

BE18645

## **Bilingual Education--Heading Into the 1990s**

**Alicia Salinas Sosa**

The focus of bilingual education programs in the United States has shifted since the enactment of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. The initial goal for this federal program was to provide services to children who were educationally disadvantaged due to their inability to speak English. School districts wishing to voluntarily initiate programs to help students with limited English proficiency were encouraged to apply for start-up funds to implement model transitional bilingual education programs.

Twenty-two years later, the emphasis has shifted to making monies available for serving new immigrant groups and for identifying alternatives to bilingual education (National Advisory Council, 1988). In 1990, the Education Department

---

Alicia Salinas Sosa, PhD, is the director of the Desegregation Assistance Center, South-Central Collaborative, Intercultural Development Research Association in San Antonio, Texas.

will allocate \$3 million dollars to fund developmental bilingual programs. The developmental programs involve teaching equal numbers of English-speaking and limited English proficient (LEP) students in both English and the LEP students' native language with the goal being the same for both groups: to learn a new language (Miller, 1990).

But at the state level, not all eligible students are being served. Reasons vary from a state such as New Mexico not enacting legislation requiring such services, to previously existing legislation not being reenacted in California. Perhaps the greatest changes can be seen in the characteristics of program recipients and the emphasis being placed on the development of literacy in the first language. This paper examines the differences in LEP student/school characteristics, current research and program elements being emphasized, and implementation issues for the 1990s.

### **Differences in Student/School Characteristics**

Federally funded bilingual education programs were first implemented in the United States in the late 1960s, following the arrival of Cuban refugees. Students being served initially were almost exclusively Spanish speaking and from varied socio-economic backgrounds. Special language services were provided to students enrolled in the primary grades, usually in grades first through third. Subject matter was taught in Spanish and English using English as a Second Language methodology. Older students entering public schools after the fourth grade had received previous schooling and were literate in their first language. These older students exclusively received ESL instruction.

From the late 1970s to the present, school personnel have witnessed an increase in the diversity of the LEP student population. As new legislation funded bilingual education in the upper grades and ESL at the secondary level, LEP students were identified at all grade levels. Students' socio-economic levels were even more varied. During the 1970s, the U.S. population grew by 11.6 percent overall, while the number of Hispanics increased by 61 percent and Asian Americans by 233 percent (Crawford, 1989). Since then the annual number of legal entries has more than doubled, and the source of newcomers has changed dramatically, from developed nations to third world countries (Crawford, 1989). Among Hispanics, Mexican Americans grew in number by 30 percent while the numbers of Central and South Americans grew by 6 percent (Quality Education for Minorities Project, 1990). Unlike the Cuban refugees, many recent immigrants lack basic literacy skills in their native language. More

importantly, recent immigrants without prior schooling experience are unaware of school expectations and school culture. Within this time span, school personnel are experiencing an increase in the diversity of LEP students' home languages. Urban areas such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago provided language related services to students from as many as 40 to 70 different language groups.

Presently, only one percent of the U.S. population is considered to have limited English proficiency. However, within Vietnamese and Hispanic groups approximately three out of every four persons, 75 percent, are considered LEP. For other language groups, 40 to 53 percent of the population are considered LEP (Oxford-Carpenter, 1984). The high LEP count among Hispanics is of great importance for several reasons. Hispanics represent the largest segment of language minority populations in the United States. Hispanics account for 40 percent of the total LEP population and 64 percent of the school-aged population from a non-English language background (Jenger & Sandhu, 1985). Hispanics are a young group with a median age of 25 (Hispanic Policy Development Project, 1988). They are also the fastest growing ethnic group in the nation. From 1980 to 1989 they experienced a population growth of 39 percent, five times that of the nation as a whole. By the year 2000 the number of Hispanics will grow an additional 46 percent (Quality Education for Minorities Project, 1990). This dramatic growth can result in students receiving fewer services especially when one considers that close to 90 percent of the Hispanic population is concentrated in nine states, with more than half of them living in California and Texas alone (Quality Education for Minorities Project, 1990).

