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## **Bilingual Education**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The history of the United States has been characterized by the immigration of individuals from almost every country in the world. They come to the United States in hopes of leading successful lives. Many immigrants come with a paltry sum of money and inexperience with the English language; they come only with a dream, a dream to make their way in the “land of opportunity.”

It is obvious how a language barrier that an immigrant has can contribute to an increased level of hardship. There are many arguments about how to best help immigrants overcome this reading and writing hindrance. While this topic is enormous, the focus of this paper is to look at bilingual education, particularly in the realm of young students. The youth are truly the future of the United States, so attacking the problem from that point is as good a starting point as any. This paper will focus on the various types of bilingual education that exist in the United States and their strengths and weaknesses. We will also discuss the difficulty policy makers and educators face in implementing bilingual education programs and highlight strategies they can use to facilitate the process. Finally, this paper will look at the case study of California and its battle against bilingual education in Proposition 227. We argue that the complete lack of research in the English-only movement makes Proposition 227 and immersion programs substandard according to the No Child

Left Behind Act and that more research needs to be conducted in order to verify or disregard current research by bilingual education scholars.

## **DEFINITION OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

So what is bilingual education? Generally speaking, bilingual education can be defined as a set of programs for students “with limited or no proficiency in the language of instruction (English in the U.S).” Bilingual programs use a student’s native language to teach academic subjects while they are simultaneously learning the English language. These programs vary in duration; some are limited to two or three years, others use the native language for multiple years with the goal of helping students achieve proficiency in both English and their native language. Bilingual proficiency refers to the “ability to use 2 or more languages in oral and/or written form; proficiency can vary from beginning to advanced levels and can be at the same level in both languages or at different levels in each language.”<sup>1</sup>

As the preceding definition suggests, while there is a general definition for bilingual education, there is a broad spectrum of implementations of bilingual education. Overall, however, they all share a common goal:

Bilingual bicultural education is a broader scope program designed to be a total educational approach for developing bilingualism in all American children and for nurturing the linguistic resources already possessed by language minorities.<sup>2</sup>

Even more specifically, the purpose of bilingual education can be summarized in several objectives:

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (<http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/tools/glossary.html>).

<sup>2</sup> San Diego State University, College of Education. Models of Bilingual Education. Microsoft Powerpoint Presentation. Slide 3.

- Conceptual development in all subjects where students of bilingual education must keep up with their English-speaking peers
- Communicative proficiency in both the first and second language

The definition of language proficiency can be broken down even further. One subcategory is basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), as proven by mastery of basic commands, social conversation, and communicative fluency. The other subcategory is cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), as proven by mastery of reading, writing and content-based, sophisticated language.<sup>3</sup>

The different models of bilingual education exist because they differ in cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical assumptions and grouping and placement procedures.<sup>4</sup> The following is a description of several of the main models of bilingual education.

### **MODEL 1: TRANSITIONAL OR EARLY-EXIT MODEL**

The transitional model of bilingual education teaches English literacy in the student's primary language. The definition of the transitional model as described by the National Association for Bilingual Education is as follows:

Most bilingual programs in the United States follow this model, which emphasizes English language development and academic learning. Native language instruction is used to facilitate English development and to keep students from falling behind in their subject matter studies while they are acquiring English. Students are typically enrolled in these programs for approximately three years.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gomez et al, Capacitacion Bilingue para Todos Los Ninos. Microsoft Powerpoint Presentation. Slide 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Slide 6.

<sup>5</sup> Bilingual Education, State Action Organization.  
<http://www.stateaction.org/issues/education/bilingualed/index.cfm>

According to Dr. Leo Gomez, professor/assistant dean of the college of education at the University of Texas Pan America, Dr. Richard Gomez Jr., the state director of migrant and bilingual education in Washington, and Dr. Jose Ruiz-Escalante, associate professor in the college of education at the University of Texas-Permian Basin, the transitional model has some very clear characteristics. The transitional early-exit model, hereafter known as TBE, is a deficit model. This means that while instruction is done partially in the student's native tongue, it strives for an early transition from the student's native language to the student's second language. Ideally, this transition occurs between two to three years. The program focuses on the development of the basic interpersonal communication skills within the first two years. However, the danger that Gomez et al suggests is that it does not focus on the cognitive academic language proficiency. The method used to facilitate the transitional early-exit model is known as concurrent translation, whereby the use of both languages occurs at the same time. The goal is to push hard for early English acquisition.<sup>6</sup>

## **MODEL 2: DEVELOPMENTAL OR LATE-EXIT MODEL**

The second model, the developmental or late-exit model, has a late transition from the student's native language to his or her second language. The developmental model is described by the National Association for Bilingual Education as follows:

Programs following this model are increasingly popular and emphasize the development of full bilingualism (oral fluency plus high levels of literacy in English and a second language) plus academic learning. Students are typically enrolled in these programs for five or more years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gomez et al, Op. cit. Slide 5.

<sup>7</sup> State Action, Ibid.

