

# **BILINGUAL EDUCATION: BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE EDUCATION OF LANGUAGE MINORITY IMMIGRANT STUDENTS.**

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This paper attempts to provide an introduction to a research-based theoretical framework for the design and implementation of instructional programs for language minority students. It is based on the experience achieved by attending a number of courses on this particular subject in the United States and, mainly, by practice through teaching a mixed group of Hispanic and Anglo-American students in downtown Los Angeles.

## **THE FACTS**

Immigration is already a fact in most countries of the EEC. Forecasts foreshadow large numbers of immigrants trying to settle in a Community Country in the coming years. Governments are designing strategies to face unemployment and other derived problems which, in many respects, may have similar implications to those the United States have been fighting for decades. The problem the present study wants to tackle is that of poor results in the education of language minority immigrant students.

On the other hand, the creation of the Single Market in 1993 is based on the establishment of total freedom of movement for goods, services, capital and people. This means that 324 million Community citizens will be able to choose where they work and where they reside. Their rights will be the same in any country as those of the indigenous population. Creation of this right will surely open the floodgates to migration towards the fashionable and most-appealing countries within the Community. Whether people are employees or self-employed they will qualify for the right of residence, with a residence permit valid for at least five years and renewable on demand. Job-seekers registered in one Member State may also spend three months in another Member State in order to seek work there. As a result, young couples will be able to change their state residence while their children will be challenged by continuing their education with other children from a different culture and language. In this respect, special bilingual programs will be of great help and will have to be designed by the Department of Education in order to help language minority students achieve high levels of basic language proficiency, appropriate levels of cognitive/academic development, and adequate psychosocial and cultural adjustment.

For the last decade, there has been a growing interest in the problems of language minority students in the United States. A number of books and articles have already been

published, although advice regarding approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques for effectively educating language minority students has sometimes been offered without any concern for or explanation of empirical evidence. Although limited-English-proficient children have always comprised a significant proportion of the school-age population in a number of states in the USA, California has, in recent years, experienced an unusual avalanche of students who go to school speaking a language other than English. According to the results, the California State Department of Education realised that the American system of public education was not as successful in meeting the education needs of language minority students as it had with the general student population. In the mid-nineteen seventies, the Office of Bilingual Bicultural Education started work to design a theoretical framework for planning and improving bilingual educational programs. There has been substantial progress. Teachers are now encouraged by the potential practical applications of the project and also invited to improve and expand their programs to meet all the schooling needs of language minority students. They have obtained significant results.

For educators, the main benefit to be derived from such a framework is the guidance such a theory can provide in judging the effectiveness of an educational program designed to meet certain specific objectives.

The main objectives settled by the California State Department of Education<sup>1</sup> were the following:

- 1) To attain high levels of oral English proficiency.
- 2) To achieve, to the best of their abilities, in academic areas, including reading, writing, and mathematics.
- 3) To experience positive psychosocial adjustment to life in a complex, multicultural society.

High levels of oral proficiency of the new language (L2) include the ability to speak and understand the language as a native speaker does. The California State Department of Education pointed out that the active and passive English vocabularies of language minority students should be in the normal range for native speakers of the same age. Although these students may speak with a slight accent, their speech should always be intelligible; and they should make grammatical errors no more frequently than do native speakers.

## A VIEW OF THE HISTORY OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION.

In the past, and for the first half of this century, public policy towards language minority students in the US was tightly bound to general attitudes toward immigrant

1.- California State Department of Education. *Schooling and Language Minority Children: A Theoretical Framework*. Los Angeles: Evaluation, Dissemination, and Assessment Center, California State University, 1981.

