

Early Childhood Education for Bilingual Children: A Cross-Cultural Examination

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Abstract : Immigration within and across continents is currently a global reality. The number of people leaving their communities in search for a better life for them and their families has increased dramatically during the last twenty years. Therefore, young children of the 21st century around the World are growing up in diverse communities, exposed to many languages and cultures. One consequence of these migration movements is the increased linguistic diversity in school settings. Depending on the linguistic history and the status of languages in the communities (i.e., minority-majority; majority-majority) the instructional approaches will differ. This session will discuss how bilingualism is addressed in early education programs in both minority-majority and majority-majority language communities, analyzing experiences in three countries with very distinct societal and demographic characteristics: Peru (South America), the United States (North America), and Italy (European Union). The ultimate goal is to identify commonalities and differences across the three experiences that could lead to a discussion of bilingualism in early education from a global perspective. From Peru, we will discuss current national language and educational policies that have led to the design and implementation of bilingual and intercultural education for children in indigenous communities. We will also discuss how those practices are being implemented in preschool programs, the progress made and challenges encountered. From the United States, we will discuss the early education of Spanish-English bilingual preschoolers, including the national policy environment, as well as variations in language of instruction approaches currently being used with these children. From Italy, we will describe early education practices in the Bilingual School of Monza, in northern Italy, a school that has 20 years promoting bilingualism and multilingualism in education. While the presentations from Peru and the United States will discuss bilingualism in a majority-minority language environment, this presentation will lead to a discussion on the opportunities and challenges of promoting bilingualism in a majority-majority language environment. It is evident that innovative models and policies are necessary to prevent inequality of opportunities for bilingual children beginning in their earliest years. The cross-cultural examination of bilingual education experiences for young children in three part of the World will allow us to learn from our success and challenges. The session will end with a discussion of the following question: To what extent are early care and education programs being effective in promoting positive development and learning among all children, including those from diverse language, ethnic and cultural backgrounds? We expect to identify, with participants to our session, a set of recommendations for policy and program development that could ensure access to high quality early education for all bilingual children.

Keywords : early education for bilingual children, global perspectives in early education, cross-cultural, language policies

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