This transition occurs after four or five years. According to Gomez et al, this is a much more effective method. The length of the instruction in the student's native language before the push for the transition allows the development of the cognitive academic language proficiency. Moreover, they believe that this allows for conceptual development in the native language, thereby aiding in the transition and acquisition of the second language. This method places emphasis on valuing the native language and the culture.<sup>8</sup>

## **SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TRANSITIONAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL MODELS**

While the two models differ in execution, overall they due share some similarities. Both adopt a technique known as subtractive bilingualism. As Gomez et al describes, "Children are asked to set aside or subtract their native language and assimilate to the more prestigious/dominant English language." And while the late-exit does a better job, the transitional model of bilingual education still does not value the child's native language as much as it should, and as a result the child's native language in not academically developed.<sup>9</sup>

## **MODEL 3: THE TWO-WAY OR DUAL IMMERSION MODEL**

While the first two models of bilingual education practice subtractive bilingualism, the two-way model methodology is that of additive bilingualism, focusing on developing biliteracy (or literacy in two languages). Additionally, the two-way model is unique in that, not only are the non-native English speakers targeted, but the native English speakers as

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<sup>8</sup> Gomez et al., Ibid. Slide 6

<sup>9</sup> Gomez et al., Op. Cit. Slide 7

well. Below is the description of the two-way model by the National Association for Bilingual Education:

This model allows limited English proficiency students and native English-speaking students to acquire each other's languages in a developmental bilingual education environment that features collaborative learning and a challenging curriculum. The goal is to help both groups meet high academic standards and develop fluent bilingualism and full literacy in two languages. Students are typically enrolled in these programs for five or more years.<sup>10</sup>

According to Gomez et al, the two-way model (also known as the dual-language model), encourages enrichment, has a challenging curriculum, and has high expectations for its students. Children are given the opportunity to add one or more languages to their repertoire at the cognitive academic language proficiency level, and their native language at the same time is valued and academically developed. The strong belief in the two-way model is founded on the interdependence hypothesis, which states that “a learner who has mastered the basics of reading, writing and thinking in the [native language] will transfer these skills and knowledge and perform well in the [second language].”

- There are many characteristics of the two-way model. The two-way model is characterized by extensive exposure to both the native and second languages for a minimum of four to six years. Language exposure and development should be used for all academic areas in content-specific ways. Both languages must be separated for instruction and should be used with equal consistency and duration in the classroom and school environment. In order for bilingual education to be most effective, school teachers and administrators must ensure that students have many

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<sup>10</sup> State Action Organization, Op. Cit.

opportunities to use both languages in the context of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This would entail sufficient administrative support from the school and the district and a high level of commitment to hiring the best bilingual teachers with certification. The schools also need to collaborate with parents to actively involve both languages in their child's education.

Clearly, the two-way model has many points that are essential to implementing the model successfully.

## **STAGES OF BILINGUALISM**

Before trying to analyze how effective the models of bilingual education are or have been, it is important to define the different stages of bilingualism. According to Gomez et al, there are generally three stages of bilingualism: limited bilinguals, less balanced bilinguals, and balanced bilinguals.

Limited bilinguals exhibit low levels of competence in both their native language and their second language. Gomez believes that this has a negative cognitive effect on the students.

Less balanced bilinguals exhibit age appropriate competence in only one of the languages. There are no positive or negative learning effects at this stage.

Balanced bilinguals exhibit age appropriate competence in both languages, with positive cognitive effects on learning.

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MODELS**

Clearly, with several different options in implementing bilingual education, it is important to analyze the effectiveness of each of the models in relation to the others. Unfortunately, there still is not substantial unbiased statistical research on just how effective or ineffective bilingual education is. From a qualitative standpoint, though, Gomez et al gives us their opinion.

The transitional, or early-exit model of bilingual education, typically produces children that are limited bilinguals, with low levels of competence in both their native and secondary languages. This occurs because of the lack of time developing the native language in the rush to transition into the secondary language.

The developmental, or late-exit model of bilingual education, typically produces children that are less balanced bilinguals. This program spends more time trying to develop the native language, but still uses subtractive bilingualism. As a result, competence according to the student's age level is shown in only one of the two languages.

The two-way or dual model of bilingual education, according to Gomez et al, is the best system of bilingual education. The two-way model produces balanced bilinguals with age-appropriate competence in both languages. As stressed by Gomez et al, the two-way model has many benefits. It teaches children to have a respect for their language and culture and to value the languages of other students in their class. Because both an English language learner's language and English would be taught in the two-way classroom, the climate would be challenging rather than remedial and would thus develop every child's cognition. The two-way model embraces teaching each child's native language as a right and is value-added.

In such a highly global society, proficiency in two languages would give any adult an advantage in the job market.

Gomez et al founds their strong belief in the two-way model on research done in the United States. According to the research, “For language minority students schooled in the U. S. from kindergarten through 5th grade, the two-way developmental bilingual education model is the most successful, as measured by standardized tests across all subject areas.” Additionally, “When students [are] schooled bilingually (two-way), rather than focus on [a secondary language], there is greater academic achievement.”<sup>11</sup>

## **THE ROOTS OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

The roots of bilingual education began in the 1970’s. At that time, language minority speakers and their advocates were arguing for bilingual education as a civil right, saying that students were being deprived of an education if they weren’t being taught in a language they could understand. Eventually, in response to the pushes from these advocates, the government passed the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and revised it again in 1974. The following statement sums up the government’s stance on the issue: “Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Collier, Virginia and Wayne Thomas. NABE Journal of Research and Practice. Winter 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Education World. The Bilingual Education Debate: Part 1. [http://www.education-world.com/a\\_curr/curr047.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr047.shtml)

According to the United States Department of Education's Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, bilingual education's purpose is two-fold: 1) All children are capable of engaging in complex thinking tasks, and 2) developing and maintaining the [student's] native language in no way interferes with English language acquisition.<sup>13</sup>

### **BILINGUAL EDUCATION: IMPLEMENTATION IN THE UNITED STATES**

Certainly, bilingual education in the context of the United States revolves around a non-English native language and English as the second language. Bilingual education is certainly a relevant issue today, with many immigrants coming to the United States with little or no English background. In the United States today there are approximately 1,000 federally funded or private bilingual education programs in K-12 schools. Beginning in 1968 with the funding of Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, bilingual programs have spread across the country and are now institutionalized in most of the nation's largest urban school systems.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in many urban and suburban areas, new bilingual education programs are continuing to expand.

