EDUCX 425.02 Assignment: Early Language Experience - Maria Kang

1) Early Language Learning:

I believe it is important for children to learn a second language during their early school years. First and foremost, learning anything at an early age is fun. There is a sense of wonder and retaining information is effortless. There are no other responsibilities for toddlers except eat, sleep, and explore. And they cry whenever they experience some kind of discomfort. That is why the nursery school my children attended in New Jersey taught them sign language from day one. By being able to communicate basic needs, my children gained confidence and there was less crying. It was amazing how my children learned over ten signs (ex. more, please, thank you, sorry, hungry, hold me, sleepy, etc..) before they could even walk. Sign language was especially helpful to communicate with my son because he didn't start speaking until he was four years-old. We later learned that he was fully capable of speaking but he didn't want to because signing was much more convenient.

My husband primarily spoke Korean to our children and I spoke English. I don't recall specifically teaching them the languages because they naturally picked them up through daily routines. Since grammar and pronunciation came effortlessly, they just had to develop a broader vocabulary base. Fortunately, my children loved watching Word World, Little Einsteins, and Sesame Street, where they learned terms and fun facts. My daughter couldn't wait for me to read Korean books to her at night so she learned how to read Korean on her own fairly quickly. My son, on the other hand, was happy just looking at the pictures in the books, so his reading and writing took a little longer.

Being bilingual has enabled our family to live a dynamic and fulfilling life. Since there are words that don't exist or can't be translated in one language, we speak in the other language to best get our message across. However, we had to set up a family rule to finish a complete sentence in one particular language. The reason was that it became too easy to mix English and Korean words in a sentence. It resulted in speaking in sentence fragments and sounding incomprehensive.

2) Motivation for Learning English as a Newcomer:

When training corporate expats or attorneys studying abroad for the LLM, my advice is to "speak simple and be confident". Naturally, we get nervous when speaking in another language. However, too often we try to formulate a perfect sentence with impressive vocabulary. I repeatedly tell my students they are not being graded or evaluated when speaking to someone in the states. More important is to maintain a good conversation pace and answer the question that is being asked. A word can even suffice as an answer if it's accompanied with a smile. There is no need to be embarrassed since English is a second language for them and that alone is an accomplishment. Therefore, I implore the students to never apologize for their imperfect English. Instead I stress the importance of being sincere in the conversation and being as clear as possible. There is no need to overthink what others think of my English level because most people are too preoccupied with themselves or something else. That is why whenever my students get frustrated, I tell them, "it's okay; this is your second or third language" and remind them that their genuine interest in the conversation speaks louder than words.