Making a Difference:

A Framework for Supporting First and Second Language Development in Preschool Children of Migrant Farm Workers

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Making a Difference:

A Framework for Supporting First and Second Language Development in Preschool Children of Migrant Farm Workers

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Introduction

It is probable that the majority of children around the world grow up with several languages rather than just one (Bialystok, 2001). However, issues related to second language acquisition (SLA) in early childhood continue to generate a number of challenges, questions and concerns. These challenges are especially pertinent to the work of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs. First, the majority of children enrolled in MSHS programs (87%), speak Spanish as their primary language (Sandra Carton, personal communication, December 8, 2004). Second, programs operate according to local agricultural schedules: classrooms may operate for as long as 9 – 10 months or as few as 6 weeks. Finally, children may migrate with their families 2 or 3 times in a calendar year, often over distances of hundreds of miles. As children migrate, they are exposed to different languages, cultures, and living conditions. These characteristics of migrant farm worker families contribute to the unique aspects and challenges faced by MSHS programs. Programs vary in the length of time they have to provide Head Start services to their children and families. However, MSHS programs must fulfill all Head Start Program Performance Standards (ACF, 1996), which include supporting children's continued development of their first language as well as facilitating their acquisition of English.

This document was written to support the work of MSHS programs. Our message is straightforward: we *can* meet the challenge of supporting first and second language development in preschool children. We have a current research base that provides important findings and recommendations for teaching practices and program policies related to first and second language acquisition. These findings should have a direct impact upon the learning experiences and opportunities for language that programs offer to their children.

In November, 2004, a questionnaire was distributed to all MSHS grantees, asking them to identify specific questions and concerns related to early SLA. The responses were coded using an open-coding system (Maxwell, 1996), and four composite questions were created to serve as the structure for this paper:

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COMPOSITE QUESTIONS

1. Can we facilitate children's acquisition of English without the loss of Spanish (i.e., their first language)?
2. How can we understand the how and when of developmental processes related to first and second language acquisition?
3. Does it matter how adults use English and children's home language when they talk to children?
4. When we continue development of the first language and facilitate English, what does it look like day-to-day?

This paper does not attempt to address all of the issues raised in the questionnaire; however, it is our best attempt to review responses from the field, compare notes on the research literature, and to present both general guidelines and examples of specific practices that appear to be most promising.

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QUESTION 1:

Can we facilitate preschool children's acquisition of English without the loss of Spanish (i.e., their first language)?

This question incorporates many issues that are relevant to language development. We will first consider issues related to language loss, and then review evidence related to bilingual instruction during the preschool period. Does instruction in English lead preschool-age children to lose their first language? Or, are children able to develop successfully in two languages?

First Language Loss

Children's loss of their first language may have negative consequences on their development. Loss of their first language may limit or even eliminate children's ability to participate in or identify with the culture of their family. A second consequence is the potential impact upon children's developing self concept. The language we speak is instrumental in forming our identity (Bialystok, 2001); therefore, first language loss may undermine children's developing concept of self. A third possibility is that first language loss can harm relationships between children and their parents. If children stop speaking the language of their parents, they may come to minimize or even reject the lessons, beliefs, and values that they are being raised with.

Finally, there is an important cognitive aspect to the issue: children's thinking and reasoning skills may suffer from first language loss. If children lose the ability to communicate in the first language, their continued conceptual development may be interrupted.

When Learning a Second Language Means Losing the First

In 1991, Lily Wong Fillmore published research related to language loss. The study involved 1,001 parents, who were contacted by telephone by volunteers conducting semi-structured interviews. The responses of parents who enrolled their children in English-only or bilingual preschool programs were contrasted with those of parents who enrolled their children in preschools providing

MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START STAFF ASK

- What are some appropriate techniques or strategies in introducing English?
- When is it appropriate to introduce second language to children?
- Is it confusing for a toddler to speak to him or her in both languages while he or she is still learning the primary language?
- We are now faced with many families from the Mixteco culture entering our program. We are looking into resources to meet this growing need, as well.
- Is it true that caregivers need to talk to children one language at a time, otherwise they get confused?
- We have a concern regarding having sufficient English models, for proper English usage, in the classroom.

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instruction in the language of the home. A larger number of parents who enrolled their children in English-only or bilingual preschool programs reported that their children used more English than their native language during conversations at home. These results were interpreted to demonstrate that early instruction in English was damaging to the maintenance of children's first language.

When Learning a Second Language Does Not Mean Losing the First

More recent studies provide a different perspective (Rodriguez, Diaz, Duran, & Espinosa, 1995; Winsler, Diaz, Espinosa, & Rodriguez, 1999). In these studies, low-income, Spanish-speaking children attending "high quality" bilingual preschool programs were compared with similar children who remained at home. The classrooms used in the study were "truly bilingual in the sense that approximately equal proportions of time were spent by teachers speaking Spanish and English" (p. 360).

Contrary to fears that early exposure to English would lead children to lose their first language, the results offered no evidence of decline in Spanish proficiency for the children attending bilingual preschools. Rather, children enrolled in the bilingual preschool programs ***showed significant gains in both Spanish and English acquisition.*** Instead of experiencing a decline in their first language, children who attended the bilingual preschools demonstrated more advanced development of specific skills in Spanish, such as the number of words used to tell a story. The authors attributed the concurrent gains in both languages to the high-quality nature of the programs children attended. The authors, however, did not go on to identify or describe the characteristics that made these programs "high quality."

"Contrary to fears that early exposure to English would lead children to lose their first language, the results offered no evidence of decline in Spanish proficiency…"

Other current research demonstrating that early childhood programs can support children's development in two languages comes from a collaboration between researchers and practitioners (Stipek, Ryan & Alarcon, 2001). The bilingual program (preschool through second grade) was designed using research findings; while data from systematic classroom observations further informed practices in the second year of the program. The authors reported that there were few differences between the academic achievement of native English- and native Spanish-speaking children in the bilingual program and native English-speaking children who received instruction entirely in English.

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Evaluating the Research on Language Loss

Language loss is a real possibility for children whose first language is other than English. However, the available research evidence does not support withholding exposure to English during the preschool period. Rather, the evidence demonstrates that children can successfully develop in two languages. In addition to the studies by Winsler, et al., and Stipek, et al., a body of case studies performed over the last 100 years is overwhelmingly clear: children exposed to two languages from birth can successfully acquire both. However, the number of studies is small (several dozen) and is almost entirely restricted to middle-class subjects, typically linguists studying their own children (see Bialystok, 2001 and McLaughlin, 1995, for reviews). On balance, MSHS programs should not regard the goal of facilitating children's acquisition of English as conflicting with continued development of children's first language. Instead, MSHS programs have the opportunity to support children's development ***across the languages they are exposed to***: promoting continued first language development and facilitating the acquisition of English.

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QUESTION 2 :

How can we understand the *how* and *when* of developmental processes related to first and second language acquisition?

The acquisition of a first language has been the subject of extensive research for decades (see Berko-Gleason, 2001). Three aspects of first language acquisition that are especially relevant to understanding second language development include: 1) the universal components of language systems; 2) the integrated nature of language and cognition; and 3) the functional aspects of language.

Universal Components of Natural Languages

All natural languages can be viewed as symbol systems that enable (allow) communication to occur. While we often focus on the differences between languages (for example, a "dog" is *un perro* in Spanish and *le chien* in French), all languages share universal structures or components. These include: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, lexicon, and pragmatics. See the chart below for descriptions.

KEY DEFINITIONS OF THE COMPONENTS OF LANGUAGE

"Phonology" refers to the way sounds of the language operate.

"Morphology" refers to the way words are formed and are related to each other.

"Semantics" refers to the ways that language conveys meaning.