In spite of the growing pervasiveness of bilingual education programs, according to the research of Toni Gregorio-Jones, many bilingual programs that have been developed have been done more out of coercion than out of a desire to help:

“Bilingual programs have been initiated in response to community pressures, court orders, or the promise of federal and state funds. They have rarely been implemented by educators within school systems simply because they believed that bilingual

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Griego-Jones, Toni. Implementing Bilingual Programs Is Everybody's Business. NCELA *Focus Occasional Papers in Bilingual Education*, Number 11, Spring 1995

programs were more effective ways of teaching students. Perhaps because of these beginnings, the programs have been considered "out of the mainstream" by educators-bilingual and non-bilingual personnel alike."

Moreover, he believes that the programs are also seen as "out of the mainstream" because they serve a minority of students. Even those programs that are established in areas with a large number of minority students, many times this large group of students still exists as an overall minority as compared to their native English speaking counterparts. Finally, there is a perception that bilingual programs are only meant for temporary purposes, a temporal fix to a language barrier problem, despite the fact that bilingual programs have been pervasive for as long as twenty-five years in some school districts.

Gregorio-Jones describes the conceptual problem that exists today with these bilingual programs by summing up their perceived purpose:

"Bilingual programs are often described as programs for students who are being transitioned from a state of unreadiness for the regular school program to a level of English proficiency that qualifies them to enter the real (mainstream) program. It is not unusual for bilingual teachers themselves to describe their work as preparing students for mainstream classrooms."

In fact, most bilingual programs are judged in terms of effectiveness based on the students exiting from the programs. Most "mainstream" teachers have no conception of what occurs inside of a bilingual classroom, and therefore are unable to help bilingual student's further develop a cultural appreciation for their native language.

The ostracizing perception of "mainstream" programs versus bilingual "out of the mainstream" programs needs to be remedied, according to Gregorio-Jones. This separation has in fact led some designated bilingual schools to become two schools in one building,

with separate bilingual and regular classrooms. He gives a list of reasons why this has a negative impact:

- Separation fosters alienation between bilingual teachers and the non-bilingual staff in designated bilingual schools.
- Bilingual students are deprived of the support and resources available to other students in their schools
- Isolation and separation denies native English speakers the potential benefits of bilingual education
- Indifference or, in some cases, hostility, encountered by bilingual teachers and administrators who are attempting to implement new programs or expand older ones can effectively prevent putting them in place

Clearly, the way bilingual education programs are implemented can have a significant effect on the atmosphere and regard toward to a bilingual education.

Currently, in most bilingual programs around the country, implementation of bilingual programs in most districts has generally been regarded as the business of designated bilingual personnel only, primarily teachers and program directors. Those not directly involved in the delivery of bilingual instruction or administration of programs have not usually taken responsibility for implementing them.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Gregorio-Jones research shows that in most cases, there is little district involvement in the creation of these bilingual education programs.

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<sup>15</sup> Gregorio-Jones, Op. Cit.

Currently, much research does not exist on the implementation of bilingual education programs because of the difficulty that is created by tracking students as they enter and leave bilingual programs. What information is known has come from evaluation studies and bilingual education directors' progress reports. Mostly, these are in terms of factors facilitating the creation of a bilingual program. These factors include:

- Support and commitment from district leadership, meaning the superintendent and school board.
- Staff development and training.
- Coordination and collaboration among administrative units. The bilingual program and regular program must be coordinated with things like curriculum, testing, elementary and secondary education, and human resources.
- Effective communication throughout the entire school and district.
- Adequate resource allocation for the programs.
- Parent/community support.
- Effective working relationships with state education agencies.

As is evidenced by the list of factors, an extremely important underlying theme is the coordination and collaboration of the bilingual program with the regular program in order to have an effective allocation of resources and services. Bilingual education programs that have done more successfully “not only involved bilingual teachers and administrators, but also actively involved other people from most departments in the system, including personnel, curriculum, and testing and evaluation. The widespread involvement of parts of

the system not only seemed to facilitate clearer perceptions of program implementation throughout the system, but also lent support to putting necessary pieces in place.”<sup>16</sup>

Gregorio-Jones gives his own guidelines for implementing a successful bilingual education program. His six guidelines are:

1. Visible and strongly stated support from the superintendent.
2. Specific and detailed guidelines for each unit in the district.
3. Intensive and ongoing staff development.
4. Organizational modifications to existing practice.
5. The use of classroom teachers as trainers.
6. Rotation of teachers in supervisory positions.

