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**TEACHER ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PRINCIPLES OF
BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND TOWARD STUDENTS'
PARTICIPATION IN BILINGUAL PROGRAMS:
SAME OR DIFFERENT?**

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Abstract

794 elementary and secondary teachers filled out a questionnaire probing attitudes toward bilingual education. While support for the principles underlying bilingual education was strong, support for actual participation by students in bilingual programs was not as strong. Those with more supplementary training in ESL and bilingual education were more supportive of bilingual education.

Porter (1990) reported that in a poll taken of teachers in the Los Angeles USD in 1987 78% voted against bilingual education and in favor of a strong emphasis on English. Not mentioned, however, was why teachers voted against bilingual education. Were they opposed to the theory underlying bilingual education or were there other reasons?

The purpose of this study was to investigate how bilingual education is perceived by teachers. We were specifically interested in teachers' understanding and attitudes toward the theoretical underpinnings of bilingual education, and how these attitudes compared

to support for participation in bilingual programs. Another goal was to determine what factors influenced teacher attitudes, particularly if years of experience, special training, grade level of students taught, and their school's student population influenced opinions.

Methodology

Subjects: The sample consisted of 794 K-12 public school teachers from six school districts in central California. The majority (628) came from one school district. Approximately 35% of the students in these districts are limited English proficient. Fifty-six percent of the teachers worked in elementary schools and forty-four percent were secondary school teachers.

Instrument: A survey was administered that covered the following topics:

1. *ESL training/credentials:* Responses were scored on a 1 to 4 scale. Four points were coded for teachers who said they had a Master's degree in multilingual education or TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language). Three points were coded for teachers who had a Language Development Specialist (LDS), Crosscultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) Certificate, Bilingual Certificate of Competence (BCC) or Bilingual Crosscultural Language and Academic Development Certificate (BCLAD). In California, such credentials are required from school districts with high numbers of LEP students. They are obtained either by taking additional classes in second language development, multicultural education, and instructional methodology for LEP students, or by passing an examination demonstrating knowledge in these areas. The BCC and BCLAD requires second language competence in reading, writing and speaking, as well as expertise in primary language instruction and cultural knowledge. Two points were coded for teachers currently taking classes for the CLAD, BCLAD, BCC or MA, and one point for teachers with none of the above (no training in teaching ESL students).

2. *Number of years of teaching experience:* One point was coded for teachers who indicated that they had taught for less than two years,

two points for teachers who had taught two to five years, three points for six to nine years, and four points for more than nine years.

3. PTO portion of LEP students in the classroom: One point was granted if respondents indicated that fewer than 20% LEP students were in their classroom, two points for 20 to 40%, three for 40 to 70%, and four points for over 70%.

4. Self-rating of proficiency in another language. Responses were rated on a 1-5 scale, with 1 = not at all and 5 = very fluent.

5. Attitudes toward bilingual education were measured using Likert-type questions. For each of these questions, respondents chose from five alternatives, ranging from no, not sure, to yes. These questions were developed based on the principles of bilingual education according to Krashen and Biber (1988), and Cummins (1989). Similar questions were used in Shin (1994).

Procedure

A small number of subjects was randomly chosen to participate in a pilot study. The results of the pilot study were used to ensure the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions. The data from the pilot study were not included in the final sample.

The majority of the surveys were distributed through the school district office, and some were distributed directly by teachers. A brief letter explaining the importance and the purpose of the study was distributed along with the survey. Participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. Names of the teachers or schools were not included in any part of the survey. The return rate was approximately 70%.

Results

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the respondents. A large proportion of subjects had some advanced education dealing with the needs of limited English proficient students.

Table 1
Characteristics of Subjects (n = 794)

Special training	
4 = MA in Multilingual Ed or TESL	4%
3 = LDS, BCC or other credential	42%
2 = enrolled in credential or MA program	10%
1 = none of above	44%
Years of experience	
less than 2 years =	10%
2-5 years =	17%
5-9 years =	15%
more than 9 years =	59%
Percent of LEP students in class	
less than 20% =	34%
20-40% =	29%
40-70% =	21%
over 70% =	16%
Proficient in another language	
5 = 16%	
4 = 9%	
3 = 25%	
2 = 18%	
1 = 33%	
(1 = not at all, 5 = very fluent)	

Results of the questionnaire items dealing with attitudes toward bilingual education are presented in Table 2. Clearly, respondents, as a group, show substantial agreement with the underlying principles of bilingual education: Seventy percent agree that learning subject matter in the first language is helpful because it helps students understand subject matter better when it is taught in English (item 3) and 74% agree that literacy transfers across languages (item 4). They also show support for the principles underlying continuing first language development (items 5-8). Responses to items 1, 2 and 10 indicate, however, that only 50 to 60% of the respondents support participation in bilingual education programs. It should be noted, however, that surprisingly few are against bilingual education: Many are simply "not sure."