groups. The immigrant flow which had historically been northwestern European in origin, was changing to include increasing numbers of Asians, central and southern Americans, and Eastern Europeans. Poorer and less well educated, these new immigrants were seen by previous immigrant groups as culturally and intellectually inferior, and discriminatory immigration policies were imposed to limit the increasing tide of the so-called undesirable newcomers. This fact has already taken place in Germany and France in recent years and is likely to happen in other countries like Italy and Spain. Educational policy regarding the new arrivals viewed cultural and linguistic differences as deficits and dictated English as the only language worthy of use in the schools. As early as 1855, the California Legislature had passed a law requiring English only instruction in the state's public schools; and, by 1923, 34 states had similar requirements.<sup>2</sup> Bilingualism was then regarded as a negative force in children's development. According to James Cummins<sup>3</sup> most teachers of language minority children saw bilingualism almost as a disease that not only caused confusion in children's thinking but also prevented them from becoming "good Americans". Therefore, they felt that a precondition for teaching children the school language was the eradication of their bilingualism. Thus, children were often punished for speaking their own language and referring to their cultural background.<sup>4</sup> It is not surprising that research studies conducted in the US in that period<sup>5</sup> often found that bilingual children did poorly at school, many experiencing emotional conflicts. Children were made to feel that it was necessary to reject the home culture in order to belong to the majority culture, often ending up unable to identify fully with either cultural group. Instead of considering the possibility that the school's treatment of minority children might be a cause of their failure, teachers, researchers and administrators blamed the children's bilingualism. The research findings were interpreted to mean that there is only a certain amount of space or capacity available in our brains for language; therefore, if we divide that space between two languages, neither language will develop properly and intellectual confusion will result.<sup>6</sup> This view is still commonplace among teachers in a number of Primary and Secondary Schools in Spain. For a number of years, I have witnessed myself the sad failure of German, Dutch and Belgian young students whose parents have decided to move country and settle in Calafell, Cunit, Coma-ruga or Roda de Barà. From the very first day, they face the challenge of studying eight, nine, or ten subjects which are taught

2.- Estrada, J. L. "A Chronicle of the Political, Legislative, and Judicial Advances for Bilingual Education in California and the American Southwest," in *Bilingual Education and Public Policy in the United States*, ed. Ypsilanti: Eastern Michigan University, 1979.

3.- Cummins, J. "The Influence of Bilingualism on Cognitive Growth: A Synthesis of Research Findings and Explanatory Hypothesis," *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, no 9, 1976.

4.- This is a similar situation to the one young students suffered at a number of schools in Catalonia during the first years of Franco's dictatorship in Spain.

5.- Darcy, Natalie. "A Review of the Literature on the Effects of Bilingualism Upon the Measurement of Intelligence," *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, no 82, March 1953.

6.- Jensen, J. Vernon. "Effects of Childhood Bilingualism," *Elementary English*, no 39, February 1962.

in two different languages: Catalan and Spanish. Sometimes, after feeling unable to successfully pass the 1st or 2nd year of BUP at the age of 17 or 18, they decide to give up and become drop out unemployed teenagers.

But the UNESCO brought a different view on the subject. In the study *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education* (1953)<sup>7</sup>, the UNESCO held the thesis that the best medium for teaching a child was his/her mother tongue. In fact, it formed the theoretical basis for recent bilingual education programs in the United States. It was called "language mismatch" theory, and attributed the lack of academic success of language minority students to the discontinuity between their home language and the language in school. The educational remedy for underachievement was to match the language of the school to the language of the home. Research studies and evaluation reports were carried on to describe the extent and the validity of the theory. In this respect, James Cummins' contribution is to be pointed out. In his work (1979), he addresses the theoretical underpinnings of primary language development, second language acquisition, and the relationship of both to normal school achievement.

## DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION.

According to Cummins, there are two different models of Bilingual Proficiency: the SUP and the CUP. The Separate Underlying Proficiency (SUP) model supports the view that if minority children are deficient in English, it means that they need instruction in English, not in their L1. This implies that proficiency in L1 is separate from proficiency in L2, and that there is a direct relationship between exposure to a language (at home or school) and achievement in that language. The second implication of the SUP model follows from the first: if L1 and L2 proficiency are separate, then content and skills learnt through L1 cannot transfer to L2 and vice versa. However, despite its intuitive appeal, there is no evidence from results to support the SUP model. Cummins clearly backs the second, the so called Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model, through which the literacy-related aspects of a bilingual's proficiency in L1 and L2 are seen as common or interdependent across languages. Experience with either language can, then, promote development of the proficiency underlying both languages, given adequate motivation and exposure to both either at school or in a wider environment. Cummins lists five major sources of evidence for the CUP model: 1- results of bilingual education programs, 2- studies relating age on arrival and immigrant students' L2 acquisition, 3- studies relating bilingual language use in the home to academic achievement, 4- studies of the relationship between L1 and L2 proficiency, and 5- experimental studies of bilingual information processing.

7.- UNESCO. *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*. Monographs on Fundamental Education, 1953.