These guidelines seem very reasonable. Firstly, the superintendent is seen as a key figure in the school district. Support from him or her for the program will contribute to widespread involvement in the process. He or she sets the tone with which bilingual education will be received by the community. Without the superintendent’s support, the efforts of any bilingual education program will be undermined, as he or she could withdraw many modes of support including financial.

The specific and detailed guidelines for each unit in the bilingual program is important for clearly identifying the needs of students in the bilingual program, and also as a way of providing accountability and accurately measuring results of the bilingual education program. Yet this is problematic because studies remain inconclusive regarding effective bilingual teaching practices.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

The ongoing staff development provides a way for non-bilingual personnel and bilingual personnel to forge relationships and understand the work that each group does. As Gregorio-Jones puts it, “Specifically identifying what individual teachers from both groups can offer the bilingual program and the entire school could establish professional respect and cooperation and foster a climate of inclusiveness.” Staff development would also allow teachers of bilingual education the opportunity to hone their teaching skills by keeping them updated of the latest research on methodology and content. This would not only help the development of students but would also give bilingual education teachers room to grow as professionals.

The organizational modifications to existing practice refer to the changing of practices to ensure that only highly qualified teachers are allowed to instruct in bilingual classrooms. Standards for hiring a bilingual education teacher should be at the same level as that of a regular classroom teacher.

The use of classroom teachers as trainers involves teachers who are well versed in the issues of bilingual education instructing their less knowledgeable counterparts. Again, this will foster collaboration and respect for the bilingual teachers, and give the non-bilingual teachers better exposure to what learning English as a second language entails.

Finally, the rotation of teachers in a supervisory position goes even further than just having bilingual teachers serve as trainers. In fact, they will mentor new teachers and serve as bilingual resource teachers or coordinators of parts of the implementation plan.

## **ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

It is clear from above that there is a tremendous amount of work that goes into setting up an effective bilingual education system. With so many models of bilingual education in the US today, it is clear that even scholars have not come to a consensus about the best way to structure the bilingual education curriculum and practice. The bilingual education system is extremely controversial today, with many people passionately arguing for and against bilingual education's effectiveness. The following section outlines some of the key arguments for and against bilingual education.

Proponents of bilingual education argue that, first of all, it is much easier for students to learn in their native tongue. Moreover, they believe that bilingual education is necessary in order to foster a cultural respect and understanding for the student's native culture. Finally, they believe that by helping students develop their cognitive academic language proficiency in both their native language and secondary language, they set up the students with the potential to lead very productive lives and help to foster a desire and passion for learning and education.

Opponents, on the other hand, cast strong doubt on the effectiveness of the bilingual education model. Some say that a focus on students' civil rights and cultural integrity is, in some cases, giving way to concern that some non-native English speakers are acquiring insufficient mastery of the English language.<sup>17</sup> Some extremists also argue that teaching a student's native language hinders their acquisition of English.

Groups like English First believe that bilingual education programs are costly and ineffective. They contend that many non-native English speakers are graduating from

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<sup>17</sup> Education World, Op. Cit.

school systems with a lack of fundamental reading skills in both English and their native language, using low test scores to support their argument. They also argue that English immersion is the most effective way of teaching non-native English speakers English quickly. "English-Immersion" programs place immigrant school children who have limited skills in the English language (e.g., Spanish-speaking immigrants) to be taught overwhelmingly in English in order to shorten the length of time these children have to spend not understanding the dominant language in American culture and in American educational institutions.<sup>18</sup> The following is a more official definition of sheltered English immersion programs:

"Sheltered English Immersion" as defined by the initiative is a program that would mix children of different native languages and different ages in an English-only class, without any native language support. This is widely agreed to be the least effective means of teaching English. Because of the lack of native-language use, there would be virtually no academic instruction in this program. The program is also limited to one year, which is not considered long enough for most students to attain academic proficiency in a second language. After one year, the students would be placed in a regular classroom with fluent English speakers. This program is not in practice in California, and there is no evidence for its effectiveness.<sup>19</sup>

The proponents of bilingual education retort that the statistics that groups like English First provide do not allow for enough time. Students require more than one to two years to become proficient in a second language (which were the statistics previously cited). Proponents also say that the shortage of qualified teachers and a sound curriculum leads to the failure of the bilingual education programs, not the method itself. They argue that ending bilingual education would be devastating.

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<sup>18</sup> Adversity.Net. Definition: Bi-Lingual Education vs. English Immersion Instruction.  
[http://www.adversity.net/Terms\\_Definitions/TERMS/bilingual\\_education.htm](http://www.adversity.net/Terms_Definitions/TERMS/bilingual_education.htm)

<sup>19</sup> Collier, Virginia and Wayne Thomas. NABE Journal of Research and Practice. Winter 2004

Additionally, the Media Alliance group has posted several contradictions that they claim opponents of bilingual education have on their website. Below is an excerpt of some of the myths:

- **Myth #1:** Bilingual education does not work. **Fact:** Children in bilingual programs develop academic English better and more quickly than children in English-only classrooms. They also learn academic subjects at the same time. **Source:** "School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students," Wayne P. Thomas and Virginia P. Collier. In *Directions in Language and Education*, George Washington University, Washington, D.C. 1997.
- **Myth #2:** English immersion (English-only) is the quickest way for children to learn a new language. **Fact:** Putting a child in a classroom where s/he doesn't speak the language is the least effective way to teach English or other subjects. **Source:** "A Meta-Analysis of the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education," Jay Greene, Assistant Professor of Government, University of Texas at Austin, March 1998.
- **Myth #3:** Bilingual education is only for Hispanics. **Fact:** Bilingual education serves speakers of Chinese, Russian, Hmong, Japanese, Vietnamese and 50 other languages in California. It also serves native English speakers who are learning a second language. **Source:** "Fact Sheet on LEP Pupils," California Department of Education, December, 1997.<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, bilingual education is a controversial topic in education today.