"Pragmatics" refers to the ways the members of the speech community achieve their goals using language.

"Lexicon" or vocabulary refers to stored information about the meanings and pronunciation of words.

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MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START STAFF ASK

- If the first language is not English, staff and parents feel that we might be delaying or should be doing "more" to help children learn English faster or sooner as the key to school success.
- Many parents want their children to experience an English-only environment so the children will become fluent in English.
- Can you introduce English too early? Before the child has much grasp of their first language (delays, speech concerns), is it appropriate to introduce English?
- How can children develop a second language better if they learn first the home language?
- I would like to know if children who learn both languages at the same time get confused.

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Accordingly, "language development" includes changes in each of these components. However, when considering the ***initial*** stages of language acquisition, Berko-Gleason (2001) points to the role of semantic understanding as most important. That is, children focus their attention in order to understand what words ***mean***, then use these initial understandings to develop additional skills. To acquire these understandings, children typically rely upon non-verbal and contextual or environmental cues. This insight plays an important role in planning and implementing appropriate learning experiences for children learning a second language.

The Integrated Nature of Language and Cognition

It is also fundamentally important to proceed from the principle that language does not develop in isolation. While this principle may appear self-evident — or even simplistic — it is important to fully examine the implications that stem from it.

To begin, we emphasize that, on a general level, language is connected to all developmental domains: physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. More specifically, our best understanding of these connections leads us to regard language and cognition as integrated into a single system in preschool children (readers who are interested in a more complete discussion are encouraged to see Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1985).

Simply put, as children develop language, their cognitive (conceptual) abilities also expand. Likewise, as children's conceptual understandings increase, the impetus (driving force) for more sophisticated language development is extended. This development is illustrated by the rate (or trajectory) of early vocabulary acquisition. While infants' acquisition of their first 100 vocabulary words is relatively slow, there is a considerable "explosion" in vocabulary development by toddlers (Bialystok, 2001).

Early Vocabulary and Conceptual Development

Consider, for example, a child with a vocabulary of seven words: ***bye-bye, go, juice, cookie, apple, please***, and ***ball***. With a vocabulary of this size, there is little incentive for the child to categorize or classify words into groups. However, once the child's vocabulary expands to include hundreds of words, the need to categorize becomes a necessary and valuable tool for future learning. For example, different words such as apple, banana, and orange can be classified as "fruits;" while dogs, cats, pigs, and cows can be grouped and referred to as "animals," and so on. The ability to create categories appears to be one of the earliest forms of conceptual development (Smith, 1995).

Later on, as children build and elaborate upon their early classification systems, language and cognition interact to support the emergence of thinking that is increasingly more abstract and conceptual. As children continue to develop, they appear to "re-structure" their lexicon (i.e., *manipulate and re-order categories in difference ways and for various purposes*)(Goswami, 2000,

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2001). At this new level, a prior classification of "animals," can become more specific (e.g., dogs and cats can now be classified as "pets," while pigs and cows can become "farm animals"). This ability to act and reflect upon different types (or levels) of categories and classification schemes, in turn, appears to promote the development of additional higher-order thinking skills.

Furthermore, children's vocabulary appears to be linked to ***phonological awareness.*** That is, the ability to acquire new words – and to store them in working memory – appears to support children's ability to recognize sound patterns within a language (e.g., rhymes, alliteration). Perhaps most important, research evidence supports the view that children with larger vocabularies are more capable of developing ***phonemic awareness*** (i.e., the ability to segment words into individual sounds)(Goswami, 2001). Both abstract conceptual skills and phonemic awareness during the preschool years are highly correlated with success in reading and academics later in life (see Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001 and Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998 for a full discussion of the research evidence on these relationships).

Vocabulary in Two Languages

Accordingly, while vocabulary acquisition is important for children acquiring English as a second language, it is ***especially important*** that children continue to develop vocabulary — and conceptual skills — in their first language.

What is a correlation?

Correlation: The degree to which two or more attributes or measurements on the same group of elements show a tendency to vary together (Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 1996).

Two variables are "correlated" if they tend to co-occur ("go together"). For example, a high score on Variable X may often "go together" with high scores on Variable Y. Or, a low score on Variable X may "go together" with a low score on Variable Y (Hopkins & Stanley, 1981).

What we want to avoid, above all, is ***interrupted*** cognitive development. By this, we mean that children are prevented from continuing to develop conceptual skills, because their environments only provide exposure to a second language (see Collier, 1988, and Thomas & Collier, 2002 for more detailed information). By supporting the development of children's first language, we concurrently support their continued development of conceptual and academic skills. We use the term ***maximize*** to underscore the importance of this issue: the available research evidence supports the goal of ***maximizing*** children's first language development as the key ingredient, along with sufficient exposure to English, to the successful acquisition of English. As we will see, to support this complex interaction between language, cognition, and social-emotional domains, children need classroom environments that fulfill two conditions: first, socially and emotionally support; second, appropriate levels of intellectual challenge and stimulation.

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A Functional Perspective: Language Serves Many Purposes

When children use language - with adults, with other children, or even when speaking to themselves (known as private speech) - they do so for one or more reasons. Simply put, language use is purposeful and practical. Halliday (1975) proposed seven types, or categories, of the functions of language:

FUNCTION	LANGUAGE IS USED TO	EXAMPLES
Instrumental	satisfy needs and wants	"I want a cookie!"
Regulatory	regulate behaviors of others	"Don't do that."
Interpersonal	interact with others	"Please read me a story."
Personal	establish and express identity and preferences	"I like my friends."
Heuristic	explore and understand the environment	"Why do bugs live in the ground?"
Imaginative	create and pretend	"When I grow up I want to be..."
Informative	communicate information	"It's raining."

(chart created from text in Halliday, 1975).

Clearly, language serves a wide variety of purposes! Each time children use language, at least one of these functions are present. For children acquiring English as a second language, understanding children's communication purposes can help to establish what they ***want*** to say. Accordingly, teachers can then look to assist children to ***say what they want*** by supplying the relevant language. When teachers learn to observe and describe the functions of children's language use, they then have information available to plan curriculum for the group as a whole and to individualize for particular children.

Therefore, teachers need regular and on-going professional development opportunities that support their abilities to observe and identify children's language in functional (purposeful) terms.

Acquiring a Second Language

Although second language acquisition is a developmental process, it is not identical to first language acquisition (Bialystok & Ryan, 1985). Second language acquisition is subject to more influences, including: the ***age*** when exposure to the second language begins; the ***amount*** and ***types*** of exposure; the ***status*** of the first language in the community; and many others. Each of these influences can be expected to have an effect upon the child's development of language.

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"As we will see, children's prior conceptual development … is a key ingredient in planning and implementing appropriate curriculum for children acquiring two languages."

How Children Come By Two Languages

The research on bilingual development can be divided into two major types: studies of ***simultaneous acquisition*** (i.e. exposure to two or more languages from birth) and ***sequential acquisition*** (i.e. exposure to a second language that begins at or after age 3 – 5 years). Simultaneous acquisition research is typically conducted as case studies; the strengths and limitations of this body of research have been previously discussed. The vignette of **Socorro** exemplifies simultaneous bilingual acquisition.

Sequential acquisition implies that children have experienced at least some development of their first language prior to exposure to the second. McLaughlin (1995) uses the age of three to identify the onset of sequential acquisition – yet there appears to be little (if any) direct empirical evidence used to make this decision. The vignette of **Angela** is one example of sequential bilingual development. Perhaps more importantly, children who acquire their second language sequentially approach acquisition processes in ways that differ from children initially acquiring their first language (McLaughlin, 1995). That is, sequential learners have ***already developed important conceptual knowledge*** in their first language that does not need to be re-learned in the second. For example, children who can count accurately in their first language have already developed concepts related to number and quantity. Children who can categorize apples and bananas as "fruit" have developed at least some understanding of classification. As we will see, children's prior conceptual development (also called "background" knowledge) is a key ingredient in planning and implementing appropriate curriculum for children acquiring two languages.