Table 2. *Attitudes Toward Bilingual Education*

1. If a student is not proficient in English, do you believe the child should be in a classroom learning his/her first language (reading and writing) as part of the school curriculum?	yes (54%)	no (7%)	not sure (29%)
2. If a student is not proficient in English, do you believe the child should be in a classroom learning subject matter (e.g. math, science, etc.) in his/her first language?	yes (56%)	no (16%)	not sure (28%)
3. Do you believe learning subject matter in the first language helps second language students learn subject matter better when he/she studies them in English?	yes (70%)	no (15%)	not sure (15%)
4. Do you believe that if students develop literacy in the first language, it will facilitate the development of reading and writing in English?	yes (74%)	no (13%)	not sure (13%)
5. Do you believe that high levels of bilingualism can lead to practical, career related advantages?	yes (85%)	no (8%)	not sure (7%)
6. Do you believe that high levels of bilingualism can result in higher development of knowledge or mental skills?	yes (71%)	no (17%)	not sure (12%)
7. Do you believe it is good for students to maintain their native culture, as well as American culture?	yes (90%)	no (4%)	not sure (6%)
8. Do you believe the development of the native language helps develop a sense of biculturalism?	yes (75%)	no (15%)	not sure (10%)
9. If a student is proficient in both Spanish and English, do you believe he/she should be enrolled in a classroom where the first language is part of the curriculum?	yes (43%)	no (17%)	not sure (40%)
10. If a student is not proficient in English, do you believe the student will do better in school if he/she learns to write in his/her first language?	yes (59%)	no (19%)	not sure (22%)
11. Do you believe that a child who can read and write in the first language will be able to learn English faster and easier (as opposed to a child who cannot read and write in his/her first language)?	yes (74%)	no (14%)	not sure (2%)

12. Do you believe that if a second language learner is in an English-only class he/she will learn English better?

yes (41%) no (22%) not sure (37%)

13. Do you believe students must learn English as quickly as possible even if it means the loss of the native language?

yes (31%) no (16%) not sure (55%)

The portion of the questionnaire dealing with attitudes toward bilingual education was subjected to an exploratory factor analysis using Principal Axis Factoring. Application of a scree test revealed that the items could be represented by a single factor. The reliability (coefficient alpha) on the general Support for Bilingual Education factor was .91. A composite score consisting of responses to items 1-6, 8,10,12, and 13 was used for subsequent analysis (scores for items 12 and 13 were reversed so that higher scores would indicate more support).

Correlations between predictors and attitudes toward bilingual education are presented in Table 3. All are low, but are statistically significant or close to significance, because of the large sample size.

Table 3
*Correlations between Support for Bilingual Education
and Teacher Background*

Predictor	Correlation with support for bilingual education
elementary/secondary school teacher	-.13
years of experience	-.06
credential	.27
% LEP children in class	.19
second language proficiency	.14

All significant at .001 level except for years of experience ($p = .11$)

Inspection of intercorrelations among the predictors revealed no serious multicollinearity; a modest correlation was obtained between measures of training and percentage of LEP children ($r = .41$), which is to be expected.

Table 4 presents the results of a simultaneous multiple regression utilizing all five predictors. (The predictor "elementary/secondary" was

coded as "elementary = 1, secondary = 2.") The effect of having a supplementary education ("credential") was clearly significant, while two other predictors approached statistical significance, fluency in another language and the percent of LEP children in class. The low r^2 , however, tells us that we have a very incomplete picture of the predictors of attitudes toward bilingual education.

Table 4
Predictors of Support for Bilingual Education

Predictor	b	beta	stand. error	t	p
elem/sec school teacher	-.8313	-.0393	.8508	-.977	.329
yrs of experience	-.3205	-.0313	.3804	-.842	.400
credential	4.4059	.2085	.9044	4.872	.001
% LEP children in class	.6732	.0688	.4100	1.642	.101
second language proficiency	.5236	.0704	.2917	1.795	.073

$F = 12.8$, $df = 5/680$, $p < .05$

Discussion

The results of this study show that there is strong acceptance for the rationale underlying bilingual education. The teachers agreed that developing literacy in the first language facilitates the development of reading and writing in English, and that subject matter instruction in the first language helps the child learn subject matter better in English. In addition, there was support for the principles underlying continuing bilingual education: subjects accepted the rationale that advanced first language development led to practical advantages, superior cognitive development, and agreed that maintaining the first culture of the child was a good idea.

Support for actual participation in bilingual education was less positive. Relatively few respondents opposed LEP children developing literacy and learning subject matter in the first language in school (less than 30%), but only slightly more than half approved of it, with a substantial percentage saying they were not sure. Forty percent were opposed to continuing first language development for children who were already bilingual.

The reasons for the discrepancy between support for the principles and support for the actual program need to be explored. The most obvious is that some teachers might agree with some of the rationale but not others, and support for the program might require full agreement with all underlying principles. There could also be practical considerations that influence teachers (e.g. concern about job security, need for additional credentials, observation of misapplications of the principles) and/or ideological considerations. What we can conclude, however, is that there is considerable support for the underlying philosophy of bilingual education, and only a minority actually oppose bilingual education programs, contrary to the results of polls such as the one reported by Porter (1990). Clearly, when teachers say they oppose bilingual education, we must ask why: Our results show it is not because of a disagreement with the underlying philosophy.

The regression analysis revealed that those who had some supplementary training showed stronger support for bilingual education, and that those with more LEP students and who were fluent in another language tended to support bilingual education more. These results support the hypothesis that those who know more about bilingual education support it more, a result consistent with a previous study dealing with parents; those whose children were involved in bilingual education supported it more (Shin and Kim, 1995). We cannot determine, from the data presented here, whether training induced the support, or whether those who already supported bilingual education were more likely to undergo supplementary teacher education. Our own observations suggest to us that good teacher education does make a difference, but this needs to be confirmed empirically.

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