LINGUISTICALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE:
A NEW WAY TO WORK WITH
YOUNG IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

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Hello,

My name is Roma Chumak-Horbatsch and I work in the School of Early Childhood Studies at Ryerson University. I’d like to tell you about *LINGUISTICALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE* or *LAP* a new way of working with young children who arrive in centres, classrooms and programs with little or no understanding of the language of program delivery.
I developed LAP in response to numerous requests from early childhood professionals who have asked me over the years: “What works best with children who do not understand the classroom language? How do I meet their language and literacy needs?”
Currently LAP is implemented in childcare centres, family programs, full day Kindergartens and classrooms across Ontario and beyond. Response from children, early childhood professionals, parents and students is both positive and encouraging. For example, in LAP classrooms children share books, ask language-related questions and showcase their growing knowledge about their own language and the languages of their friends. Parents report that LAP activities lead to children’s eagerness to speak and learn their home language. Undergraduate students who are implementing LAP in the Early Learning Centre - our Lab School - describe LAP as a bridge between the home and the childcare centre, and report that LAP creates a comfort zone for children who do not speak English.
LET’S LOOK AT THE HIGHLIGHTS OF LAP AND ADDRESS

FOUR QUESTIONS:

1. What is LAP?
2. Do we need a new practice?
3. How does LAP work?
4. What are the benefits of LAP?
SO, WHAT IS LAP?

I am more than a learner of the new language.

Let me start by explaining what LAP is NOT:

LAP is not an elaborate, costly teaching tool. There are no kits and no special materials to buy.

LAP invites early childhood professionals to do THREE things:

1. take the time to understand the language reality of immigrant children

2. acknowledge their dual language and literacy needs AND

3. support them as they navigate their two language worlds.
LAP IS

inquiry based - it encourages all children to engage in language and literacy activities, pose questions, seek answers, and discuss and share their ideas with others.

THE STARTING POINT OF LAP IS THAT immigrant and newcomer children are far more than learners of the classroom language.

These children have language and literacy lives beyond the classroom - they speak their home languages in various contexts and have literacy experiences in their homes. When they join the new language classroom - they begin their bilingual journey.
The current practice, however, is to refer to these children as ELLs or English Language Learners and focus on their hasty mastery of English. In so doing - the language and literacy skills these children bring with them are too often discounted.

So following Ofelia Garcia, LAP refers to young immigrant and newcomer children as EMERGENT BILINGUALS or BILINGUALS IN THE MAKING.
LET'S TURN TO THE 2nd QUESTION:

DO WE NEED A NEW PRACTICE?

THERE ARE FOUR REASONS WHY WE DO, INDEED, NEED A NEW WAY TO WORK WITH IMMIGRANT CHILDREN.

FIRSTLY

The number of immigrant children in centres, classrooms and family programs in Canadian cities both large and small - is on the rise. For example a study I recently conducted revealed that close to one half of the children enrolled in Toronto childcare centres speak a language other than English in the home. If we look at schools we see a very similar picture - more than 50% of the school population of Toronto comes from non-English speaking backgrounds.
A SECOND REASON
Early childhood professionals are often unsure of what works best and are asking for concrete guidance as they face the challenge of meeting the needs of immigrant and newcomer children.

A THIRD REASON WHY WE NEED A NEW PRACTICE IS THAT policy documents and curriculum guidelines give young immigrant children minimal attention and do not concretely address their language and literacy needs.

AND LASTLY
Current classroom practices, for the most part, do not meet the language and literacy needs of young immigrant children.
In my work, I have identified three different kinds of practices early childhood professionals adopt in their work with immigrant children: Assimilative, Supportive and Inclusive.

Here’s a brief description of each practice:

**Assimilative** practices focus on absorbing immigrant children into the majority language and culture.

**Supportive** practices have a similar goal and differ from Assimilative practices in one way - they acknowledge and celebrate home languages and cultures. **Both of these practices** focus on single language learning and rest on outdated and incorrect assumptions about young children’s dual language learning ability.
The third practice is **Inclusive** and it is very different from Assimilative and Supportive practices.

**Inclusive** practices go beyond acknowledging children’s home languages - they create multilingual, and multi-literate environments where home languages are welcomed, validated, compared, explored and incorporated into the program.

Unlike **Assimilative** and **Supportive** Practices – **Inclusive** practices are in line with current research that describes the young child as a capable and skillful dual language learner.
My travels to schools and childcare centres revealed that these three practices are adopted as follows:

**Assimilative** practices are adopted rarely.

**Supportive** practices where the focus is on learning the classroom language and celebrating home languages and cultures are adopted most often.

**Inclusive** practices where home languages are given a place in the program are adopted sporadically and infrequently.
OUR NEXT QUESTION HAS TWO PARTS:
1. WHAT DOES LAP DO?
2. HOW DOES LAP WORK?

LAP BRINGS LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY TO LIFE - OPENS THE DOOR TO ALL LANGUAGES AND GIVES THEM A PLACE IN THE PROGRAM.

LAP
• links children’s two language worlds
• promotes bilingualism
• engages families and communities AND
• helps all children understand and experience linguistic diversity.
HOW DOES LAP WORK? LAP is divided into 3 sequential parts:

PART 1
Laying the groundwork for LAP

Part 2
Preparing the Classroom for LAP

Part 3
Implementing LAP activities

THE FIRST PART reports on the global presence of immigrant children in metropolitan centres with large immigrant populations.

The Language Portrait included in the first part sketches two sides of immigrant childrens’ language and literacy lives – their skills, capabilities and potential and also the challenges they face when they join a classroom where everyone speaks a language they don’t understand.

Finally, the first part defines LAP and provides a brief outline of Dynamic Bilingualism, the theoretical grounding of this new practice.
IN THE SECOND PART OF LAP
early childhood professionals are invited to take what I call the *LAP challenge* – to become advocates of young immigrant children’s growing bilingualism.

Following this, suggestions are provided for transforming classrooms into multilingual and multi-literate environments.

**PART THREE includes over 50 ACTIVITIES** and suggestions and tips for their implementation.
We now turn to the last question.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF LAP?

The fast answer is that the adoption of LAP has benefits for everyone - children, families, and professionals.

LAP enriches the lives of all children, not just those who are learning the classroom language.

LAP also has benefits for early childhood professionals and LAP helps parents.
Let’s look at these benefits more closely:

**LAP helps all children**

engage in personal and group identity negotiation and construction.

It helps them find answers to questions such as WHO AM I? WHO ARE YOU? WHO ARE WE? WHERE DO I BELONG?

**LAP helps all children**

develop important language, science, geography, social science and math skills.

**Further, LAP helps immigrant and newcomer children**

bridge their two language worlds and take ownership of their home language.
Adoption of LAP helps early childhood professionals
- become skilled in identifying different languages
- make linguistic diversity come to life AND
- take on the role of learner.

Finally, LAP
- supports immigrant parents in their language maintenance attempts,
- gives them a voice in the program and provides them with the opportunity to share their language and literacy skills.
And so, this is LAP.

Detailed information about the WHAT, WHY and HOW of LAP can be found in the book.
I invite you to check out LAP.

Discuss this new practice with your colleagues and staff.

Review the 3 parts to see how you can make LAP work in your classroom or centre.

Engage the children you care for and work with using the LAP activities.

Invite families to share their language and literacy skills.

Transform your classrooms and centres into environments where all languages have a place, where children discover, understand and accept the many exciting ways people talk, live, sing, eat, pray, cook, count and live.

Everyone stands to win in classrooms where home languages and literacies are included, enjoyed and valued!
I ♥ LAP!

Linguistically Appropriate Practice