Rudolph C. Troike (1978)<sup>8</sup> reviewed twelve evaluations and several research studies in which bilingual instruction was found to be more effective than English-only instruction in promoting English academic skills. A substantial number of papers and more recent studies<sup>9</sup> have often shown cognitive and academic benefits associated with bilingualism. The press has also reflected these views. Daniel Goleman wrote a revolutionary article in the *New York Times* with the title: "Bilingual Schooling Said to Give Intellectual Edge."<sup>10</sup> Goleman supported the CUP model and reported the views of the American Psychological Association when they claimed that children who grow up speaking two languages display superior cognitive abilities and are more sophisticated than other children in their understanding of language. He wrote: "The new findings, the researchers said, cast doubt on the wisdom of placing children who speak another language in classes where teachers use only English."<sup>11</sup> He supported Dr Kenji Hakuta's views, a psychologist at Yale University, with regard to force bilingual children into English-speaking classes can be counter-productive, both emotionally and intellectually. Research conducted by Dr Hakuta among Hispanic children in New Haven schools, found that the more a child used both Spanish and English, the greater was his intellectual advantage in skills underlying reading ability and nonverbal logic.

From the mid-nineteen eighties onwards, the old theories that claimed bilingualism caused mental confusion have been left aside. Researchers have increasingly accepted and followed Dr Hakuta's views when he claimed that not only did bilingual education did not introduce any negative cognitive effects on the language minority students, but that cognitive abilities of bilingual children showed that the mind benefits from diversity of experience. In bilingual education, what is learnt in one language seems to help the intellectual development in the other. That's the reason why bilingual education is followed massively at schools with language minority students in the US.

James Crawford (1986)<sup>12</sup> also takes the standard line. He points out the sudden increase in scores on the New York City Reading Test for those students who had entered

8.- Troike, Rudolph C. "Research Evidence for the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education," *Bilingual Education Paper Series*, Vol. 2, No. 5, Los Angeles, California: National Dissemination and Assessment Center, California State University, Los Angeles, December 1978.

9.- Duncan, S., and E. De Avila. "Bilingualism and Cognition: Some Recent Findings," *NABE Journal*, Vol. 4, Autumn 1979; Kessler, C., and M. Quinn. "Bilingualism and Science Problem-Solving Ability," in *Schooling and Language Minority Children: A Theoretical Framework*. Los Angeles: Evaluation, Dissemination, and Assessment Center, California State University, 1981; Development Associates. *Evaluation of California's Educational Services to Limited and Non-English Speaking Students: Final Report*. San Francisco, 1980; Bain, B., and A. Yu. "Cognitive Consequences of Raising Children Bilingually: One Parent, One Language," *Canadian Journal*

10.- Goleman, Daniel. "Bilingual Schooling Said to Give Intellectual Edge," *The New York Times*, August 25, 1985, p. 24.

11.- Ibid.

12.- Crawford, James. "N.Y.C. Bilingual Students Show Gains." *Education Week*, New York City, June 18, 1986.

bilingual classes in 1982. Crawford claims that while scores for a control group of non-LEP (limited English proficient) students increased from 53.2 to 54.8 by 1984, average normative scores had increased from 27.1 to 35.4 for Hispanics and 27.1 to 37.3 for other LEP children in bilingual programs in the same period of time. He introduces another positive figure when he declares that according to the assessment office, high school students in bilingual programs maintained attendance rates well above the city-wide average and were three times less likely to drop out: 92 per cent compared with 72 per cent average attendance rate in New York City High Schools as a whole.

The failure of the US traditional all-English curriculum to educate students of limited English ability was, in the eighties, more than ever documented in national statistics showing low achievement levels and high drop-out rates for linguistic minorities, while bilingual programs around the country showed they had proven a powerful approach to overcoming the problems posed by the language barrier. With the bilingual programs, students from non-English backgrounds across the country have achieved, in the last decade, close to or even above national norms in English, often for the first time in the history of their communities. Rudolph Troike (1989)<sup>13</sup> gives substantial data on the success of Bilingual Education in French, Hispanic, and Chinese communities in different parts of the US. He also stresses the social and affective factors which have a powerful effect on learning the language of a dominant social group by members of a socially subordinate linguistic minority.

If we are to look at other countries, there are also signs of evidence. An interesting piece of research in this regard was done in the seventies in Sweden. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas embarked on a study of Finnish school immigrants in Sweden. In his published works (1979)<sup>14</sup> he declares that students who completed most of elementary school in Finland before moving to Sweden did better in Swedish after two years of study than Finnish students who had been educated in Sweden from the first grade. Furthermore achievement in math, chemistry, and physics also correlated highly with Finnish language skills. According to Skutnabb-Kangas, Finnish students who immigrated to Sweden at earlier ages rapidly lost their competence in Finnish and at the same time failed to gain full competence in Swedish, becoming semi-lingual, in the words of the researchers. W. A. Lambert (1975) describes the phenomenon as "subtractive bilingualism."<sup>15</sup> From these facts, Skutnabb-Kangas suggests that interruption of development in the native language before linguistic skills are consolidated, which occurs

13.- Troike, Rudolph C. "Synthesis of Research on Bilingual Education," Research Informative Service, *Educational Leadership*, Washington D. C., March 1989.