Conceptual knowledge

Conceptual knowledge includes understanding the uses of objects (i.e., a preschooler may know that a map is used to find locations and to guide driving, even though they themselves cannot read the map) and more abstract concepts, such as measurement (i.e., a child might understand that produce is put in certain sized crates and that the size - small, medium, large – and number of crates are related to the success of the crop).

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SOCORRO

Socorro is four years old and has migrated with her family since she was born. During the last 10 years, the family has migrated for agricultural employment within California, and also to Oregon. Socorro's mother is originally from Mexico and speaks to her daughter exclusively in Spanish. Her father was born in Texas and was exposed to both languages as a child. During his elementary school years he was often punished for speaking Spanish, therefore, while he is capable of speaking two languages, he often converses with Socorro in English. In addition, two of Socorro's uncles migrate with the family, and both tend to speak more English than Spanish.

As a result of her experiences with migration and from conversations with family members, Socorro has been exposed to roughly equal proportions of English and Spanish since she was an infant. Teachers in the MSHS classroom in which she has been enrolled refer to her as "our good student" due to her well-developed capabilities in both languages. Socorro can tell extended stories of her experiences in both languages, and is also able to recall many of the details from the books her teachers read. In addition, she rarely code switches. Instead, Socorro uses her two languages based upon her knowledge of her conversation partners.

AnGELA

Angela is three years old and has just been enrolled in an MSHS center for the first time. Previously, she has always been in Spanish-speaking environments with no exposure to English. Her parents and teachers consider her development in Spanish to be age-appropriate.

One day while she is washing her hands, she begins to turn the water in the sink on and off. Suddenly, Angela yanks her hands out of the water with a gasp — she has turned off the cold water tap, so that the flow of water is hot. Angela's teacher, a native English speaker, responds: "You turned the water to hot. Let's turn some cold water back on so you can finish washing your hands."

In the afternoon, the teachers notice that Angela said "hot" when she was pretending to cook in the dramatic play area — this is the first time she has been heard to use English. Over the next two weeks, Angela finds ways to use the word again and again. For example, when a container of rice arrives in her classroom just before lunch, Angela notices the steam rising from it. She points and exclaims: "hot!" On another occasion, she touches a table-top that has been exposed to the afternoon sun and says "hot."

Background Knowledge

At any age, children not only acquire language skills but also conceptual knowledge. Some examples of conceptual knowledge include: understanding the uses of objects (i.e., that a map is used to find locations); quantity (how many items are in a group); directions (up/down or north/south); or properties of objects (e.g., a cork will float in water but a key will not). Conceptual knowledge also includes the ability to comprehend more abstract concepts, such as "justice" or "rights." Finally, insights about how language is organized and used can be considered conceptual knowledge. These insights include understandings such as: forming questions; referring to past (or future) events; recognizing and creating rhymes or poems; and telling a story. These insights are an additional source of information for planning and implementing daily learning experiences within the classroom.

Background knowledge plays a key role in second language acquisition. Familiar objects and concepts — when used in second language settings — can facilitate acquisition, as the child can focus on the new vocabulary involved. Background knowledge "helps determine how cognitively demanding a subject is," and can be considered as a context for second language acquisition (Freeman & Freeman, 1992, p.28). For example, in their first language, migrant children may have well-developed knowledge of different fruits and vegetables. They may be able to: name the fruit/vegetable, say where and when it is grown, how and when it is harvested, etc.

"By taking into account what children already know, teachers are then in a position to plan curriculum to maximize children's learning of new information."

They may have detailed knowledge of different places they have lived and the different crops that are grown there. Background knowledge also includes specific, personally meaningful experiences, such as the recall of a hail storm, a trip to a museum, or a ride on a tractor. Teachers can use on-going assessment procedures (including observations and conversations with parents) in order to understand the background knowledge of individual children and of the group as a whole. By taking into account what children ***already know***, teachers are then in a position to plan curriculum to maximize children's learning of ***new information***.

Bilingual Development in Young Children

Lyon (1996) established a perspective on early bilingual development prior to the age of public school entry. In her view, children exposed to more than one language proceed through four stages of development.

First, children should first be viewed as being in an ***early language*** stage, in which words

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and phrases in either language may be acquired. Second, children enter into ***potential bilingualism***, as their abilities with both languages increase — although not uniformly in most cases. Third, assuming continued acquisition of two languages, children enter into a stage of ***developing bilingualism***. Here, most often, one language will become dominant, yet both need and deserve support as development continues. Fourth, children can achieve ***proficient bilingualism***, in which skills in either language are age-appropriate.

This view is valuable for several reasons. First, the perspective is inclusive of the full range of linguistic development, ranging from children who can speak a few words and phrases to those who can think, reason and reflect in meaningful ways. Second, the perspective captures the dynamic nature of bilingual development; children become bilingual by developing their abilities to use more than one language over time. Third, the perspective orients teachers to ***individualize*** curriculum for young learners, as children may demonstrate developmental differences within each of the four stages. Finally, this perspective orients teachers to be ***intentional***.
To fully support children's development, it is not enough to (simply) talk to children. Instead, children need and deserve exposure to a broad range of learning opportunities that include meaningful, sustained, rich, and varied language.

Bilingual Milestones
Milestones have been studied extensively in monolingual children, and the results from such research often serve as a basis for ascertaining whether children are on course. Unfortunately, no such normative database exists for bilingual children, and collecting such data would not be easy. Bilingual children differ considerably from on another in ways that might be expected to affect their rate of development without implicating on underlying impairments (Genesee, Paradis & Crago, 2004 p.48).

How Do We Know Which Language is Dominant?

For children who have had varied exposure to different languages, it may not be immediately apparent. The dominant language usually has a number of the following characteristics when compared with the non-dominant language (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004):

- Longer mean length of utterance and more advanced grammatical structures.
- Larger number of different word types, or verb types in particular, used in a stretch of discourse of fixed length.
- Fewer pauses or hesitations.
- Greater volubility (the quality of being fluent in speech/writing).

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QUESTION 3 :

Does it matter how adults use English and children's home language when they talk to preschool children?

Yes, the nature of our talk with children has a huge impact on their language development—both their first language and their second. For the purposes of clarity we are separating teacher talk into two types: 1) talk in more prescribed (planned) instructional interactions (e.g., circle time, small group instruction); and 2) talk with children in everyday conversations. Both planned instructional exchanges and conversations are very important to the dual goals of maximizing first language development and facilitating acquisition of English.

Planned Instructional Interactions

Children can learn new vocabulary in their first language and in English. What is of primary importance is that we use children's prior knowledge to build new language learning. In conversations it is often appropriate to follow upon the language initiated and used by individual children, who generally use the appropriate language with the people they are speaking with (Genesee et al., 2004) and therefore are most likely to initiate a conversation in the language that they know an adult (or another child) will speak. This might be either the first or the second language. The amount of time children spend in each language environment has also been shown to influence their proficiency in each (Genesee, 2002) so this implies that it is extremely important for children to be involved in conversations with adults who speak both languages. Language use for the most part should be kept distinct within the exchange; however, some exceptions to this rule do not seem to prove harmful. Therefore, keeping two languages separate should be regarded as a general rule rather than as an absolute necessity.