At the school building level, students who attend an urban school with a high percentage of minority students are at a high risk of dropping out (Pallas, 1991). Yet, 88 percent of Hispanics reside in urban areas. Ten states with high Hispanic student enrollment have been found to be among the most segregated. According to Orfield, Monfort, and Aaron, (1989), fifty-nine percent of the students in New York and forty-one percent of the students in Texas are enrolled in schools where 90-100 percent of the students are minority. Moreover, many Hispanics attend predominantly minority schools: New York (83.8%), New Mexico (78.8%), New Jersey (78.3%), Texas (77.7%), California (74.8%), Illinois (74.4%), Connecticut (68.2%), Florida (68.2%), Arizona (67.2%) and Pennsylvania (59.1%).

A high poverty rate among Hispanics places this group at an even greater educational disadvantage. Today, three out of five Hispanic students, or 42 percent, live in poverty. Approximately 75 percent of Hispanic students living in single, female-headed households are so classified.

These data present a change in the type of LEP students being served. In addition, the problems of the LEP students are multidimensional and include more than a language problem.

### **Current Research/Program Elements**

The following section provides brief descriptions of changes in instructional practice within bilingual classrooms during the past 20 years. It lists trends in the education of language minority students within bilingual education classrooms.

**Reduce numbers of at-risk students** — Educators working with LEP students have come to realize that learning English in and of itself will not guarantee achievement. We know that students whose home language is one other than English are one and one-half times as likely to leave school as native English speakers (Wagoner, 1988). Researchers have noted that Hispanics are twice as likely to drop out of school as their white counterparts (Cárdenas, Robledo, & Supik, 1986). Reasons for dropping out vary, but lack of academic achievement stands out as a primary reason. The concern now is to reduce the number of students who are at-risk of dropping out. Bilingual program staff must address issues such as (a) LEP student overrepresentation in special education, (b) LEP students not being identified for gifted and talented programs, and (c) low teacher expectations for language minority youth.

**Develop literacy in  $L_1$**  — Skutnabb-Kangas (1980) reported that even after seven years of Swedish instruction, Finnish immigrant children had not reached the average competence of Swedish children in the Swedish language. At the same time they had forgotten their native language faster than they had acquired Swedish. They predicted that for these students both languages will always remain much poorer than for monolingual speakers of either language. Skutnabb-Kangas sees semilingualism existing when minority children from working class homes are forced to accept instruction in the foreign, majority middle class language, and their own language is a low prestige language in school and in society.

The role played by  $L_1$  in the development of  $L_2$  is found in Cummins' (1979a) "Interdependence Hypothesis." According to Cummins, the development of  $L_2$  is partially a function of the level of  $L_1$  proficiency at the time when the student was first introduced to  $L_2$  in an intensive manner. Students whose  $L_1$  development is disrupted and replaced by  $L_2$  will suffer cognitive deficits. Related to this is Cummins' "Threshold Hypothesis" (1979b), which proposes that certain

threshold levels of language development in  $L_1$  must be reached by bilingual children in order to avoid cognitive deficits and to derive cognitive benefits of bilingualism. He also states that children who are not provided with the opportunity for continued  $L_1$  development will not develop the conceptual basis needed for abstraction in their first language. Without this, students will lack the semantic knowledge necessary for developing fluent reading skills (Cummins, 1979 c).

State guidelines call for decreasing the amount of instruction in Spanish as the student gains greater English fluency and moves into the upper elementary grades. School personnel need to recognize that state requirements contain minimum behavioral expectations. They should allow opportunities for continued development of literacy in Spanish through the use of children's literature and the fine arts.

**Separate language use** — During the early years of bilingual education, teachers were encouraged to accept students' home language and to extend it. Discussions often centered around differences in dialect, and teachers were chastised for criticizing students' use of anglicisms or "Tex-Mex." Jacobson (1979) encouraged the mixing of the two languages or code-switching as a strategy for teaching the content areas.

Several researchers (Dulay & Burt, 1978; Wong-Fillmore, 1982) have criticized the mixing of languages for several reasons. Dulay and Burt (1978) and Wong-Fillmore (1982) reported that students would not attend to the English version and merely wait for the translation. Gonzalez and Maez (1980) expressed concern that the lower status language would be used less often.

