Strengthening Home School Relations in Immigrant Communities: The Role of Mother Tongue Support

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Home-School Partnerships in Multicultural Settings

“Organizing Principles” from Miramontes, Nadeau & Commins (2011, p. 24)

- The more the mother tongue can be developed, the greater the potential for students to be academically successful.

  There are always ways to nurture the mother tongue, regardless of school resources

  - Sociocultural factors and political context must be considered in making decisions regarding every aspect of program planning
  
  - Parents and community must play a major role in the learning and schooling of their children
More Than Language

Children are being socialized into a new culture and set of power relationships.

We must ask:

- What happens to immigrant students when they enter school and begin to learn the dominant language (Finnish or Swedish)?

- What does it mean to their families that children are becoming speakers of the dominant language and being socialized to new ways of acting?

- In what ways are we maximizing children’s schooling experience or limiting their possibilities for success?
Questions to Ask of Schools

- Is there a climate of respect for different languages and cultures at school? In the larger community?
- What is the message sent to parents and children about the value and importance of students maintaining and deepening their mother tongue?
- Is trying to address the needs of students from immigrant backgrounds seen as a burden or as an opportunity?
- Are families and community members viewed as assets to students’ academic success or as disinterested or counter productive?
My Own Family

- Immigrant grandparents early 1900s
- Encouraged their children to stop using their home language so they could “fit in” and “do well in school.”
- My parents gave up their mother tongue and became monolingual English speakers,
- Cut off my generation from a rich cultural heritage.
Danger in Immigrant Communities

- Well meaning, yet uninformed, practices and policies can make things worse.
- A haphazard or uncritical approach, especially to issues of language use and cultural identity, can result in weakened family ties in the immigrant community.
  - Break down of communication between generations
  - Disruption of family ties
Message Many Children Receive

- Adapt to the new culture
- Dominant language is the only one that is important because it is the only one used for instruction
- Who they are, as well as the language and culture of their parents is no longer of value.
Negative Outcomes

- Feelings of alienation and not belonging
- Rejection of their home culture
- Loss of their mother tongue
- Loss of communication with members of their family and community.
- Unrest among adolescents and young adults in immigrant communities.
Goal of Community Partnerships

- Break down fears associated with cultural change.
- Schools act as a bridge between mainstream society and students’ own linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- Reassure families that school is a safe environment for their children.
- Show concern by creating trust between home and school.
Two-Way Communication

- Build trust and break down barriers created by language and culture.
- Establish mutual respect
- Adopt an attitude of learning
- Maintain a commitment to the good of the whole society.
Teachers’ Most Important Message

That they value the students’ mother tongue

It supports learning in school
Gives immigrant parents a role to play.

The more welcome parents feel, the more likely it is that they will take steps to integrate into the larger community and encourage their children to do so, as well.
Relationship Between First and Second Languages

- Additive vs. Subtractive Bilingualism
- Common Underlying Proficiency
- Conceptual Reservoir
Emerging Bilingualism

As a person acquires a second language they will either maintain or lose their abilities in their first language.
Subtractive Bilingualism

...occurs when the second language replaces the first as the only language available to the individual for communication.

The person becomes monolingual in their second language.

This is a great loss.
Additive Bilingualism

...occurs when the second language is added on to the first, thus expanding a person’s linguistic abilities.

This is what all educators should be aiming for in all students

Additive bilinguals experience social, cognitive, and economic advantages.
Academic Bilingualism

At the center of our work should be a demonstrated value for bilingualism, multilingualism and intercultural competence.
Academic Success and Equity

• **Basic Academic Skills**
  Read, write, compute, scientific method, etc

• **Higher Order Thinking Skills**
  Critical Thinking – Problem solving

• **Self Efficacy**
  Know where to go and how to get help.
  Life long learner

• **Civic Responsibility**
  Take an active part in the civic life of the society

• **Intercultural Competence**
  Work with, learn from, care about and respect people different from yourself
What Does the Research Say?

- Students benefit when they maintain their mother tongue while they are learning the dominant language.
- The stronger the mother tongue, the better students do in all of their academic work.
- Parents can play a role by using their strongest language to continue to develop their children’s linguistic and cognitive strengths.
First and Second Language Acquisition: Common Underlying Proficiency

Adapted from Jim Cummins by John Hilliard, IRC
Learning Through the Mother Tongue

Conceptual Reservoir

Listening, observing, reading, and imitating, doing

Speaking, writing, artistic expression, physical movement, etc.
Deepen the Reservoir ➔
Strengthen the Pathways

Conceptual Reservoir
Native Bilinguals

Conceptual Reservoir
Learning a Second Language Begins With Representing What is Already Known

Conceptual Reservoir

L1

L1

L2
Adding to the Reservoir Through a Second Language

Conceptual Reservoir

[Diagram with arrows indicating transfer between L1 and L2, labeled as L1 and L2]
The Job of Parents & Educators

Fill the reservoir as deeply as possible.

Assure that students are gaining concepts and knowledge and practicing higher order thinking skills – no matter the context or the language used to do so.
Students Learning In More Than 1 Language Take Multiple Routes

Different Pathways to Academic Competence
Implication for Instruction:

Students benefit when teachers organize instruction to help them take what they know in one language and express it through the other.

This is enhanced by communication with parents and families.
Be Transparent and Open

• Talk with all students about the fact that they are becoming bilingual or multilingual.

• Emphasize the intercultural skills needed to be successful in a global economy.

• Affirm the importance of identity and the need to respect each individual as a part of community that works together.
We Have Much In Common With People We Perceive As Different From Ourselves

All parents love their children and want them to succeed.
We can use this understanding to
• build personal relationships
• create connections between newcomers and long time residents
  ◦ For example: conversation partners, cooking classes, or sharing childcare.
Inform parents about the big ideas and topics of instructions

Encourage parents to work with their children in their strongest language about these ideas.

How Teachers Can Help
How Parents Can Help

- Talk with their children about what they are learning
- Ask questions like:
  - Can you give me an example?
  - Why? Why not?
  - How would you do it differently?
Celebrate Multilingualism

- Talk to children about the gift of bilingualism / multilingualism.
- Emphasize that all languages are languages for learning.
- Support the notion that anything you know in one language you can learn to express in another.
Actions That Honor Home Language And Culture

- Interview or survey parents and community members about the kind of work they do and the skills they have.
- Learn about “survival networks” in the community and how newcomers make sense of new cultural and social patterns.
- Investigate the kinds of activities, responsibilities and interactions children have in their home community.
- Invite family members to share their knowledge and expertise as part of the delivery of the curriculum.
Actions That Honor Home Language And Culture

- Enlist community members in compiling a list of ‘family friendly’ websites and other resources in as many of languages as possible.
- Value students’ ability to use more than one language by bringing the languages of the community into the school and classroom.
- Encourage immigrant parents and family members to communicate with their children in their strongest language.
KIITOS

Danke  Thank you  شكراً
Merci  Gracias  ขอบคุณค่ะ

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