Code Switching

Code switching during more prescribed instruction (e.g., morning circle time, small group learning experiences) might be more closely controlled than during conversations. That is, teachers would be encouraged to limit their own code switching during these times – while

MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START STAFF ASK

- In a classroom where adults are bilingual and children speak either Spanish or English, how important is it to keep the languages separate or distinct?
- Should they code-switch depending on who initiated the conversation?
- One of my concerns is that some parents mix two languages, English and Spanish, in the same sentence, for example: "recoje el toy".
- Do we confuse children when we mix two languages?

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"…young children in classrooms often use both their first and second language. This is influenced by the classroom environment and by the individual child's progression in bilingual language acquisition. This is typical behavior and not a cause for concern."

Debra Drake

always encouraging and being accepting of the language use of individual children. Programs are encouraged to view their teachers as language resources, and to assess the availability of language skills present in classrooms (or in the program as a whole) in order to establish effective policies. As one MSHS staff person mentioned: *"we implement a 50/50 approach, which entails a strategy that has teachers focusing on one language one day, then switching to the other language the next day, and so on. As an example, if the language for Monday is Spanish, then the primary language spoken for the day is Spanish, with availability of an English speaking teacher at all times for those children who do speak English and may choose to communicate in that language."* Since this program employs a large number of bilingual teachers, the policy appears to be a good use of available language resources. This was the approach taken in the research by Winsler, et al., which has been shown to be effective. Other programs have been successful in implementing learning experiences for children using one language per week (i.e, the first language one week and the second language the next) (Stipek, Ryan & Alarcón, 2001). Overall, there has not been research that confirms that one of these two approaches is better or worse than the other. As exemplified by the vignette **Sandra**, young children in classrooms often use both their first and second language. This is influenced by the classroom environment and by the individual child's progression in bilingual language acquisition. This is typical behavior and not a cause for concern.

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Sandra

Sandra is five years old and has been migrating with her family since she was an infant. Last year, the family lived in Mexico for about 4 months; during their time in the U.S., they traveled between California, Oregon, and Washington. Sandra often mixes Spanish and English words when she speaks.

Most often, she begins to say something in Spanish, but inserts English words and phrases into the sentences. At times, teachers will speak to her in Spanish and she will reply in English. Her teachers are concerned with the amount of switching that Sandra does. However, the Education Specialist at the center notes that Sandra has well-developed skills in many areas of development. Further, she notes that Sandra can keep the two languages separate "when she wants to."

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Back-To-Back Translations

What we want to avoid is exposing children to prolonged, back-to-back translations. That is, each statement made in one language is directly translated into the other (e.g., "*Today we will be taking a field trip. Vamos a tomar un paseo hoy dia.*"). This is inappropriate in light of our overall goal to promote continued development in the first language and in English. We can expect children to have unequal abilities in their two languages (Bialystok, 2001). Given this, children appear to listen for their strongest language.
The danger is that children will become comfortable in actively "tuning out" their weaker (less dominant) language. In addition, the practice of back-to-back translation may also have a negative influence upon teachers' language use. That is, teachers who know that they must directly translate everything they say may (consciously or subconsciously) alter their speech to make the task of translation easier. This, in turn, reduces children's exposure to rich and sustained language. In sum, the practice of back-to-back translation appears to limit children's exposure to what they need most to acquire and develop language: meaningful experiences in which language is used to accomplish personal and social tasks.

Code Mixing (Switching)
Code-mixing is the use of elements from two languages in the same utterance or in the same stretch of conversation. (Genesee, et al., 2004 p. 91).

Conversations in the Classroom

Conversations between teachers and children take place during school entrance and departure, transitions, lunch, free play, etc. and can also occur during formal instructional times such as storytelling, book reading or small group learning experiences. Conversations between adults and children are important for establishing good communication and classroom relationships; more specifically, there is a significant amount of linguistic and conceptual learning that occurs during conversations. Parents and teachers who spend time talking individually with children and extending children's conversations (e.g., through open-ended questions, encouragement to go into detail) promote growth in children's language development. The vocabulary adults use during conversations is particularly important for later language and literacy development (Hart & Risley, 1995; Tabors, Roach & Snow, 2001). We want teachers to be intentional in introducing new words and ideas for children to experience. The vignette of **Roberto** presents a child who easily and frequently initiates and sustains elaborated conversations. Not surprisingly, classroom teachers may spend a good deal of time in conversations with him. However, a crucial consideration for MSHS programs is to actively and effectively create conversational oopportunities for *all* children.

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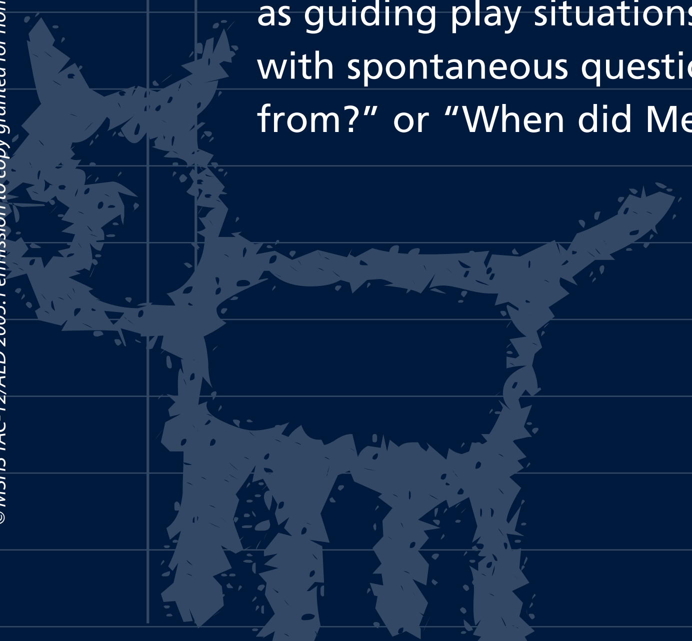
ROBERTO

Roberto is four years old and astounds everyone with his language abilities. He seems to talk about anything and everything — all the time. Roberto has lived in Mexico and the United States, and often makes detailed comparisons about life in the two countries. He can recall many specific activities and events from living in both countries, and loves to find responsive listeners to his stories.

Roberto often takes on leadership roles with other children, such as guiding play situations. He will also approach his teachers with spontaneous questions, such as "Where does hail come from?" or "When did Mexico become a country?"



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Parental Code Switching

Parents may also code-switch while speaking to their children. This mixing of languages is a natural and normal aspect of early bilingual acquisition, and is also typical of language use in many communities (Genesee, et al., 2004), even among proficient adult bilinguals. Many of the parents of MSHS children are in the midst of bilingual acquisition or development themselves. It is most important to emphasize to parents that they should have daily conversations, tell stories, or otherwise communicate with their children. This should be done in the parents' strongest language (first language); we should not be concerned about the inclusion of some words in a second language.

MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START STAFF ASK

- One of my concerns is that some parents mix two languages, English and Spanish, in the same sentence, for example: "recoje el toy". What should I say to them about this?

Professional Development

Program staff need regular, on-going access to professional development on issues related to language and literacy (Burns & Stechuk, 2004). It is very important that staff know about the different functions and structure of language, and ***how to connect this knowledge to their daily work.*** In terms of the functions of language, when children engage in communication — with adults, with other children, or even when speaking to themselves! (private speech) — they do so for one or more reasons. As previously mentioned, language use should be viewed as purposeful and practical. Very young children may produce sounds which are linked to their understandings of the world. For example, "wa" is produced to refer to water, or "ba" for bottle. When children begin speaking, they typically produce one-word utterances. These utterances typically refer to familiar objects (e.g., "cracker" or "bottle"). Children's first words refer to items which are relevant and meaningful to ***them,*** and, as their experience with the world grows, so does their vocabulary! As vocabulary continues to grow, children begin to combine two words at a time. Later, the ability to combine two words together becomes expanded to three and more words in one utterance. Language development is a progression in which the early production of sounds leads, eventually, to the ability to produce sentences.

MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START STAFF ASK

- We have many staff members who are not well versed in the proper use(s) of their own first language, Spanish. How do we address this?
- We have a concern regarding having sufficient English models, for proper English usage, in the classroom. What do we do?

Not Speaking Does Not Always Equate "Not Understanding"

Many authors distinguish between ***expressive*** and ***receptive*** language. As the terms imply, ***expressive language*** refers to what children are able to say; ***receptive language*** refers to what children are able to understand. During the infant, toddler and into the preschool periods, children's receptive language is far more extensive than their expressive language. For example, a mother may ask her child to "give me your hand" — the child is able to understand and comply with the request even before she begins speaking. At the beginning stages of acquisition, ***understanding*** language overwhelmingly outpaces speaking for children of this age.

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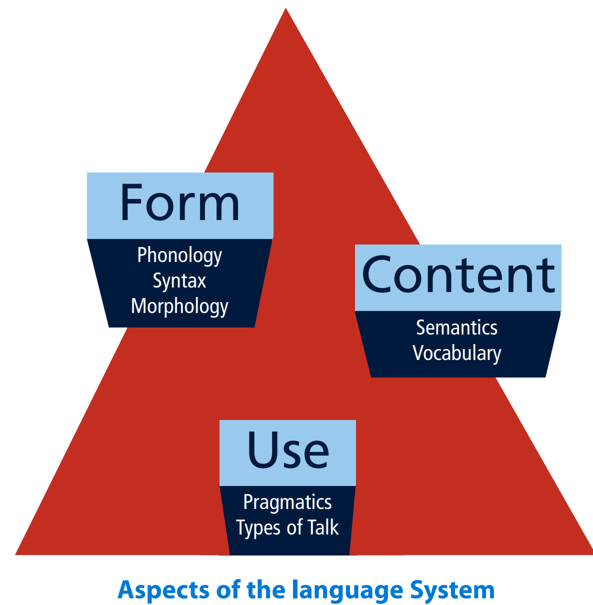
Structural Aspects of Language

Language also has a structure. It can be understood as a system involving rules. That is, not only is language a system – but the sub-components of the system are themselves systematic. Language sub-components (or sub-systems) have received a great deal of attention from researchers and practitioners alike. These sub-systems include: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (presented in the chart on page 9). ***Pragmatics*** is defined as knowing how to **use** language appropriately in social contexts to achieve the desired goals of the speaker. Commonly identified aspects of the **form** of language are ***Phonology, Syntax and Morphology***. ***Phonology*** refers to the language structure which relates to the "representation, production, and reception of the sounds of language." ***Syntax*** refers to the ways "words are put together to form phrases, clauses and sentences." ***Morphology*** refers to the "ways words are formed with prefixes, roots and suffices and are related to each other." ***Semantics and Vocabulary*** account for the **content** or meaning in the language system.



Aspects of the language System

Children Acquire Structure Via Daily Conversations

From extensive research on children acquiring their first language, we know that understandings of the structural aspects of language are often acquired rather than learned. That is, children are born with a natural ability to first recognize, and then later reproduce, many of the rules of the language systems. For example, as infants listen to speech from their caregivers and family members, they process and store in memory the sounds of their first language. In doing so, they come to recognize the rules that shape how sounds are combined in their first language. Children also come to recognize rules of grammar through exposure to language. For example, children are not directly taught to form plural nouns, yet many toddlers "know" how to do this (e.g., adding –s to "book" to form "books"). As adults speak to children, the structural aspects of language are naturally occuring, therefore, we do not need to create specific "lessons" in order to teach rules of language, nor engage children in drill-and-recital. Rather, the types of language experiences that have been previously referred to (i.e., meaningful, sustained, rich and varied) appear to provide children with exposure to all of the structural aspects of language. What teachers and parents ***can*** do is to plan and implement experiences that 1) allow children to use the understandings they already have; and 2) that expose children to newer, more elaborated forms, uses, and content.

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QUESTION 4 :

When we continue development of the first language and facilitate English, what does it look like day-to-day?

The basis for incorporating second language and first language is an effective system of assessment and curriculum.

No single curriculum or pedagogical approach can be identified as best — but we *do* know that a curriculum needs to provide children with four specific opportunities (see Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001 for a review of effective early childhood pedagogy). These opportunities include:

- #1: past learning is recognized and used as the foundation for new learning;
- #2: assessment that is thoughtful, valid and reliable;
- #3: meaningful and intellectually useful curriculum content; and
- #4: daily interactions with stimulating and supportive adults.

Cognitive, language, social-emotional, and gross/fine motor development are complementary, mutually supportive areas of growth. All of these developmental domains should receive active attention in order to provide maximum support to language development, and especially second language acquisition. It is important to emphasize that programs must address all areas of development — even if we are focusing on language development. It is also important to recall the Head Start definitions of "assessment" and "curriculum":

From the Head Start Program Performance Standards:

Assessment means the ongoing procedures used by appropriate qualified personnel throughout the period of a child's eligibility to identify:

(i) The child's unique strengths and needs and the services appropriate to meet those needs; and

(ii) The resources, priorities, and concerns of the family and the supports and services necessary to enhance the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of their child.

Curriculum means a written plan that includes:

(i) The goals for children's development and learning;

(ii) The experiences through which they will achieve these goals;

(iii) What staff and parents do to help children achieve these goals; and

(iv) The materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum. The curriculum is consistent with the Head Start Program Performance Standards and is based on sound child development principles about how children grow and learn.

Available: http://www.headstartinfo.org/

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Opportunity #1: past learning is recognized and used as the foundation for new learning.

Background knowledge plays a key role in second language acquisition. Familiar objects and concepts — when used in second language settings — can facilitate acquisition, as the child can focus on the new vocabulary involved. Background knowledge "helps determine how cognitively demanding a subject is," and can be considered as a context for second language acquisition (Freeman & Freeman, 1992, p.28). For example, migrant children may be very familiar with — have well-developed knowledge of — some types of fruits/vegetables. They may be able to: name the fruit/vegetable, say where and when it is grown, how and when it is harvested, etc. When background knowledge underlies the curriculum, children's learning experiences are meaningful and integrated.

Conceptual knowledge includes understanding the uses of objects (i.e., a preschooler may know that a map is used to find locations and to guide driving, even though they themselves cannot read the map) and more abstract concepts, such as measurement (i.e., a child might understand that produce is put in certain sized crates and that the size — small, medium, large — and number of crates are related to the success of the crop).

Opportunity #2: assessment that is thoughtful, valid and reliable.

There are many issues important to bringing assessment alive and to making it useful for deciding on curriculum and goals for individual children. We are concerned about the validity and reliability issues concerning young children. Further, there are specific issues for assessment that need to be considered. Finally, assessment policies and practices should take the unique needs of migrant and seasonal children into account. We offer three specific considerations for the assessment of children in MSHS programs:

1. *Gather information from the family about the child's response(s) to migration and to previous experiences - both positive and negative - with the second language.*

How children respond to the changes in their lives has a major impact on their overall development — and specifically on their ability to acquire a second language. This is especially important at the beginning of the season, when children may still be feeling anxious or upset over moving from a prior location. Bialystok (2001, p. 5) notes the links between home language and identity formation — and the potential that migration might reduce a child's motivation to acquire a second language:

"The language we speak is instrumental in forming our identity, and being required to speak a language that is not completely natural may interfere with the child's construction of self. Children who are bilingual because of relocation, particularly unwanted relocation, may resent the new community language."