In the "Significant Bilingual Education Features" Tikunoff (1983) found that teachers in the 58 bilingual classrooms studied used English primarily, but 25 percent of the time they alternated to students'  $L_1$  to accomplish certain functions. According to Tikunoff about half of the alternations were "instructional developments," about a third were "procedures and directions," and a fifth were "behavioral feedback to students." The main purpose for shifting to the  $L_1$  was to make sure LEP students could participate effectively in instruction provided in English. After reviewing several studies Wong-Fillmore and Valadez (1986) concluded that in classrooms where languages of instruction are not kept separate by time blocks, teachers predominantly used English as the language of instruction.

Teachers should accept code-switching by the students, but they must carefully plan their Spanish instruction to achieve quality instruction.

**Develop cognitive/academic language proficiency** — Cummins (1984) has stated that in his studies immigrant children took four to seven years to learn

English at a level that permits effective participation in instruction. Teachers are asked to develop academic skills in L<sub>1</sub> because the great majority of skills learned will transfer easily to the second language (English). Chamot and O'Mally (1986) have developed the *Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach*, an ESL content-based curriculum designed to teach language learning strategies to LEP students.

**View students as active learners** — In the 1970s, methods for teaching language focused more on aspects related to the teaching act, i.e. on methodology and materials. Teachers used the audio-lingual method with its emphasis on language being learned through habit formation, rote-learning, and practice (Morley, 1987). Natural processes were recognized, and the role of the teacher shifted to that of a facilitator. According to Morley (1987) the teachers and teaching materials must adapt to the learner rather than vice-versa. Similarly, Wong-Fillmore, Ammon, McLaughlin and Ammon (1985) reported that the development of English production and comprehension was related to teacher responsiveness to student cues. Teachers who adjusted their linguistic interactions in response to student feedback were more likely to produce English language gains. Such adjustments included simplification of syntax, less rapid speech, and repetition. These teachers not only allowed but encouraged student interaction. Garcia (1987) recently reported on instructional strategies used in effective bilingual classrooms. He suggests that student-student interaction discourse strategies are important to enhance linguistic development.

**Use holistic approaches, themes** — In the early 1970s teachers received inservice training on methods for introducing initial reading instruction. Teachers acquired information about three methods for teaching beginning reading in Spanish: the phonetic method, the syllabic method, and the global method (Thonis, 1970). Because Spanish was such a phonetic language the overwhelming majority of bilingual teachers initially used the phonetic method, with its letter-sound correspondence, followed by the combining of consonant-vowel combinations to form syllables. Students were expected to naturally make the transition to reading whole words and even phrases as these were repeatedly encountered. While teachers received inservice on the use of the language experience approach, they reserved the use of this reading approach for teaching students to read in the second language. Moreover, teachers were asked to delay teaching writing until after a student was reading at a fluent level. Kline (1988) reported that reading experts now focus on whole language development, integrating the teaching and learning of reading and writing and the use of children's literature to counter skills driven student basal readers. Bilingual education teachers are asking their students to maintain dialogue journals and

are using predictable stories.

**Develop communicative competence**— Learning to speak in a grammatically correct manner is no longer considered a mark of a proficient speaker of a second language. Speakers must also be aware of the rules of language use. Widdowson (1978) sees teaching language as having a communication focus. In 1980, Canale and Swain developed a framework which included four areas of knowledge and skills: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, sociocultural rules, and strategic competence. Students are also being asked to use language for specific purposes. Teachers use syllabi that contain the notions and functions of language.

**Group students for collaborative work** — Educators are encouraging teachers to use new structures that encourage group work such as planning tasks and discussing and reporting outcomes. Students develop group interaction skills as they learn thinking skills and extend their language skills.

## Issues for the 1990s

### Instruction

In the area of instruction, the prognosis is hopeful. The changes in instructional practices are positive and proactively address some past recurring issues such as relevance in the curriculum, students' lack of background knowledge, and a small amount of students' verbalization in classrooms. While the changes are just beginning, school district inservice requests made to the Region VI Desegregation Assistance Center reflect trends toward whole language and cooperative learning strategies. However, school personnel need to explore more than just the "how to." Guskey (1990) emphasizes the need for continued support and follow-up beyond the start-up year. He cautions us that last year's innovation can be seen as another fad. For students to benefit, their teachers must see the connections among these innovations and how these changes can support their work as bilingual teachers.

### Student Assessment

In states mandating implementation of bilingual education programs, policies have been drafted that specify language assessment procedures for identifying LEP students. Because bilingual education programs cost additional money to operate, only students meeting state eligibility criteria receive such services.