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<sup>20</sup> Media Alliance Group. Bilingual Education Fact Sheet. <http://www.media-alliance.org/voices/bilingual/bilingualfaqs.html>

## **BILINGUAL EDUCATION: A CULTURAL APPROACH**

Few people will argue that the current status of the bilingual education programs in the United States does not mainly target Hispanic youth, with most bilingual education programs having teachers who speak Spanish and English. Taking a look specifically at the state of California, “of the state's 5.6 million students in 1997, approximately 1.4 million (25%) were English learners. Of these, 80% are Spanish speakers. The rest speak Vietnamese, Hmong, Cantonese, Russian, Armenian and more than 50 other languages. Bilingual education also serves native English speakers who learn another language from an early age.”(California Dept of Education, 1997). The bilingual education debate is thus complicated by the sheer numbers of different languages spoken by students in America’s public school system. Thus, one of the arguments against bilingual education is the fact that it would be extremely costly to hire a teacher to teach in the language of every student in a school.

Additionally, in the last decade, an argument has risen over whether or not African Americans have in their culture a dialect that should be distinguished from English. This controversy over whether Ebonics should be recognized is indeed an additional twist to the bilingual education argument. We will first look at the ebonics controversy.

## **EBONICS: A LANGUAGE OR NOT?**

Ebonics literally means “black sounds,” and generally refers to the sounds and structure of a common way that African Americans speak. The controversy began in December 1996 when the Oakland School Board passed a resolution to recognize Ebonics as the “primary language of African American children” and take it into account in their Language Arts lessons. The media went into a frenzy, and the debate came to the forefront

as to whether or not Ebonics really is a language or just slang. Opponents of the Ebonics movement poked fun, and a series of derogatory statements and comics were released.

Proponents of Ebonics, on the other hand, gave many reasons for the adoption of it as a new language. First of all, linguists argued that there was a definite structure and form to the Ebonics language. They highlighted patterns that they had found and verified through a series of interviews, and they came to the conclusion that Ebonics was a separate language. Moreover, they argued that Ebonics should be implemented in a bilingual education style atmosphere. Results have shown that students who are allowed to use Ebonics in the classroom without constantly being corrected developed reading comprehension ability far surpassing those students who were constantly corrected and chastised for their usage of Ebonics.

In the end, there was a resolution not to approve the use of Ebonics. However, the controversy still continues, as many proponents are still pushing for its recognition.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

Because of the controversy over the bilingual education system, it is interesting to look at some alternatives to bilingual education in the classroom that certain ethnicities are taking.

Asian Americans are a racial group that, in many ways, has the same language barrier as those traditionally targeted by bilingual education in schools. In terms of relative shortages, the number of qualified bilingual teachers in an Asian language is far less than the number of qualified bilingual teachers in a language like Spanish. Therefore, many non-

English speaking Asian Americans did not have access to bilingual education. To try to solve the problem, some Asian Americans end up going with a combination of English immersion at school and supplementary education on the weekend. Their supplementary education schools encourage the development of their native tongue and the fostering of interest in their culture.

Another segment of the population that has found another approach to the traditional bilingual education is groups like the Jewish Americans. Strong religious groups maintain ties to their native language and culture through religious education. In the case of the Jewish Americans, they learn Hebrew in their religious classes in order to read their religious text, the Torah.

In summary, some ethnicities, in response to the bilingual education challenge, are resorting to parallel institutions to develop their ability and appreciation of the native language and culture. While this paper will not delve into the effectiveness of this method in relation to the tradition bilingual education, it is still interesting to see the other alternatives that are being taken to try to solve a similar education problem and consider how these methods could help those of other language backgrounds.

### **PROPOSITION 227: CALIFORNIA'S BILINGUAL EDUCATION STANCE**

The state of California was placed in great risk when in June 1998, voters approved Proposition 227 with a 22% victory (Leung). Proposition 227, also known as the “English for the Children” initiative, mandated that all children be “taught English by being taught in English” and limited first-language instruction for English language learners to one year

(Unz and Tuchman). Proposition 227 was touted as the formula for high-paced English learning through total immersion in the English language without distractions from any other languages. Proposition 227, also known as the Unz initiative or "English for the Children," is a voter initiative that would effectively ban bilingual education in California public schools. It mandates that all children study in "a classroom in which the language of instruction...is overwhelmingly the English language." Students who have limited or no English ability "shall be educated through sheltered English immersion during a temporary transition period not normally intended to exceed one year." Under certain conditions, parents may request waivers to allow their children to study in bilingual education. The proposition also allocates \$50 million dollars to finance adult English language education. Teachers, administrators and school board officials could be sued by parents for refusing to enact the proposition."<sup>21</sup>

In 2001, the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) raised the requirements for educational program funding; in order to receive financial backing, all instruction and programs needed to have their benefits rigorously proven through extensive research (US Department of Education 11). However, six years after Proposition 227 was enacted, research and student test results still remain inconclusive as to whether English-only and English immersion classes actually improve English language learners' academic performance (Gandara). While English-only research has yet to surface, bilingual education research is already proving that instruction in a student's native language assists and