MSHS programs are in a good position to assess the impact of migration upon an

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MARCO

Marco has just turned four years old. After 3 weeks of patient attempts, his classroom teachers have not been able to engage him in verbal interactions; they report that they have never heard Marco speak at all. Marco's parents inform the program that they speak to Marco exclusively in Spanish. They report that Marco does not speak often but seems to understand everything that he is told. Program staff recommend that Marco receive further testing from a speech pathologist. Although nervous, the parents give their consent.

Marco is evaluated by the program's speech pathologist, who reports that he presents with significant delays in many areas of language. She further recommends that Marco's parents speak to him only in English, in order to best support his development of a language for school.

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individual child. Assessment procedures that gather this kind of information provide programs with a real foundation for planning effective curriculum: both for the child "as a whole" and more specifically for first and second language development.

2. Use information from the family combined with observations done in the classroom to identify children's prior knowledge and the language(s) they have been exposed to.

Families can provide an essential base of information that can be used to plan appropriate curriculum and second language experiences. Information about a child's interests, recent language use, favorite play activities, familiar events and specific personal experiences can all be used to form an understanding of their background knowledge. In addition, careful observations of a child — especially during play and during meal times — can inform classroom curriculum. In the vignette about **Marco**, several important implications can be identified. First, teachers can use observations and information from parents to plan and implement effective learning experiences — even if the child does not use speech. In these cases, teachers should seek to establish and extend non-verbal communications and interactions. Second, the recommendation that parents use their own second languages with children is contrary to the research (see Collier, 1995, for a full discussion). Instead, Marco's parents should be advised to continue to speak to him frequently, and in the language they are most comfortable and familiar with. This recommendation will provide Marco with what he needs most: continued exposure to meaningful language in familiar settings.

3. Use on-going assessment opportunities to identify children's individual preferences, interests and ways of relating to the second language as well as their on-going development of knowledge in the first language.

For children who have been exposed to more that one language, care should be taken to assess their abilities in both languages. This can include a combination of information from families; teacher observations conducted in the classroom or during home visits; as well as information obtained from the use of screening and assessment instruments. In addition, MSHS programs can work to create opportunities for teachers and parents to share information about children's progress. These exchanges can be formal or informal, but they provide a valuable basis for keeping up with developmental issues and trends that are complex and subject to numerous influences.

Opportunity #3: meaningful and intellectually useful curriculum content. To use children's background knowledge as the basis for curriculum content to support first and second language development, we must first identify children's interests. We can then tie the acquisition of new skills (including metacognitive skills) to the meaningful teaching practices. Consider, for example, teaching practices that foster children's

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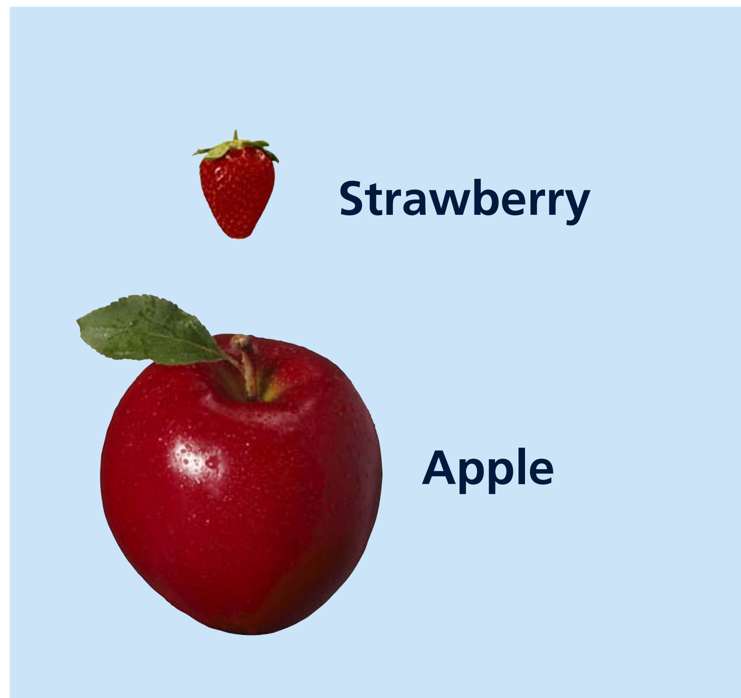
classification skills. Teaching becomes more meaningful when content information (i.e., classification) is related to information that children are already familiar with. For example, children may learn more quickly to classify types of fruits/vegetables that they have experience with. *"Making" a Book*, a literacy activity that is often done in preschool through dictation and drawings, may be more meaningful if the topic is *"My Trip to ____."* A metalinguistic activity comparing words to objects to explore the number of sounds in a word and the contrast between the sounds in words might be better done with fruits or vegetable that are familiar to the children (e.g., it is interesting that a strawberry is small relative to an apple but the word "strawberry" is bigger (i.e., has more letters than) the word "apple").

Concurrently, as we build upon the children's understandings we need to provide ***challenges*** — not overestimating their knowledge and skills while at the same time not underestimating their knowledge and skills. The task is as difficult as it is necessary. The curriculum content ***needs*** to be intellectually useful. It needs to be based on information worth talking about. This information, skill, and metalinguistic skill acquisition is emphasized by Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) as essential to prevent reading difficulties in young children:

> "…developing readiness for school is often equated with learning English, despite the evidence that a strong basis in the first language promotes school achievement in the second language (Cummins, 1979; Lanauze and Snow, 1989)….Having a bilingual capability by learning English as a second language can be seen as an asset for anyone. However, the asset may turn into a risk for young Hispanic children getting ready for reading, if learning a foreign language comes at the expense of building on very early home language development in ways that promote the metalinguistic experiences needed for alphabetic reading" (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998 p. 157).



"Metacognition" refers to thoughts about thinking (cognition); for example, thinking about how to understand a passage.
"Metalinguistic" refers to language or thought about language; for example, noting that the word "snake' refers to a long skinny thing all in one piece but that the word itself is neither long nor skinny and has four parts when spoken and five parts when written.

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On-going professional development for program staff and training offerings for parents should emphasize that many language skills that develop during the preschool years are essential to the later acquisition of reading and writing. The progress children make while enrolled in MSHS programs can have a direct impact upon their future!

Comprehensible Input

According to Krashen (1991) children acquire a second language when they receive "comprehensible input." Comprehensible input can be understood as language that children ***already*** understand, ***plus additional language at their "next level" of development.*** Here, "input" refers to the language in the child's environment that he or she hears — language that (literally!) "goes in." If the input is exclusively language that the child ***already*** knows, ***no new acquisition takes place.*** If the input is too far "beyond" the child, the result is the same: the child does not acquire new language.

The goal, therefore, is to discover the "balance" between what the child already knows and what is too difficult to acquire. In other words, when the ***majority*** of the language in the child's environment is comprehensible (understood), but also includes some new vocabulary, children's capabilities are challenged ***just enough*** to support acquisition of new language. Accordingly, "comprehensible input" will look (and sound) very different for different children. Consider the children presented in our vignettes:

- **Socorro** and **Roberto** have well-developed language abilities in both Spanish and English. They can be exposed to a wide range of "rare" (i.e, infrequent) vocabulary words in the context of familiar activities in both languages. For example, if they were to say that something was "big," the teacher could reply: "Yes, that's *enormous*."
- **Angela** has had little if any prior exposure to English. Therefore, teachers can first seek to establish learning experiences that she finds engaging and meaningful. When she is involved in enjoyable learning experiences, teachers can model English by naming the objects she is using ("You have a *ball*.") or by describing her actions ("*Throw* the ball into the container.") in conjunction with gestures.
- **Sandra** is developing skills in both Spanish and English and frequently mixes the two. Her teachers can provide comprehensible input by exposing Sandra to sustained language use in each of her two languages. For example, they could read a story in Spanish, and then modify the classroom environment to support Sandra and other children to act out the story in their play. Using play experiences to extend children's learning is a viable strategy for either first or second language development.
- **Marco** has not been heard to speak in the classroom and his parents report very little language use. His teacher can provide comprehensible input when they interact with him in meaningful ways that he enjoys. Marco does not need to speak to receive — or to benefit from — comprehensible input. For example, a

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teacher could offer him a choice between a box of legos and a box or crayons, then use language to frame his decision: "Oh, I see you chose the crayons. Let's draw!"