Increasingly prescriptive time and treatment guidelines for specific categories of students result in a labeling and sorting process whereby specific allocations for language use are then mandated. In Texas, for example, students are labeled BE1, BE2, etc. to denote language dominance. Students may have been tested at the age of four or five years when initial language development (concepts and language) is still occurring. The students' language scores then dictate the amount of instruction provided via the home language *or* through use of English as a second language methodology. Students, once labeled, retain that designation until they leave the special language program. This mandate applies as well to four year-old LEP students who are tested upon enrolling in a one-half day preschool program. It is unfortunate that at such a young age these students are labeled as having deficits. The validity of such a testing situation is questionable when one considers that the child has had no previous opportunity for language performance, experience, or practice within a school setting.

This labeling and prescription process similarly affects a LEP student when tested for mastery of the essential elements (the state's minimal learning outcomes). Students labeled as Spanish dominant LEPs are tested in Spanish and need not show mastery in English. Students labeled as English dominant LEPs will be expected to achieve a 70 percent mastery of the essential elements in English. Failure to show a 70 percent mastery can result in their being retained to repeat the grade level for an entire year. Retention increases a student's likelihood of dropping out by 40 percent. For students who are retained twice, their probability of dropping out rises to 90 percent (Bachman et al., 1971).

Language minority students in all-English programs are, similarly, experiencing high rates of retention. Increasingly, students are placed in linguistically isolated classrooms. Students not showing progress are placed in "transitional classrooms." Transitional first grades initially appeared three years ago. In 1990, transitional kindergarten classrooms were started. Criteria for inclusion rested solely on students' knowledge of the sound/letters of the alphabet in English.

The Texas Education Agency responded to my inquiries for breakdowns by ethnic, bilingual sub-classification, and income levels with, "We are not keeping records on that." Yet, it was the state of Texas that issued those specific guidelines to be followed based on a theoretical framework (that of California) which has not produced evidence on the effectiveness of the program for particular categories of students.

## **Too Few Minority Teachers**

The supply of minority teachers will decrease by the late 1990s, declining from 10 percent of the teaching force to a mere five percent (Quality Education for Minorities Project, 1990). This loss is expected to affect the education of minority and language minority children because it will come at a time when minority students are expected to approach 50 percent of the student population in most urban school districts (Quality Education for Minorities Project, 1990).

Several factors affect the teaching-pool, but two major factors need to be addressed immediately and definitely before entering the year 2000. These include the high Hispanic dropout rate of 45 percent of the students and the increased use of competency testing at the institutions of higher education. Only about 13 percent of Hispanic students enter college, and of these, approximately six percent complete requirements for a bachelor of arts degree. Because fewer Hispanics are entering the teaching profession, the pool of Hispanic educators is further diluted.

Moreover, prospective teachers who are Hispanic face an additional challenge with the proliferation of college level standardized testing required for entry into the teaching field. A study conducted by Pritchey Smith (1988) reported that since the inception of this required testing, over 10,000 Hispanic prospective teachers have been excluded from the teacher education field.

## **Summary of Issues for the 1990s**

Need to integrate innovations (mastery learning, whole language, cooperative learning) within the bilingual education framework.

Need to examine how prescriptions set by the state education agencies (showing mastery for grade promotion, exit exams for graduation, ESL classes and the use of differentiated diplomas) are affecting LEP students.

Need to address the issue of testing being used for sorting and labeling and not for instructional decision-making.

Need to explore/discuss state policies which contribute to placing language minority and poor children at a high-risk of dropping out (transitional first grade, transitional Kindergarten classes).

Need to search for ways to increase the numbers of Hispanic and/or bilingual persons qualifying for a teaching degree.

It is apparent that bilingual educators cannot focus solely on instructional issues. Our ability to implement an effective program is greatly influenced by

state and local policies relating to identification of LEP students, language treatment, student mastery of the essential elements, and grade retention. Advocates for LEP students need to examine the positive and adverse effects of local and state mandates and seek to modify or eliminate policies having negative effects.

