



Bilingual Education in Texas

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BILINGUALISM is not a unique phenomenon nor is bilingual education an innovation. The latter is new only in Texas and other states in the United States where today it is taking a secure position in the formal educational process of the schools.

Bilingualism has occurred for many years all over the world wherever countries with different languages border each other. The typical Western examples are Alsace-Lorraine in France-Germany, the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, and the Basque areas of France and Spain; not to overlook Switzerland with its varieties of bilingualism because of its multilingual frontiers. Since language is a strong cultural characteristic, one may say that wherever bilingualism exists biculturalism also exists.

The Texas Education Agency, as a state function, is concerned with bilingual education rather than bilingualism per se. The bilingualism that prevails in Texas among the Spanish, Czech, German, French, Lebanese, Greek, Japanese, and speakers of other languages is due to the strong cultural ties of language, rather than any effort exerted in the past by schools to utilize languages other than English in the educational process and to develop bilingual students.

As bilingual education becomes an integral part of the curriculum, one must define it and explain its rationale. Sometimes it is better to define first what it is not, and then what it is. Bilingual education is not merely using the first language of a child, as a bridge to English, and then eliminating the first language as proficiency in English is attained. It is the total development of the child bilingually so that he can function within his own capabilities in two languages. This means that in the beginning the basic concepts must be taught in the first language.

After the pupil learns the concept of reading, in his first language, for example, he can easily be taught to read in a second language. This could be English; or it could be Spanish for an English-speaking child. A second language can be taught as naturally as the language of mathematics, science, or music, as long as the first language is the medium for teaching it.

As it is for the basic concepts, there must be a time when subject matter is taught almost exclusively in the first language while the student is learning a second language. Subject matter becomes a tool for learning a second language. This permits intellectual growth, the primary purpose for learning;

and in reality, bilingualism becomes the by-product of learning. It can also be stated that bilingual education does not cut the educational program in half nor leave anything out of the curriculum. It is a complete program plus the added enrichment of two languages, rather than one.

Briefly, the whole of bilingual education must have as its components: (a) the learning of basic concepts in the first language; (b) language development in the first language; (c) language development in the second language; (d) subject matter in the first language; (e) subject matter in the second language; and (f) the development of a positive self-image in the total process.

A Positive Self-Image

The development of a positive self-image is a very important concept for all students. It is usually thought of as something for the speakers of languages other than English or for the so-called minority groups. This is an erroneous assumption. All children should be involved in the development of a positive self-identity. Consequently, it is very important that, in the educational process, there be experiences denoting the contributions of all of the ethnic groups of which this country is comprised. It is more feasible to reach a positive self-concept by building upon the many good traits a student brings to school. Teachers must recognize the historical, psychological, sociological, and cultural forces that influence the formation of the character and characteristics of a group of people.

Several significant happenings in Texas in the past two years reflect the commitment of this state to bilingual education. Some three years ago, the Office of Bilingual Education was established; by "Office," in the Department of Education, is meant that it is a major division, with an Assistant Commissioner of Education as its head. This in itself is evidence of the importance of bilingual education to the Commissioner of Education and to the State Board of Education.

Shortly after the establishment of the Office, a task force was formed from a cross

section of professionals from throughout the Department—from social sciences, languages, the arts, special education, teacher education, and vocational education. In addition, two committees were appointed by the Commissioner, the Chief State School Officer. One which is called the Commissioner's Advisory Committee on Bilingual Education is a 15-member committee comprised of educators, businessmen, and government officials.

Included in the group are a psychologist, a state senator, a state representative, an official of the State Association of School Boards, a historian, a lawyer, representatives from the League of United Latin American Citizens and the American GI Forum, local school administrators, and a director of one of the 20 education service centers in the state. There are also representatives from colleges of education, the International Good Neighbor Commission, and vocational education.

The second committee is called the Consulting Committee on the Confluence of Cultures. It too is a 15-member committee, whose purpose is to assist the State Department of Education in developing materials which will reflect the cultural contributions of the 26 ethnic groups of the state. This group also has a diversity of backgrounds among its members and includes playwrights, folklorists, and anthropologists.