All children, regardless of their skill levels or language backgrounds, need and deserve comprehensible input. Teachers in MSHS programs must therefore be supported to develop their ability to observe children on a regular basis, implement curriculum across all developmental domains, and, simultaneously, provide comprehensible input.

Opportunity #4: daily interactions with stimulating and supportive adults.
Providing the types of curriculum opportunities mentioned throughout this paper demands that children are in stimulating classroom environments. Adults are a key part of stimulating learning environments. As mentioned previously, teachers must be able to provide stimulation across developmental domains. Equally important is for teachers to establish supportive, caring interactions with their children. Relationships that are effective are positive and warm and what is deemed positive and warm is defined by cultural and familial contexts. Thinking and feeling work hand in hand.

Affective Variables

For Krashen (1982, 1985) affective (i.e. social-emotional) variables are central to the process of second language acquisition. Affective variables are the personal and social characteristics of the second language learner. For young children, these characteristics are both linked to other aspects of development (e.g., cognitive, physical) and are still in the process of formation. Because each of these developmental domains is closely linked in preschool children, it is not surprising that "preschool children's ***social development*** predict[s] long-range outcomes, including literacy" (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998 p. 165).

Daily Curriculum and Teacher Practices that Provide these Child Opportunities

The four opportunities are important considerations for classroom practices. First, classrooms should be organized to provide children with many opportunities to hear and understand language. When children are able to participate in numerous activities which are fun, real and meaningful to them, they are naturally exposed to language. Indeed, participation in play situations is an ideal way to support children's language development. Through play, children are able to practice and participate in activities which engage their thinking and reasoning skills, gain exposure to and build understandings of concepts, and initiate and maintain social relationships. Play enables children to take in language that is important to them and at a pace which they can control.

The Role of Context

Context is the "fabric" that provides children with comprehensible input and thus enables messages to be understood. Classroom personnel can facilitate young children's second language acquisition when they

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provide context to communication in the following ways:

TEACHING PRACTICE	EXAMPLE(S)
Direct reference to objects	Here is your *jacket*.
Frequent repetition	It's cold outside so we'll need to put on our *jacket*. Our *jacket* keep us warm.
Many hints and cues of what is expected; Frequent use of gestures	Teacher points to jacket or pantomimes pulling on and zipping up.

(chart created from text in Fueyo, 1997)

Children develop language skills as they interact socially with adults and with other children. Teachers can create natural environments for communication by focusing on children's actions and interests. Teachers can best support language development by observing children and by creating environments that then set the stage for language use. Environments that reflect children's sociocultural backgrounds provide the best support to communication.

The Role of Play in Preschool Language Development

Play is an especially important source of supporting language and literacy development. Based on what is known about how young children develop, appropriate teaching strategies for second language learners include:

- dramatic play (especially when linked to children's real life experiences, such as a trip to the doctor, shopping at a store, visiting a mall, or bakery).
- times when children are topics of the conversation, and share their happy, sad, frightened, or joyful experiences, real or imagined
- music, including music that is culturally relevant
- cooking, using recipes from families and children's literature
- field trips - visits to the nearest panaderia (bakery), tiendita (corner store), park, and zoo
- free play outdoors (Riojas-Cortez, 2000)

Each of the strategies above can provide children with both comprehensible input and opportunities to use new vocabulary in meaningful ways.

Play as a Learning Strategy

Teachers should not be overly concerned with a child's ability to repeat words. Activities involving flashcards, drills and other rote exercises have much less of a role in language development than play and other active learning experiences. Although a child may be able to repeat words on a flashcard or during a drill, there is no evidence that he or she will be able to use the words in other situations. At best, therefore, drills and rote memory exercises have a limited benefit to the child. On the other hand, when a child uses language in play situations, they demonstrate evidence of the ability to generalize language across settings. When a child demonstrates generalization, they are able to use previous learning to gain (generalize to) new knowledge. For children from varied cultures, languages and ability levels, the ability to

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generalize language, concepts and skills is a fundamental goal for preschool curriculum.

Group Settings and Language Acquisition

Young children are sensitive to the contexts in which they find themselves: within their community, within their home, and within their classrooms. Adults who work with young children are encouraged to reflect on the amount of time during the day that is allocated to large group activities, and to the time available for one-on-one and small group activities and interactions.

One way to develop an appreciation for the impact of group settings on children's language use is to imagine yourself speaking in front of a large group. Many adults who could ***easily*** demonstrate their knowledge of a topic when talking to a familiar friend would have a difficult time relating the same information to a group of 200 at a conference. Likewise, teachers and programs are encouraged to develop an appreciation of how group sizes affect children's language use - especially in the second language. Large group discussions and activities may be effective for transmitting some types of information, but should be used sparingly in classrooms with second language learners.

Small group settings support children's listening comprehension and use of their first and second languages. In addition, small group settings make it easier for teachers to observe children's language use, particularly the acquisition of new words or concepts.

Elaboration: A Daily Strategy for Success

Elaboration is the ability to use language in depth, to converse on subjects at length and in detail. As an instructional strategy, teachers should first look for and make note of children's interests, then use modeling,

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supportive interactions and changes to materials and environments to sustain and extend children's language use.

As an instructional strategy for second language learners, elaboration provides several benefits. First, it assists children to hear repeated instances of language use in familiar contexts. The use of familiar topics reinforces increased second language acquisition — the elaborated (varied) expressions help hold the children's interest. Second, elaboration minimizes the risks of using a second language. In an environment in which everyone is encouraged to express themselves and to sustain interesting conversations, expressing ***meaning*** is emphasized, not mistakes. Finally, elaboration is a good source of language data — teachers can readily assess children's progress in first and second language development when extended conversations are a natural part of the classroom environment!

A Functional Approach to Second Language Acquisition

A functional approach to supporting second language acquisition is one in which children ***want*** to use a second language to communicate because it is immediately functional (i.e., meets one or more purposes that the child has). Children do not acquire a second language simply by hearing a teacher speak it or by virtue of being young (see the Five Myths of second language acquisition, McLaughlin, 1992). All children benefit from teaching and learning experiences that are individualized to meet their specific interests, needs and abilities — and that take their personal background knowledge into account.

Classroom environments should incorporate familiar objects, and patterns of events, including patterns of communication. Second, the classroom materials and social interactions (both teacher-child and child-child) should be arranged to invite comments and questions — which provides a source of on-going communicative contexts. The intersection of these variables: physical environment, use of objects, and social relationships, provides an optimal (and infinite!) source of comprehensible input for children.

Dialogic Reading: A Basis for Parent-Program Collaboration

One example of a teaching practice that can be implemented by classroom teachers and parents is dialogic reading. The practice has been studied extensively, ***with the evidence consistently demonstrating gains in children's vocabulary after interventions*** as brief as 6 to 8 weeks (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Hargrave & Senechal, 2000). In addition, the practice can be implemented by parents regardless of their native language and ***regardless of their level of literacy.*** The program has been successfully implemented in Chinese (Chow & McBride, 2003), Spanish (Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992) and with children with disabilities (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999; Fung, Chow, & McBride, 2004).