## References

- Bachman, J. G. (1971). *Youth in transition*. Volume III: Dropping out-Problem or Symptom? Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical basis of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1-47.
- Cárdenas, J. Robledo, C., & Supik, J. (1986). *Texas school dropout survey project: A summary of findings*. San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association.
- Chamot, A. U., & O'Mally, M. J. (1986). *A cognitive academic language learning approach: An ESL content-based curriculum*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Crawford, J. (1989). *Bilingual education: History, policies, theory and practice*. Trenton, NJ: Crane Publishing Company.
- Cummins, J. (1979a). Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters. *Working papers on bilingualism, No. 19*. Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Cummins, J. (1979b). The cross-lingual dimensions of language proficiency, implications for bilingual education and the optional age issue. *T.E.S.O.L. Quarterly*, 14:2, 175-187.
- Cummins, J. (1979c). Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Bilingual education paper series*, 3:2, 1979.
- Dulay, H., & Burt, M. (1978). From research to method in bilingual education. In J. E. Alatis (Ed.), *Georgetown University Round Table on Language and Linguistics*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Gonzalez, G., & Maez, L. F. (1980). To switch or not to switch: The role of code-

- switching in the elementary bilingual classroom. In R. V. Padilla (Ed.), *Ethnoperspective in bilingual education*, Volume II. Ypsilanti, MI: Eastern Michigan University.
- Guskey, T. R. (1990). Integrating innovations. *Educational Leadership*, *47* (5), 11-16.
- Hispanic Policy Development Project. (1988). *Closing the gap for the U.S. Hispanic youth*. Washington, D.C.: Hispanic Policy Development Project.
- Jacobson, R. (1979). Can bilingual teaching techniques reflect bilingual community behaviors? A study in ethnoculture and its relationship to some amendments contained in the new bilingual education act. In R. V. Padilla (Ed.), *Ethnoperspectives in bilingual education*, Volume I. Ypsilanti, MI: Eastern Michigan University, 483-497.
- Jenger, S., & Sandhu, H. (1985). Southeast Asian refugees: English language development and acculturation. *Focus No. 21*. Rosslyn, VA: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Kline, L. W. (June 1988). Reading: Whole language development, renewed focus on literature spur change. *Curriculum Update*, 1-4, 9.
- Miller, J. A. (1990). Ed., Shift, to fund developmental bilingual programs. *Education Week*, p. 19.
- National Advisory and Coordinating Council on Bilingual Education (1988). *Twelfth annual report*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.
- Oxford-Carpenter, R., et al. (1984). *Demographic projections of non-English language background and limited-English proficient persons in the United States to the year 2000 by state, age, and language group*. Rosslyn, VA: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Orfield, G., Monfort, F., & Aaron, M. (1989). Segregation, integration and public policy: National, state, and metropolitan trends in public schools. Washington, D.C.: National School Board Association Council of Urban Boards of Education.

- Pallas, A. M. (1991). Who is at risk? Definition, demographics, and decisions. In W. Schwartz and C. Howley (Eds.), *Overcoming Risk: An annotated Bibliography of Publications Developed by ERIC Clearinghouses*. New York: ERIC/CUE, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Quality Education for Minorities Project. (1990). *Education that works: An action plan for the education of minorities*. Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Quality Education for Minorities Project.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1980). *Language in the process of cultural assimilation and structural incorporation of linguistic minorities*. Rosslyn, VA: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Smith, G. P. (1987). *The effects of competency testing on the supply of minority teachers: A report prepared for the national education association and the council of chief state school officers*. Jacksonville, FL: University of North Florida.
- Tikunoff, W. (1983). Chapter four: Components of effective instruction for LEP students. In S. H. Fradd and W. J. Tikunoff (Eds.), *Bilingual education and bilingual special education: A guide for administrators*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Tikunoff (Ed.), (1983). *Teaching in successful bilingual instructional settings*. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory.
- Thonis, E. W. (1970). *Teaching reading to non-English speakers*. New York: Collier Macmillan International, Inc.
- Waggoner, D. (1988). *The undereducation of American youth*. San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1978). *Teaching language as communication*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Wong-Fillmore, L. (1982). Instructional language as linguistic input: Second language learning in classrooms. In L. C. Wilkinson (Ed.), *Communicating in the classroom*. New York: Academic Press.

Wong-Fillmore, L., & Valadez, C. (1986). Teaching bilingual learners. In Mc. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.