Head Start has placed major emphasis on promoting children's health, both physical and mental, as a significant determinant of school readiness. As you know, the Head Start Program Performance Standards includes a set of program requirements regarding children's health, dental, nutrition, physical and mental well-being.

The provision of these comprehensive services continues as a hallmark of Head Start programs, and we know that it is difficult for a child to develop and learn if his physical and mental well-being goes unattended. We also know that different cultures have differing approaches to parenting. These differences may not always be easy for programs to understand, and this can serve as a source of conflict between staff and family members.

Some areas that typically evoke strong reactions are differences in how children are disciplined, beliefs about promoting independence, and approaches to feeding, sleeping, toilet training, et cetera. What we have to remember is that the most important thing we do in Head Start is to learn from families how things are done in their culture and at their homes to come to a shared understanding about the best approach for their particular child in Head Start.

Now I'd like to turn to Carol because I know she has some excellent examples of shared cultural understandings around physical development. Carol?

Carol Bellamy: Thanks, Sharon. My name is Carol Bellamy, and I am currently a Head Start Fellow for the 2008-2009 year. Prior to this, I was a Head Start manager at Greater Mount Vernon Community Head Start in Alexandria, Virginia. I was also a Head Start teacher for 14 years at Higher Horizons Head Start. Greater Mount Vernon Head Start serves approximately 200 children from multiple cultures, with over 15 languages spoken throughout the center.

Needless to say, serving dual language students and families is both a challenge and an opportunity to help promote different cultures and languages, while simultaneously promoting the acquisition of English language skills.

Sharon Yandian: So Carol, can you tell me, in terms of this concept of school readiness and physical development, give us some examples of how -- what this looks like in your program, particularly serving dual language learners and their families?

Carol Bellamy: Yes. Well, first I'd like to point out that when most people think of cognitive development, they don't think of physical development. However, we know from research that brain cells need an adequate flow of blood to help ensure they function correctly, especially in children. So, one of the ways I have been able to develop this concept is through music. I ask families to bring in music that they play at home, and ask the children to either perform a traditional dance typical of their culture, or to make up a dance.

That way the children are exposed to the various cultures through music. They get to use their moves and creativity in choreographing moves, and they get to show off what they already know about their own culture. When you use music that children are familiar with, they become excited and begin to share their dances and movements. For instance, one year, I worked with many children and families who spoke Arabic. I played some Arabic music during work time one day, and I couldn't believe how Rene, this three-year-old girl, danced to the music.

We were so amazed at how coordinated she was! I definitely learned some new dance moves that year. Another method I use to help convey ideas about nutrition is that I ask families to bring in their native cooking utensils, such as woks, chopsticks or tortilla pans, and I place them in the housekeeping area. This gives children the opportunity to demonstrate how their parents prepare meals, and talk a little bit about the ingredients that are important staples in their culture. In this way, the children get to focus on what they already know while teaching their classmates new things.

This can really help to support and foster children's self-concept in a positive way. Once again, I want to emphasize that the items must relate to your children's experiences. Bringing items your children are familiar with into the classroom helps them feel they belong, and they are able to have rich classroom experiences.

I have also had parents come in and cook in the classroom. One year, I had many Spanish speaking families from El Salvador in my classroom, and we purchased ingredients for a parent to make pupusas. We modified the recipe slightly so that all our children with varying diets could try the meal.

Sharon Yandian: Those are great examples, Carol. Now, let's move on to our second school readiness concepts: social and emotional development. When we talk about social and emotional development in the context of the Child Outcomes Framework, we highlight elements such as self-concept, self-control, cooperation, social relationships and knowledge of families and communities. Promoting young children's social emotional development is vital for three interrelated reasons.

Positive social and emotional development provides a base for lifelong learning, social skills and emotional self-regulation are integrally related to later academic success in school, and prevention of future social and behavioral difficulties is more effective than later remediation. So, we see how important it is to get this right for all children, and especially for children that speak languages other than English. Of course, there are a lot of important pieces to social and emotional development. Carol, how have you dealt with this concept in your classroom?

Carol Bellamy: Well, one thing I do, Sharon, it's very important for me to continually assess myself. I explore my own cultural identities and beliefs, uncover and address my biases and discomforts. That way, I recognize my own areas of improvement when trying to help others. This is actually one of the areas I will address in the presentation I will be making at the Dual Language Institute. After I address my own cultural identity, I become familiar with the children's cultural identities and experiences which helps me to plan my materials and activities for the children.

I also make the required home visits before the program begins, so I have an opportunity to learn about what each child enjoys, and to think about how to prepare a welcoming classroom environment. It is so important that we don't

keep the same old lesson plans from year to year, and just change the date and names on the forms. Each year, your classroom should go through a process of renewal, making sure you're starting fresh with plans that address the unique needs of all your children and families.

In my classrooms, I used to hang a world map at the children's eye level, which would help to stimulate conversations about the children's countries of origin. One child in my class described how he took an airplane to Peru to see his grandmother. While looking at the map, he showed me many countries he flew over. We put a pin on the map with a piece of string to show how far he had come, and to trace his visit to his grandmother.

These types of conversations engage the children in knowing about their families and communities, and the languages and geography relating to their countries of origin. Another child was looking at the map, and as I observed him, he said, "Miss Carol, where is Morocco?" This was the country his family comes from, and I learned that year that even though his family spoke Arabic, the Arabic spoken in Morocco has a French influence to the language. Many folks from Morocco speak French as well.

Another way to strengthen children's social and emotional development is to create a safe haven, or an area that is away from the language-rich house or block area, where children can go and not feel pressured to communicate in a language they are not familiar with. This break from the pressures of communication gives them time to process all that they've learned and regroup before they come out to engage in another learning session.

One little girl in my classroom spoke only Spanish, and during work time she always stayed in the writing area or looked at books. She was especially drawn to books that had both Spanish and English. I noticed that she never engaged in group play. That's when I realized that maybe she was not as comfortable in the high-language areas of the classroom.

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