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<sup>21</sup> Unz, Ron K. and Gloria Tuchman. *The Unz Initiative*. California TESOL. Online. Internet. Available: <http://www.catesol.org/unztext.html>.

enhances his acquisition of English (August and Hakuta 16). NCLB's new funding stipulation, combined with California's rapidly growing percentage of English language learning students mandates the immediate reanalysis of the effectiveness of Proposition 227. This research must be conducted by an independent agency to determine the effectiveness of English immersion programs versus bilingual programs. While Proposition 227 is being reevaluated, the governor of California has an obligation to place a sunset clause in the bill and provide schools choice and support to instruct in either English-only or bilingual methods.

### **THE TENANTS OF PROPSOTION 227**

Proposition 227 required all English language learners in California to be "taught English in English" (Unz and Tuchman). This meant that children who had some degree of English oral proficiency would be transferred from bilingual to mainstream English classes where instruction would be completely in English. According to the proposition, the State would allow children a maximum transition period of one year to become proficient. During this year, they would be in sheltered English immersion classes where instruction would be in English but would be tailored to meet the needs of English language learners. The State stipulated in the Proposition that students of various ages and academic ability could be placed in the same classroom as long as their level of English proficiency was similar (Unz and Tuchman).

Below are also some frequently asked questions about proposition 227 that Unz and Tuchman answered:

- **How would Proposition 227 affect parental choice?** Under current law, all parents have the right to put their children in English-only classrooms. If a child is assigned to a bilingual education class and the parent requests reassignment to an English-only class, the school must comply. Under Proposition 227, all children would be placed in English-only classes. Only a few children would be eligible for waivers which would enable them to study in a bilingual education program. *(Unz & Tuchman 1997)*
- **Who would be eligible for waivers?** Children who would be eligible for a waiver must **a)** already be fluent in English; **b)** be ten years old or older; or **c)** have special educational or psychological needs. The majority of children currently in bilingual education programs would not be eligible. *(Unz & Tuchman 1997)*
- **How would Proposition 227 affect local control?** Currently, local school boards and school administrators determine which teaching methods and programs are used in each district. As a result, there is a wide variation between school districts, depending on the needs of the local student body, the resources available, and the philosophy of the local school board. Proposition 227 would mandate one state-wide teaching method and make other models illegal. *(Unz & Tuchman 1997)*

## **TWO-PRONGED REASONING FOR PROPOSITION 227'S**

### **RECONSIDERATION**

**Proposition 227 is based on non-existent and faulty research**

Proposition 227 fails to meet research-based standards that will soon become the norm for every educational program receiving Federal funds. English-only proponents claim that by maximizing time spent on English instruction in classrooms, English language learners will acquire the language at a faster, more proficient rate. However, no research affirms the claims of these English-only proponents. According to Proposition 227 supporters, the test scores for English language learners should have increased post-Proposition 227 because of the proposed advantage of English-only instruction. Rather, research on testing results since the implementation of the proposition has proven flawed and biased, rendering the evaluation of Proposition 227 inconclusive.

Firstly, the analysis that has been conducted to establish the credibility of Proposition 227 has been conducted with such egregious errors that no logical conclusion can be derived from the results. One of the methods used by the researchers of Proposition 227 to establish the proposition's credibility is a plan to track the performance improvement of English language learners. However, a stark problem with their method of tracking implementation was that the data in California did not carry "memory" on individual students who are reclassified from limited English to fluent English status (Hakuta). One year after sheltered English immersion classes end, students are reclassified as fluent English proficient and subsequently transferred to mainstream classrooms where state testing data subsequently lumps these children's scores with those of native-English speakers (Hakuta). The test then proceeds to analyze the trend in scores for these mainstream classes; however, because the scores of these individual children are lost in the aggregate data, there is no way that the state can accurately determine whether or not the sheltered English immersion

resulted in a rise in English proficiency scores for these students. Even if an upward trend in scores is seen, many other confounding factors exist that invalidate the claim that Proposition 227 is benefiting English language learners. For example, native English speakers may simply be scoring better and thus bringing up the average score while English language learners are still struggling. Moreover, this inconclusiveness issue is further substantiated by 2000 data that showed fewer than 1% of limited English proficient students being reclassified as fluent English proficient (Gandara). While this addresses Hakuta's concern that the state cannot assess actual achievement outcomes because very few limited English students were actually transferred to mainstream classes, this fact dispels Proposition 227 author's claim that one year is sufficient for students to become fluent English proficient.

Secondly, state-provided results from research on the effects of Proposition 227 are unreliable because the State's analysis has proven biased. After the first year of Proposition 227's implementation, the State claimed that 15% of second-grade limited English students were performing at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in English reading on a statewide exam. Two years later, 25% of limited English second graders were performing at this level. While these gains are indeed positive, the state cannot unquestionably attribute them to sheltered English immersion programs; upon closer inspection, all students in mainstream classes also showed similar gains in this period. It is thus inaccurate to conclude that Proposition 227 was the cause of limited English proficient student gains in achievement because those students were not the only students showing gain, a sign that there were most likely other factors contributing to the improvement. Further, while the State boasts success, the fact

that native English speakers were twice as likely to meet academic standards than English language learners post-227 indicates that the “reform” is not as effective as it needs to be (Gandara). As is shown from an objective look at the research results, Proposition 227 cannot be so quickly regarded as a success. To measure the actual effectiveness of the program, the State should have presented results that would track student progress from grade to grade. Test results should show how the third graders in 1998 performed on the same exam two years later when they were in the fifth grade. Presenting the data in this form would allow the State to measure improved performance.

