

## Dual Language Curriculum Part 1

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:06.7] ANNOUNCER:** Next is Dr. Charlene Wrighton to discuss everything early education about your children or students in our new show, Ed. Talks with Dr. Char.

[EPISODE]

**[0:00:21.4] CW:** Hello, this is Dr. Char Wrighton and today, I have the privilege and pleasure of reintroducing you to Priscilla Hernandez Pou. She and I have done a radio show several months ago and so we talked about her wonderful preschool that she has in the Dominican Republic. She is our business partner and has been for four years.

And as she has grown her school, her school is wonderful school that serves many, many children, she can tell you the exact number and a little bit more about it. But her school serves professional people, doctors, lawyers ambassadors, business people et cetera. And so, her school is very beautiful. I've had the privilege of being there twice and visiting and training teachers and watching them in action. The more that Priscilla and I have worked together and talked together, and the more that I've watched her children and her teachers in action, I find that we have something that we really would like to share with the world.

And so, we are in the process of creating dual language program which I'm very excited about. Zoo-phonics has had, Zoo-phonics in Española, in Spanish, for almost three decades. This is going to be a little bit different and very powerful. In fact, more powerful and so I'm going to have Priscilla to explain it because she's obviously the expert here. If you could see what I've seen personally, your jaw drops open, that's all I can say and daughter, Renata is also here with us and she has gotten her master's degree, she works at the school and also takes these incredible pictures and the teachers take all these incredible pictures of children in action, videos and stills.

And I get to see videos of one-year old's doing Zoo-phonics in Spanish. Then, as they progress in English as they get a little older. This is what we get to present to you today. We're going to do some brain research, we're going to look at neuroscience, we're going to look at what the United States is looking at as far as dual language and bilingual education.

I'm going to present that to you because I feel like we are on the verge of something pretty exciting and I'm very excited to share with you. If you want to hear our prior radio show, definitely go back and you'll see introducing Priscilla Hernandez Pu there as the title as you can see there. And then, this is pretty much a part two for sure, we might even squeeze a part three out of this. We'll just see how time goes. We have a lot to share with you. I hope you enjoy it.

[CONVERSATION]

**[0:03:10.5] CW:** So, Priscilla, I would love to hear first of all, you have such an interesting personal story about your mother and yourself growing up. Knowing one language, learning a second and so, I would love to hear about your mother's story and yours because I think it's very significant.

**[0:03:26.9] PHP:** Hi Char, thank you for welcoming us here again in Sonora, we're very excited to be working with you together and Safari Learning at the same time and seeing how your children are progressing as well. We're super proud of what our children are achieving in the Dominican Republic with dual language. And as you said, it goes back to my personal story and part of what inspired me to be a teacher and more than anything, be a bilingual teacher and make sure that future generations have the benefit of being able to fully bilingual and not only be fully bilingual, but have a cross cultural competence of understanding different cultures.

I explained to you yesterday that my mother was born in Venezuela. In Venezuela, back a few decades, they wouldn't speak a word of any other language than Spanish, they were very proud people, just like people from Spain. But my mother went back to live in Dominican Republic with her father, who was a patriotic fighter for the Dominican Republic.

And when she arrived in Dominican Republic, to her surprise, even though she was a gifted student in math and in all areas, she was the only one who didn't speak English. So, it was really shocking for her to arrive at schools and see that schools in Santo Domingo were working with children in both languages. So, we felt really bad.

Especially coming from a very perfectionist and hard-working person like she was. That she came in and she looked at the other children and say, "why do these people know two

languages and I don't?" The answer is simple, we are in the middle of the Caribbean. As I said before, we're like the bellybutton of America, we're right in the middle. We have professionals from all over the world moving to our country to work with Europe, the United States, commerce with Latin America.

So, it is very important for people to speak two languages and not only that, our tourism industry that grows every single year.

**[0:05:23.4] CW:** Can you tell us just at your school alone, how many languages and countries are represented?

**[0:05:29.0] PHP:** We have about 14 nationalities at the moment. We have a 40% Dominican group and then we have US, Italians, Argentinians, Uruguay, China, Taiwan, Korea. We also have Hebrew, I wouldn't want to miss any of them, but we have a lot of nationalities coming in, we have people from United Nations, from different embassies around our country and again, being right in the middle, we have a lot of the offices that govern the whole Latin America from that middle point.

**[0:06:03.6] CW:** That's amazing. So, just for the audience sake, this means that when children come to her school at one year two, year, three year or four year, et cetera, they have their own home language and it is not English and it may not necessarily be English and it's definitely not Spanish most likely, it could be so if you listen to all the different languages, that means these children come in with their home language and they most likely do not know another language until they come to Priscilla's Tree House Preschool.