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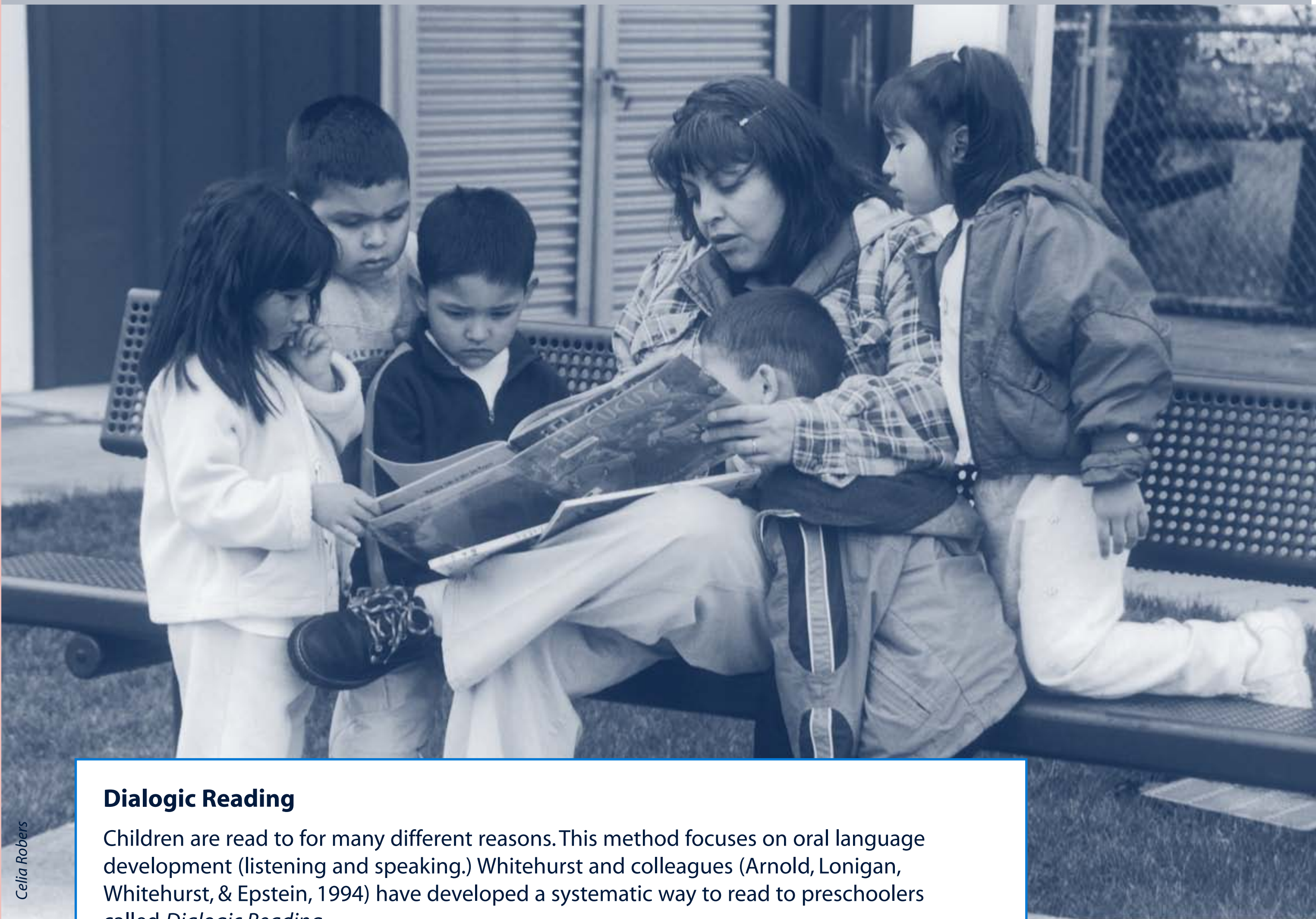

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Dialogic Reading

Children are read to for many different reasons. This method focuses on oral language development (listening and speaking.) Whitehurst and colleagues (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994) have developed a systematic way to read to preschoolers called *Dialogic Reading*.

Dialogic Reading is based on a specific method of interacting with children and reading materials, the procedures of the practice are called the PEER sequence. The PEER sequence begins with the Parent (or teacher) initiating a Prompt about a book to promote shared reading and conversation. The adult then Evaluates the child's response and Expands on it. The adult Repeats the initial question to check that the child understands and can then use the expansion. Future exchanges then take children's new competencies into account when again employing the *PEER* sequence.

Dialogic reading employs one of five types of prompts (called *CROWD*) to begin a PEER sequence. These prompts are Completion — asking students to complete a sentence about the book; Recall — asking students to recall using easy questions (e.g., yes, no); Open-ended — asking students to recall through expressive language; "Wh" Questions — asking the child *what, when, where, who* and *why* details about the story; and Distancing — asking the child to connect the book to their own experiences.

Research on this model indicates that preschoolers with poor vocabulary learn new vocabulary from a dialogic reading intervention program. Positive outcomes include increases in expressive and receptive vocabulary, mean utterance length, and use of a larger number of different words.

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Supporting First and Second Language Acquisition: Not Easy – But Very Possible

Collier (1988) observed that learning is "burdensome" when young children are expected to function within a second language (school) environment prior to sufficient maturation of their first language. MSHS staff can facilitate second language acquisition by observing young children as individuals and by planning learning experiences that address their individual strengths, needs and interests.

MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START STAFF ASK

- We struggle with locating enough resources (especially BIG BOOKS), in Spanish, what can we do?

Classroom teachers can equip their classrooms with materials that invite communication and work to engage each child in many types of communication each day. In addition, teachers can use their understanding of each child's background knowledge to initiate and sustain communication. Above all, teachers facilitate second language acquisition by creating safe environments in which young children can try out and experiment with a new language – and in which they can continue to develop their vocabulary and conceptual skills in their first language. By continuing to support the development of children's first language while gradually and carefully introducing English as a second language, teachers offer preschool children appropriate supports for a life-long developmental process.

Program Practices That Support Bilingual Development

First, programs should establish a consensus among all relevant stakeholders that bilingual development is an important goal. Enlist program staff at all levels, as well as parents, extended family members and community partners and maximize their involvement. Successful outcomes are compromised without a strong "buy-in" from the outset. Once a consensus is established, consider developing written policies on language and literacy (addressing first and second language acquisition and bi-literacy) as a way to solidify progress. Written policies can be developed as ***functional*** documents, including: 1) expressing a shared vision and purpose; 2) articulating key principles and practices; and 3) establishing a concrete basis for program self-assessment and on-going professional development.

Second, program managers can identify the current knowledge base(s) of the teaching staff and use this information to develop priorities for future training, technical assistance and professional development. When staff talk about their practices, do they mention ideas that foster new vocabulary acquisition, use of background knowledge, or ways of encouraging elaboration? To what extent is information from parents included into on-going assessment? Is the impact of migration upon children looked at? Do staff have opportunities to share "ideas that work"?

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Third, programs must not only plan and implement regular, on-going professional development opportunities for teaching staff, but also work to ensure that these opportunities include time and support for teachers to reflect upon the effectiveness of their teaching practices (Burns & Stechuk, 2004). While there are extensive research bases that are available for consideration, these should not be taken as a "prescription" for program practices. That is, we cannot simply do what the research "says." We can, however, take up the challenge inherent in MSHS program operations by thoughtfully constructing a set of principles, strategies, and practices to use as a foundation for serving children and families, then regularly evaluating how this information holds up in practice.

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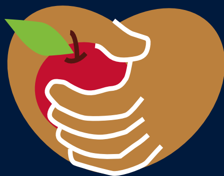

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