### **Proposition 227 is rooted in racism**

English-only laws like Proposition 227 should be also reconsidered because in addition to being unfounded by research or facts, they are rooted in nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Not coincidentally, English-only movements in the United States occurred simultaneously with increasing waves of immigration. In the late 1800s, national political and economic problems were seen as immigrant problems as waves of Southern and Eastern European and Asian immigrants poured into the country. As a result, the Americanization movement was “promoted as a means of countering this influence. . .” (Auerbach). According to Auerbach, English as a second language was introduced as a means to enhance loyalty to the country and was a direct result of the Americanization movement. Efforts to Americanize immigrants and Native Americans have been all too commonplace in history. These efforts resulted in English literacy requirements for employment, naturalization, immigration and suffrage (ACLU 3). The same rationale was

used in California to pass Proposition 227: in order to ensure non-English speaking students become active citizens who can contribute to society, they must learn English by being immersed in English classrooms. While the importance of learning English is not being denied, the manner in which students acquire the language in this country is of significant importance. English-only instruction cannot be justified simply because the acquisition of the language is necessary to succeed in society. Society cannot allow its xenophobia to drive this movement that truly has no academic support.

Additionally, English-only in the classroom ideologically violates the precedence set by the 1974 Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* and the lower court's 1981 decision in *Castaneda v. Pickard* (Conaty). According to *Lau*, school districts are required to ensure that educational programs are based on legitimate theory and are implemented to help children overcome language barriers (Conaty). In 1981, *Castaneda* reaffirmed the Supreme Court's decision in *Lau*. The *Castaneda* test has three criteria: an educational program must be based on sound educational theory, the program must be implemented with appropriate resources, and must produce results that "can be determined as fulfilling the goal of overcoming the student's language barrier" (Conaty). The sheltered English immersion classes for one year mandated by Proposition 227 do not meet the requirements set out by *Lau* and *Castaneda* because of their failure in satisfying the legitimate theory requirement due to lack of scientific research. As previously mentioned, there is also currently no way to measure whether or not sheltered English immersion has been helping English language learners in California achieve the same standards as their native-English speaking counterparts because student performance outcomes on standardized tests are inconclusive.

Proposition 227 must also be suspect because it was co-authored by Ron Unz and Gloria Matta Tuchman. Unz has no background or educational expertise in education and is by profession, a high-technology entrepreneur. He personally funded the campaign for English-only in California classrooms. Such legislation is a reflection of his personal agenda and should be taken as such. Simply because a person has money to fund a campaign should not allow him or her to set such broad policy that affects millions of children (*Unz & Tuchman 1997*). Opponents of Proposition 227 included former President Clinton, then Assembly Speaker Cruz Bustamante and Assembly Majority Leader Antonio Villaraigosa, the California Republican and Democratic Parties, California PTA, California Federation of Teachers, and at least 53 California school districts (*Media Alliance Group*).

## **THE CASE FOR LATE-EXIT AND TWO-WAY PROGRAMS**

It is obvious that there is a powerful and growing mandate today for educational programs to be backed by substantial research, and while the success of English-only programs is still doubtful, the late-exit and two-way programs which Proposition 227 opposed are in fact grounded in research that supports the benefits of joint instruction in the student's native language and English. Research conducted by Ramirez found that first language literacy contributes to second language literacy. Ramirez found that students in late-exit programs showed greater achievement gains than those in early-exit or ESL programs (NRC 236). Cummins and Hakuta have made similar findings in their research: "children with weak first-language skills will not acquire their second language as quickly as

those with more developed skills” (August and Hakuta 16). Jimenez also supports research on the transfer of language skills as he observes that successful bilingual readers have learned how to use their Spanish knowledge abilities to enhance their English reading comprehension. These students see relationships between their two languages which also occurs with languages that are not as orthographically and typologically similar to English as Spanish (Jimenez 106 and NRC 237). Research conducted by Paul and Jarvis concluded that preschoolers performed better on the Chicago Early Assessment and Remediation Laboratory when they were in classrooms with bilingual instruction than those students who were in English-only classrooms (August and Hakuta 18).

Opponents of two-way and late-exit bilingual education programs argue that instruction in the native language will inhibit the acquisition of English. On the contrary, research not only finds that the development of the native language aids English acquisition, but that “the lack of continuing first language cognitive development during second language acquisition may lead to lowered proficiency levels in the second language and cognitive academic growth” (Collier 511). Prohibiting native language instruction, particularly at a very young age when English-language learners are still learning their native language, can thus have actual negative consequences on student achievement.

In addition to having multiple research bases, two-way and late-exit bilingual education programs in California support multicultural education and globalization. Maintaining English language learners’ native languages in addition to developing English skills will give these students advantages “a monolingual does not enjoy” (August and Hakuta 14). Making these bilingual programs the norm will affirm the identities of these

children by allowing them to embrace and maintain their cultural roots. Although proficient English skills are absolutely necessary to succeed in American society, ridding children of their native language skills is excessive and unjust. One of the benefits of two-way bilingual programs is that, while non-English speakers adapt to the mainstream, the English-speaking children also adapt to the non-English speaking population by learning their language. In that way, English-language learners receive the double benefit of developing the language skills necessary to function successfully in mainstream society as well as maintaining their heritage.