**[0:06:36.2] PHP:** This is where my mother comes in again. She lived this experience and she tried to learn English after that. She was taught in a very traditional way like foreign language, second language as – it's basically left brain oriented; you don't get to do anything, you're just memorizing words. My mom in her case, she just hired a tutor that would come to play with us.

So, we actually learn by doing, by playing, by moving around. It was language in context and I'm very grateful for my mother because that is the reason why I'm being able now to come over here and share my experience with you.

**[0:07:12.0] CW:** It sounds like because of her approach, it may be why you are attracted to Zoo-phonics.

**[0:07:17.1] PHP:** It's only physical but it respects a hierarchy of learning that you have to learn. As you mentioned before children come in, speaking another language, sometimes Italian, Mandarin, whichever the language it is and the parents are more than fine. I know that that child will not lose their culture or the language that they speak at home, that their child will be immersed in a dual language program in two languages; English and Spanish.

And considering that Spanish is just the second most spoken language in the world, it opens doors all around.

**[0:07:51.3] CW:** So, this means that the child is absolutely likely and guaranteed basically to speak their home language from wherever they're from, Spanish and English and they're only five or six years old?

**[0:08:06.1] PHP:** Correct.

**[0:08:06.6] CW:** That's phenomenal.

**[0:08:07.7] PHP:** This trip, I brought my son Alejandro and I think he's the perfect example of it. Alejandro is only seven and my son is able to communicate fluently in both languages, much better than I do and read and write in both.

**[0:08:20.9] CW:** he doesn't have a Latino accent at all. I mean, it's there, I can hear a tiny hint, but you don't hear it because he learned so young.

**[0:08:30.7] PHP:** They learned so young and they're exposed to the language since they were born. The difference is, and it's basically why we're aiming for full bilingualism that the brain does not work by having two languages separate. Even though we store it in different places in our brain, our brain, when you're fully bilingual is able to just log in to one area and work with that one. It's kind of like synonyms, you're not translating inside your head.

I'll give you a simple example. If you see a table picture of brain of a bilingual person who will pop up both words, table and mesa at the same time. Just as synonyms and your brain will go ahead and pick the one it has to use. It will not do what is taught in most foreign language classes to go from the picture to the word in your native language and then transfer and translate it to that second language. You go directly to the word.

I tell parents when they come in and they're looking for bilingualism, I tell them, "well, most of us are now generation we learn a second language but your children will learn it as a first language. They'll simply learn two at the same time."

**[0:09:39.3] CW:** I really want the audience to listen to this and I want to say two things. First of all, anybody who is listening to us from the early childhood world like a teacher or a director, administrator, just to know the importance of children learning a language. We don't, as a country in the United States, we really do not teach until maybe junior high, but mostly high school and by that time, it's very late to try to learn the language.

It doesn't mean you can't, but high school children have a tendency to be less dedicated, less interested because social life is so important to them and they work. The time it takes – just be able to find somebody who can speak the language so that you can go back and forth and be immersed in it is almost nonexistent. So, you have to sit in a lab and listen to recordings and it's just not the same thing.

The other thing is parents definitely, we more than invite you to take seriously the fact that if you have a preschool child, if you can somehow give them the opportunity of learning a second language and again, the way Priscilla is presenting it, a first language to their first language. When they're very young, it would open doors or it could open doors beyond what you'd expect as they're growing up.

The thing to consider is that you learn one language and then you learn a second language or you learn your other language. That means that a possibility of learning a third language, a fourth language, just because once you have that foundation, first of all, I find that especially in the romance languages are so similar. I read Spanish today and almost fully understood it except for one word that I didn't know what it meant. I knew every other word meant.

So, that means, when our children stay in that possibility of having doors open to them and I don't think we realize – you know, you look at your child and you don't look at their future, but we really need to because this is a possibility of opening doors to their livelihood, to travel, to fulfillment, to then raising their children with more than one language.

And so, to me, it's one of the most exciting things.

**[0:11:50.8] PHP:** I totally agree. Especially when you start in foreign language, once you're a teenager, number one, your vocal chords are hardening, it's not the same as when you were exposed in preschool that it's much easier for you to pronounce words. But on top of it, self-consciousness. A teenager and adult, it's less likely to take risk and go ahead and talk and practice the language with other people.

In our case, we want our children to be able to dream, think and sing everything in the second language. And we have – it happens a lot to us that they don't know what language they're speaking at the moment. If they're having fun with whatever comes out of their mouth will be the language they're speaking. I find myself sometimes having to remind my son, “you know, you're surrounded by Latin people honey, speak Spanish.”

