

Strategic Use of Consultants: An Interactive Guide for Head Start and Early Head Start Leaders



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Cultural and Linguistic
Responsiveness

Voices From the Field

Supporting Children's Spanish Language Development

Program:

Educare of Omaha, Inc., Omaha, NE

Contact:

Deborah Winkelmann, Site Director

Brief Program Description:

Educare of Omaha receives funding for 238 children in Head Start (HS) and 136 in Early Head Start (EHS). The program operates 14 HS and 17 EHS classrooms, all of which are five-day, full-day, full-year center-based programs. Approximately 41 percent of the children enrolled in HS and 42 percent enrolled in EHS are identified as coming from homes where Spanish is the primary language. Each classroom has at least one staff member who is bilingual.

Program Improvement Goal:

To support the Spanish language development of children whose primary home language is Spanish.

Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Plan:

In the program's second year of operation at its site at Indian Hill Elementary School, program leadership decided to hire a consultant to assist staff in developing their skills to support the Spanish language development of children who have Spanish as their primary home language. Specifically, the T/TA plan called for the consultant to

- provide consultation via conference call to the management team,
- provide onsite training to staff on dual language development, and
- provide follow-up to ensure the recommended practices are appropriately implemented by the management team, including master teachers.

Consultant Qualifications:

Program leadership received information about a qualified consultant while at a training on creative curriculum. The consultant had published a book on the subject of working with dual language learners (DLLs).

Consultant's Work:

The consultant provided consultation through conference calls to the management team, followed by onsite trainings with program staff.

Outcomes:

- Staff gained a better understanding of best practices for supporting the home language and English language development of DLLs.
- Staff made recommended changes to the classroom environment and their practices to better support children who are DLLs.
- Enrolled children whose primary home language is Spanish are now assessed in both English and Spanish and are showing gains in both languages.

Advice to Others:

- **It is okay to admit that you don't know something.** Let the consultant know you need help in a particular area. Be honest about your challenges and expectations, and clearly articulate your desired outcomes.
- **Know your program prior to hiring the consultant.** Look at your program and analyze its needs before you begin work with a consultant.
- **Find a consultant who understands the culture of your program.** It is preferable for a consultant to be familiar with your program and/or to take the time to visit your program in order to understand its culture and operations prior to developing and providing training.
- **Conduct a rigorous selection process.** The management team and members of the staff should be actively involved in the recruiting and hiring process, including interviews.