Because the text of the research studies cited in this paper were not available and these arguments thus rest on meta-analyses, the validity and scientific base of those studies must be questioned and evaluated. Those results, like the state of California's test results, may also have been presented in a way to show positive effects when there may not have been any. However, many authors in the education field have conducted studies similar to Cummins' and have found the same results that testify to the transfer of language skills. The ability for the study to be replicated and produce the same results is one of the tenants of research-based education as set out by NCLB, and Cummins' research does meet that requirement (NCLB). Moreover, because Proposition 227 failed to believe the statistics presented in support of bilingual education when it was passed in 1998, proponents of the proposition have an obligation to demonstrate that their alternative method for teaching is proven to be effective, and even more so than late-exit or two-way programs.

## **SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The shortcomings of existing research on both sheltered English immersion and two-way bilingual education presents an urgent problem in the California school system. The governor of California must recognize that its current system is making 25% of the State's children vulnerable to "costly experimental language programs" by immersing them in instruction that has not been tested (Unz and Tuchman). Sheltered English immersion classrooms contradict the mission of Proposition 227 by allowing California's children to fall victim to nativist educational trends. Language instruction for English language learners must be researched so that California can really guarantee equal educational opportunity to all its students.

Because the effectiveness of English-only and bilingual instruction have yet to be assessed, the governor of California should add a sunset clause to Proposition 227 and set it to 2008. During this five year period, thorough and unbiased research should be conducted to evaluate the achievement of English language learners in English-only and two-way and late-exit classrooms. Test results must be controlled for all other factors aside from language and method of instruction. Of the classrooms complying with Proposition 227, the state must revise test tracking processes to disaggregate data of limited English proficient students who were reclassified as fluent English students and subsequently entered mainstream classrooms. This will allow the testing system to retain "memory" and accurately assess long-term outcomes in achievement (Hakuta). After this five year period, an independent research agency will evaluate the data to determine whether or not Proposition 227 is having its desired and intended effects. Data for two-way and late-exit classrooms will also be

evaluated to determine its effectiveness. Results from this research should warrant the actions of the state of California from 2008 in regards to either the reenactments or the abolition of Proposition 227. If Proposition 227 is found to have negative effects on student achievement, it must be immediately repealed, and sufficient resources must be allocated to promote quality bilingual education instruction and research and vice versa. Should results show that both programs have no negative consequences, both should be allowed in California classrooms, but the governor must continue to track test results so that the research in the field can dictate changes needed in language policy.

During the next five years, the State of California also has an obligation to provide schools a choice between sheltered English immersion and two-way bilingual education programs. Even though there already exists a bias toward bilingual programs for its research base, the State can continue to allow English-only programs for the next five years in order to test its theory. However, because these programs currently have no research base, every school in California must be notified of such faults and should be advised to act accordingly. The State thus has a responsibility to provide quality training to all teachers in both areas so that English language learning children can reap maximum benefits from either form of instruction in this period. The burden now falls on the State to allocate sufficient funds to both programs in this period for allowing legislation to come up for vote when it was not based on facts.

## **A CALL FOR RECONSIDERATION**

Proposition 227 must be reconsidered. With the new Federal emphasis on research-based programs, sheltered English immersion instruction must be immediately reevaluated. The seriousness of this issue must not be ignored, as one in four children in California public schools was an English language learner in the 2000-2001 school year (NCELA). Given the vast numbers of children that are daily affected by this legislation, it would be the State of California's greatest interest to determine which instructional methods best teach them the skills they need to succeed. Conducting research on the effectiveness of sheltered English immersion and two-way bilingual programs is the least the State can do to ensure quality education for English language learners. Rather than requiring the State to completely overhaul the tenants of Proposition 227, the State is instead called to use the next five years to conduct extensive and thorough research on its existing policy. This will be a compromise between proponents of English-only and bilingual education proponents that will align the State of California with Federal statute that is here to stay. Researching educational practices is in the best interests of California's English language learning children because as the Proposition states, no child should receive an education that falls victim to mere experimental trends. Ensuring a quality education and promising future for these children depends on the reconsideration of this Proposition.

## **BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN A NUTSHELL**

Indeed, bilingual education is a topic of great controversy, and is still a field in need of more research. Currently, there is not enough unbiased research to come to a definitive conclusion as to whether or not bilingual education is a better or worse way of educating

students with a native language different from English. There are many sides to the coin, with proponents and opponents both bolstering their arguments with a mix of facts and figures and ideology. In our personal opinion, bilingual education seems like it would be a more straightforward way and beneficial way of helping those with a native language other than English learn not on the English language, but also to keep up to speed with their native English speaking counterparts in other school subjects. The problem we see with bilingual education is the lack of resources and widespread support, elements that are crucial to the successful implementation of any bilingual education program. We certainly think that proposition 227 is a far too extreme measure for a position on bilingual education that is not strongly supported by unbiased data.

We are sure that the bilingual education debate will continue in the years to come, particularly as the United States becomes a more mixed culture. We are certain that as research continues, a more accurate assessment of bilingual education and its implementations will occur and be put into practice.

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