“I'm speaking Spanish.”

“You're speaking English, honey.” Their brain does it so automatically because they're full of emotions, they're moving around, they're playing that they don't notice. You can see an American child talking to a Dominican child in a playground. And the American is so proud to speak in Spanish and I'm talking about two or three year old's. Then the Dominican proudly answers in English because their brain tells them, you know, “this guy speaks English.”

So, they speak back in English and you see this fluent conversation that makes total sense.

**[0:13:06.8] CW:** And again Priscilla right now is speaking of what is happening in her school and what we want to do is work on this project, this program together so that we can also share this dual language using Zoo-phonics with the United States and it can be picked up by because we're using the same program using Zoo-phonics as your basis. It really doesn't matter what your language is. We could literally take this anywhere.

Right now, she's teaching 14 different languages at her school. So, 14 different languages are coming to our school and she is teaching them English and Spanish and they have their native tongue at home. So this shows us that this program is so powerful. Some things that I have seen when I look at the videos of the one year olds, they are using the Zoo-phonics animals and letter sounds and little of names even though some of the sounds are different, they are using it to speak English.

And these one year olds, one year old, we're talking 12 months. Like 12 months ago, they were in their mother's stomach. That's how short it was so think about that and they are fully engaged in playing physical games with the Zoo-phonics in Spanish and then when they become three, so that means they are learning that for the next couple of years and then once three, they start transitioning to English. So again, there's that third language it's crazy.

I want Priscilla to really explain the concept of synonym because I think that once you get that you'll fully understand what she's talking about, about this comfort of going back and forth between the various languages and treating them like synonyms instead of different languages. For instance, we have desk and we have table. Very similar in meaning, different in sound, but that is an example. Our brain doesn't struggle over is it a desk or is it a table?

A desk maybe has drawers, table maybe doesn't. But the point being is that we know that that's got four legs and we can eat on it, we can write on it, we can put our computer on it or iPad on it. We know what the function is even though the words are different. So that concept of synonym I'm sure I could figure out something better than table, but the concept of synonym is really critical to this because it explains it so perfectly.

That way when Priscilla says dream about it, she means in the children's sleep, they are actually thinking in different languages. They are picturing words and hearing words in their own head in different languages. That's how internalized this is. It is not an artificial set up. It has been internalized by these one, two and three-year olds. It's phenomenal.

**[0:15:48.3] PHP:** And if it is something you learn in the early years it is something that you will never forget, like riding a bike. It's not the same as when you learn the second language as an adult that if you don't practice it, it goes away. It's a part of them, it's a part of their brain.

Neurologically speaking, you were talking about synapses happening at the same time to both sides to the English and the Spanish and I am going to quote the superintendent of public instruction in Washington.

I believe that you're aware that Washington State wants the whole state to be fully bilingual dual language in all schools by 2030 and he said, "if we begin second language acquisition in K through 8<sup>th</sup> we can drastically close learning gaps for English language learners while simultaneously bringing native English speakers up to par with the rest of the world by having them learn a second language."

I found this quote so important because it says two important things about the history of education. Number one, English language learners have been treated as if it were a disability and putting away the Spanish that they had from before and then just losing that native tongue and immersing them in a second language and not including content areas because they are focusing on learning English as a second language to live here in the States, when they should be learning it as a native language.

**[0:17:08.3] CW:** And what's interesting to me because I am looking at it as more of an outsider not having two languages sufficiently, I have said before that I speak in Spanish like a one year old and maybe not even that well. So, I am looking from an outsider on this, kicking myself for not learning it prior to being 71, especially California because this is where I live. We go to Catalina very often and the Latino population is large there.

And I see the children and teenagers and adults going between the two languages as if it is nothing. They know, they are fluent in English but they are fluent in Spanish as well. Priscilla and I were talking about what person in their right mind and quite honestly, this is what's happening in education, would think that learning English only and dropping away or removing, being removed from the Spanish language for instance within literacy would ever be a good idea?

Knowing two languages I would put as one of the greatest gifts and one of the highest priorities and something that you said Priscilla is that it was looked down upon as if it was a disability and I actually verbalize to our friends in Catalina how phenomenal and amazing it is and basically, I'm happy jealous. When I say jealous it's like that happy jealousy where, "oh I wish it were me,"

and I admire them so much. Something that is little known or lesser in the educational field is that the brain of a person who knows one or more languages is actually bigger.

It is larger, it is heavier because of all the neuronal connections. So then if our brain is larger because we are learning two languages then why would we not want to give this gift to our children? Priscilla, tell us how do you do it? How do you start your one-year olds?