Another very important happening in the state in recent years was the passage of House Bill 103, the Bilingual Bill, by the State Legislature. This bill permits the use of two languages in instruction. It is optional, rather than mandatory, at the local district level. The State Board of Education followed this legislation with a policy complementing it.

The Spanish-speaking population is not the only group in the state which is potentially bilingual. There are approximately one-half million Czech speakers in the state and a large number of German speakers. Since Czech is the third language of the state, Czech-English bilingualism in communities with large concentrations of Czech speakers is encouraged. Last year, a Czech national

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working in the Department assisted in the development of curriculum materials for the teaching of Czech. In previous years the same was done for French, German, and Spanish. A consultant from Mexico was brought in for the Spanish.

Another significant happening which influenced activities in the state, although sponsored by the federal government, was Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In 1969, \$2 million was allocated to the State of Texas for 19 projects serving about 25 school districts. Three of the regional service centers were involved.

Bilingual education, however, is not limited to Title VII projects. There are other schools that are using local funds for bilingual programs, and others are engaged in some activities using Titles I and III funds. Although there are some junior and senior high school programs, most of the activities at this time are at the early elementary school level. This is the area of the greatest need.

In 1970, 13 more projects were funded and two special centers were established, with one in Houston and one in Fort Worth. The former is developing reading materials in Spanish; the latter, curriculum materials in Spanish and English.

Number One Priority

The circumstances in which Mexican Americans find themselves in education seem to dictate that they be placed in the number one priority in bilingual education. None should be denied this experience. The State-wide Design for Bilingual Education approved by the State Board of Education places emphasis on the following goals:

1. Implementation of programs for students whose first language is Spanish which will allow successful experiences in the education process while developing literacy in the use of English and Spanish in the total school curriculum and knowledge of the history and culture associated with the languages
2. Implementation of programs for students whose first language is English which will allow them to develop a literacy in Spanish and

English and a knowledge of the history and culture of the speakers of Spanish and their contribution to the development of the state and country

3. Development of proper measuring instruments for children in bilingual programs.

Since competent, trained personnel are needed for implementing bilingual programs and because there is a shortage of such personnel, the statewide plan of action must include activities which will:

- Plan programs for personnel development (preservice and in-service)
- Develop curriculum materials for use in bilingual education programs
- Determine ways in which administration and instruction should be planned and integrated in bilingual education in order to provide optimum development of pupil abilities, interest, attitudes, goals, and self-understanding
- Identify the major dimensions of pupil development (language, skills, culturally engendered patterns of behavior, attitudes and aspirations, and talents and abilities) which are the primary emphases of a bilingual program and identify the relationship between family and social background and pupil development
- Study the functions and competencies of staff members who will provide services to the bilingual education program
- Study the roles of the Agency, education service centers, regional laboratories, and other resource agencies, colleges, and local schools in program planning and development
- Establish valid evaluative procedures.

It can be observed that great strides have been made in Texas in bilingual education.

However, much more has to be accomplished. Only a small percentage of the total population is involved in bilingual activities. There are about 20,000 students in the Title VII projects and another 10,000 in projects supported locally. There are also about 40,000 students in programs specifically designed for children of migrant parents. These programs have some elements of bilingual education—basically an English-as-a-second-language component.

This total number of 70,000 students now being served seems insignificant when one considers that the enrollment of Mexican American students in Texas schools in 1969-70 was 508,207. It would seem that these data presuppose that the concept of bilingual education has not been fully accepted in the state. To a great extent this is true. Nevertheless, when one examines the personnel situation, a different light is shed on the situation. Only 6,990 Mexican American teachers were employed by Texas schools in 1969-70. The Mexican American teachers comprise 5 percent of the total of 130,898 teachers. The Mexican American students comprise 21 percent of the total enrollment. This indicates very strongly that many teachers will need to learn Spanish, learn about Mexican American culture, and get involved in the bilingual education process if the objectives of the Statewide Design are to be accomplished.

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