

Sí se puede

Summary

Because the language of power in our society is English, the message students often receive is that their home language is less valuable, less important, and holds less social capital than English. Although students in bilingual or dual language programs have much higher rates of bilingualism and biliteracy, even in these settings students experience the push towards English dominance. As a result, as students progress through Dual Language Programs into the upper grades they choose the LOTE (Language Other Than English) less and less frequently. This phenomenon can be observed in their collaborative conversations, on the school yard, in the literature they choose to read, and sometimes in their responses to their LOTE speaking teacher and families. *Sí se puede* is a strategy designed to address this issue by providing teachers (and families) with two different frameworks aimed at elevating the status of the home language or LOTE. The first part of the strategy aims to address the intentional and unintentional messages students receive about language status. This part of the strategy is designed to elevate student understanding of the importance home language or LOTE. The second part of the strategy provides teachers (or families) with a set of tools they can use to support students in maintaining the partner language.

Implementation

1. Build a Language Safe Community

Teachers and staff build a language safe classroom community by making the classroom a safe space for students to take risks with language:

- Teacher models what it looks like both to forget and also to ask for help
- Students share agreements to not make fun of each other
- Students and teachers bring this work home to families to support a language safe environment at home

2. Literature About Language Status

Teacher shares literature that helps students examine language status, the effects of language loss and the power of bilingualism or multilingualism. Some possible titles might include: *One Green Apple* By Eve Bunting, *René Has Two Last Names* (Sp/En) By René Colato Lainez, *Mi diario de aquí hasta allá* (Sp/En) Amada Irma Perez, *A Movie in My Pillow* By Jorge Argueta, *My Name is Yoon/ Me llamo Yoon* (Sp/En) By Helen Recorvits, *Speak English for us, Marisol!* By Karen English, and *El día en que descubres quien eres* Por Jacqueline Woodson (Sp or En).

3. Share Your Own Story

Teacher shares his/her road to bilingualism and shares the beautiful as well as hard parts. This opens up the door for students to reflect on their own experiences and choices.

4. Facilitate the Language Status Conversation

Possible questions for discussion:

- What language do you chose to speak at home? School? On the playground? See on TV? In the books you chose to read?
- How do you feel about speaking your home language?
- Which language is more important? Why?
- What do your families tell you about speaking your home language? What do they say about English?
- What is the relationship of language and power in society?
- What would happen if you lost the ability to speak your home language?

5. Partner with Families

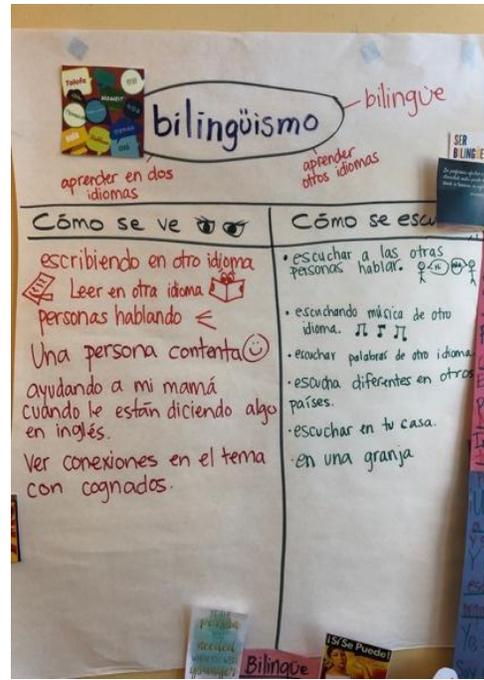
Teachers and staff educate families about their impact in this endeavor. Many emerging bilinguals describe being teased, discouraged, or criticized by their parents and families in their attempts to speak their home language. Helping families be aware of how powerful their messages around language can be is an important step towards creating safe language learning spaces at home, as well as at school.

6. Elevate LOTE Schoolwide

Bilingualism and multilingualism is celebrated schoolwide. This can be through bilingual pride boards, Bridging School and Family connections, language goals, library selections, Bilingual Pathways celebrations, classroom or school recognition awards, and much more. All staff educates students about the benefits of multilingualism and give them opportunities to talk and write about why it matters to them.

Additionally, staff ask questions about school practices - does translation exist? Is the LOTE (Language Other Than English) always second in signage, classroom charts, announcements, or meetings? All staff models choosing LOTE in conversations with bilingual colleagues, students, and families.





Notes on Sí se puede
