

ACHIEVING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A PROMISING ANSWER FOR LATINOS IN WASHINGTON

Lillian Petersen, Whitman College
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And its what can we do to prepare the teachers and the caregivers of these young children that are in our community – what can we do to help them be better prepared to teach all of our children. – Melinda Brennan, Walla Walla Community College

- **Topic:** What do training programs look like that best aid teachers in providing or maintaining culturally appropriate early learning environments for their young students?
 - This report primarily centers upon effective, high quality teacher training for early childhood educators working in diverse settings.
 - Issues such as bilingual education, kindergarten readiness, Latinos and academic success, and the benefits of dual language abilities are addressed.

- **Methods:**
 - By closely examining the Washington Learns initiative, I ensured that my objectives and recommendations in this report aligned themselves with the current goals of Washington’s Department of Education.
 - By examining prior research regarding bilingual education and the maintenance of a child’s native language and culture, I found that *culturally appropriate* early learning experiences are crucial to a child’s future success.
 - Classrooms visits, interviews, and research, allowed for discussion of several innovative and culturally sensitive teacher training programs.

- **Findings:** Latino children and families in Washington need culturally appropriate early learning programs in order to succeed, but many teachers feeling unprepared to operate in diverse settings. Programs and projects exist, nation-wide, which successfully train teachers to operate in diverse classroom settings. Contrary to popular belief, success in diverse learning environments does not necessarily require bilingual skills on behalf of the teacher. Interviews revealed that culturally responsive environments can be achieved without a teacher’s bilingual skills as long as the teacher receives high-quality training. Such training is found in the Building Bridges program, which is offered across Washington State.

- **Recommendations:**
 1. Bilingual models that support the maintenance of dual language skills should be proliferated in communities such as Walla Walla where more than one language is significantly represented. English-only assimilation practices should be avoided.
 2. A greater number of well-trained, culturally competent and/or bilingual early childhood educators should be sought in communities where they are needed.
 3. Ensuring the existence of high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education programs should be a top priority for the Washington State Department of Education. Improved teacher training programs should be a primary means by which this goal is achieved.

- **Community Partner:** Melinda Brennan, the director of the Parent-Child Center and the coordinator of early childhood and educational support programs at Walla Walla Community College