14.- Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove and Pertti Toukomaa. *Teaching Migrant Children's Mother tongue and Learning the Language of the Host country in the Context of the Socio-cultural Situation of the Migrant Family*. Helsinki: The Finnish National Commission for UNESCO, 1976; Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. *Language in the Process of Cultural Assimilation and Structural Incorporation of Linguistic Minorities*, Arlington, Va.: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1979.

15.- Lambert, W. A. "Culture and Language as Factors in Learning and Education." In *Education of Immigrant Students*. Edited by A. Wolfgang. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1975.

around the age of ten or eleven, may have a destabilizing effect on cognitive development.<sup>16</sup> Thus, students in bilingual programs should do better if instruction in their native language is continued through the fifth or sixth grade. Challenged by the Finnish immigrants' poor results at school, the Swedish government developed the "Sodertälje Program for Finnish Immigrant Children in Sweden." It produced remarkable results: Finnish was used as the major initial language of instruction and continued its use throughout elementary school. By sixth grade, children's performances in this program in both Finnish and Swedish were almost at the same level as that of Swedish-speaking children in Finland, a considerable improvement in both languages compared to their performances in Swedish-only programs.

## CONCLUSIONS:

The research evidence reviewed above strongly suggests that programs that aim to develop a high level of proficiency in two languages provide greater potential for academic development for all children than education through the medium of only one language.<sup>17</sup> The students should be placed in classes taught through the language which, it is assumed, will best promote the development of academic skills. A test would assess aspects of language proficiency related to the development of literacy. When sufficient L2 proficiency is shown reclassification among monolingual students will follow. But the central idea is that, as the research suggests, achievement in L2 literacy skills is strongly related to the extent of development of L1 literacy skills. Thus, rather than reclassifying and exiting minority students as soon as possible, teachers and administrators should be concerned with providing students with sufficient time in the bilingual program to develop bilingual proficiency. The same theory may be applied to those students whose mother tongue (L1) is Spanish and they are forced to learn all subjects in Catalan from an early age.

How much time is sufficient?

16.- Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove. Op. cit.; Cummins, J. "Linguistic Interdependence and the Educational Development of Bilingual Children." *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 49, 1979.

17.- As has been shown, a number of studies have reported that bilingual children are more cognitively flexible in certain respects and better able to analyze linguistic meaning than are monolingual children. Martin L. Albert and Loraine K. Obler, in their study *The Bilingual Brain*, New York: Academic Press, 1978, point out:

Bilinguals mature earlier than monolinguals both in terms of cerebral lateralization for language and in acquiring skills for linguistic abstraction. Bilinguals have better developed auditory language skills than monolinguals, but there is no clear evidence that they differ from monolinguals in written skills (p. 248).

But these findings are not surprising when one considers that bilingual children have been exposed to considerably more training in analyzing and interpreting language than monolingual children.

According to J. Cummins (1979), schools should aim to provide at least fifty percent of instruction in the early grades through the child's L1 or family language, and instruction in and through L1 should be continued throughout primary school. Cummins suggests it would be appropriate to provide more L2 input at school in situations where exposure to L2 outside school is limited. This is the case of students living in large Spanish-speaking areas in California or in other southern States. However, this increased exposure should not come in the early grades where the instructional emphasis should be on L1 in order to develop the conceptual outline required to make L2 context-reduced input comprehensible.

Most US Departments of Education have provided schools with a research-based theoretical framework for planning and improving bilingual education programs. Large sums of money have been invested in research as well as in the implementation of bilingual programs. The results have been substantial. Many people are still working to improve and expand their programs to meet all the schooling needs of language minority students. For the Europeans there is a question ahead: Will the EEC Departments of Education take into consideration the research and experience in the field of bilingual education in the US? Will they be concerned about the academic results of language minority students and consider the need of a bilingual education for immigrants at all?<sup>18</sup>

18.- A number of studies on bilingual education in Europe and Catalonia have been done. The following selected bibliography may be useful for anybody interested in further research:

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