**[0:19:02.1] PHP:** Okay, if we go back to what my mom did with me, I again thank her because even though she was monolingual, she made sure that all of us, all of her children became bilingual and what you were saying about this study, there was a study done in 2009-2010 in North Carolina by the public school district of a sample of 80,000 students. And they found out that most students that were in dual language programs were scoring higher than monolingual students in the grade above them.

And by the time they were in high school, they were scoring even two academic years above. So why limit this only to the children that are exposed to a second language at home. It is something for us as parents to think even monolingual parents that we want our children to conquer the world tomorrow. We're not teaching them to live today, which is what we are doing now what our parents did for us. We are teaching them to live tomorrow. And what good is knowledge and ability and all you can do in your professional life if you cannot share it with other people and communicate?

**[0:20:07.0] CW:** Right and we are such a global society that we do need to have this. And it's like even if we stayed in Sonora for the rest of our life and we didn't stray too far from that or California, whatever knowing that we were expanding our horizons is how I look at different genres of literature and different genres of music and learning about different cultures. You are expanding your horizons, vocabulary, interest but if we know that our brain is hard wired for languages and it's absolutely created to learn language then we should be doing it and this is why we are doing this radio show.

So that we can bring it to the public's awareness because I don't feel like outside of educational arenas, people hear this or know this. A little information about the brain and we did discuss this before and I have discussed this several times because it means so much to me is that when the baby is in the womb, it hears language. It hears the language of the parents and I mentioned

this before, if you picture – again I am talking about that baby in the womb because they can hear sound, they can hear language.

But the as soon as it's born as well, if say for instance if they are Spanish speaking child and they're listening to English music or English radio or the people speaking English in the grocery store, they are hearing the sounds for two languages without any effort. It is just happening. So not only are they getting the language and the home, which might be Spanish, but because they are living in an English speaking country, they are absolutely hardwired to speak both languages.

Dr. Patricia Kuhl, which is one of my favorite researchers said that children from the birth to 12 months, they have the ability to speak at that moment any language on earth, if they are introduced to it. Their brain is absolutely ready and she calls them baby geniuses and the hard part, the sad part is that it diminishes that first year of life is critical. However, until about seven years old, the brain is ready to learn a second language naturally with a good accent.

From the time they start getting to that 10-year-old mark, they are starting to lose it. By 12 they've lost it and it doesn't mean that people cannot pick up the language if they will put effort into it in junior high or high school or as an adult. It just means it is so much harder and you'll never have that perfect accent that you want when you are travelling and that you want for your own sense of pride. So, keeping that in mind, we as a nation, we as a California State Department of Education should be having every single child fully immersed in two languages, absolutely.

And then remember, once you've learned two you can learn three. You can go on. So, we need to finish up with this and then we'll definitely do a part two for you because there is so much more that we want to say and so on the next sequel, in our part two, I want to be more quiet. I want to hear Priscilla really tell what she does, what her teachers do every single day. It will blow your mind that's all I have to say. You said, when you left school as a senior you moved to

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**[0:23:30.7] PHP:** Yes that was a good experience. I've been having experiences with the language through my life. When I was in my senior year, my mom got hired in the Island of Saint Martin and I had to live in a Dutch side of the island and the school, the only high school in the

island was supposed to be in English. So I wanted my senior year and I had good grades. I was an honor class student. I arrived there and I tried speaking English to my teachers and peers.

And they would understand me but I wouldn't understand them, why? Because they spoke a really Jamaican accent island kind of English. So, I could say I am bilingual in English in two ways. And I ended up in detention twice because the teachers insisted that I was being disrespectful because I could speak fluent English, but not understand it. So again, it's such a tough feeling. It's so frustrating not to be able to communicate what you think or be able to just engage in a conversation. It took me about two or three months but I can say that I can speak Jamaican too now.

**[0:24:39.4] CW:** Well, we hope you enjoyed this. If you have any questions, you can write me at [char@zoo-phonics.com](mailto:char@zoo-phonics.com) or [char@safarilearning.com](mailto:char@safarilearning.com). You can call our 800 number, 800-622-8104. Anyway, also our 209-536-4926. We'd love to hear from you. We love any kind of feedback you give us. Follow us on Instagram, Facebook, love to hear from you.

[OUTRO]

**[0:25:09.1] ANNOUNCER:** That was Ed. Talks with Dr. Char. You've been listening on KAAD-LP Radio, live on 103.5 FM, or streaming online at [kaad-lp.org](http://kaad-lp.org). If you would like to have Dr. Char answer any of your questions, please e-mail your question to [dr\\_char@zoophonics.com](mailto:dr_char@zoophonics.com). Thanks for listening and stay tuned for what's next on KAAD-LP Radio.

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