Competencies Needed by Bilingual Education Teachers

George M. Blanco

Identified are specific pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural skills needed by an elementary bilingual education teacher in one's native language and also in the second language taught.

The questions that immediately arise with educators and the public-at-large concerning what a bilingual education teacher should be able to do are these: "If Ms. X grew up speaking a language other than English, what's all the fuss about? She speaks two languages, right? Why shouldn't she be able to conduct her class bilingually?" Simple as the situation and the questions may seem, they give rise to a series of related questions—"What does 'bilingual' mean? Why should we have bilingual education? What are bilingual classes? What constitutes a bilingual education teacher? What competencies should a bilingual education teacher develop to carry out an effective bilingual education program?"

The definition of "bilingual" can mean control of one's native language and minimal control of one of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) of the second language (Macnamara 1967). At the other end of the continuum is the rare individual who is able to express anything and everything with equal ease in both languages in a variety of settings and situations. This, indeed, is an unusual individual since bilingualism tends to become specialized in use (Halliday 1968): An individual may be able to express certain thoughts and concepts in one language, but not necessarily or with equal ease in the other, since an individual rarely uses both languages for all purposes and thus certain linguistic elements, such as vocabulary, are learned in only one language.

A widely accepted definition of bilingual education in this country is the one prepared by the U.S. Office of Education (1971:1):

> [Bilingual education is] . . . the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well-organized program which encompasses all or part of the curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children's self-esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures.

As can be deduced from this definition, the teaching of English as a second language to bilingual students does not, in itself, constitute a bilingual education program. An unstructured program in which two languages are used haphazardly does not qualify as a bilingual education program either, according to the definition presented here.

Bilingual education is a necessary part of general education because the U.S. is not a melting pot in which everyone is exactly the same. Rather, this nation is linguistically and culturally pluralistic. Our schools have large numbers of children who speak other languages besides English. Bilingual education provides basic instruction

in the child's first or dominant language, and provides opportunities to learn English as well. Once English proficiency is acquired, subject matter is taught in both English and the child's first language.

Given the foregoing information on what constitutes bilingualism and bilingual education, we can begin to explore what sort of teacher we would need to implement an effective program. We have in this country millions of individuals who speak languages other than English. For example, 8.2 million persons speak Spanish; 1.8 million speak Italian; 1.5 million speak German; and 1.5 million speak French (Waggoner 1976). In addition a host of other languages are spoken natively in the United States. It would seem, therefore, that bilingual education teachers could be recruited from this seemingly rich linguistic and cultural resource. However, even within the teaching profession, it appears that teachers who are bilingual as a result of having spoken a language other than English in the home, usually cannot use it for instructional purposes unless they have had extensive formal training in the four skills and in the technical vocabulary of specific subject areas (Blanco 1975).

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There are a number of sources from which one can distill the competencies needed by a bilingual teacher to implement an effective instructional program (Andersson & Boyer 1970; Gaarder 1975; Jaramillo 1973; Palmer 1975; Paulston 1974; Pérez 1975; Saville and Troike 1971; Texas Education Agency 1976; U.S. Commission for Civil Rights 1975). In some cases these writers describe bilingual education programs while the competencies that teachers should demonstrate are largely implied and, in other cases, they state explicitly some of the knowledge and skills that bilingual teachers should have. Probably the most explicit and complete list of teacher competencies for the bilingual education teacher is the list produced by the Center for Applied Linguistics (1974).

This list is quite comprehensive, and it identifies critical areas in which bilingual education teachers should have expertise. However, the list of competencies may raise questions concerning the feasibility of implementation in a four-year teacher preparation program because of its extensiveness. A new document that will be forthcoming from the Office of Bilingual Education of the U.S. Office of Education (in press) intended for teacher educators and school administrators provides guidance on implementing effective bilingual education teacher preparation programs. It also identifies minimum competencies to be developed at the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels.

At this point in the development of bilingual education in the U.S., there is a great lack of research that could shed light on competencies that contribute to effective bilingual education teachers. Therefore, the competencies recommended here have been gleaned from the foregoing sources and they, consequently, represent the opinion of authorities in the field, such as those cited earlier.

Language Proficiency

Proficiency in English and the target language of the bilingual education program is not only an essential competency for the bilingual education teacher, but also a basic one as well. As was expressed earlier, bilingual education is the teaching of subject matter through two languages. As such, the bilingual education teacher should have much more than a passing acquaintance with the target language. It is not sufficient for the teacher to be able to greet the children in the morning in their language and to pronounce their names. Bilingual education teachers must be able to provide instruction in all areas of the curriculum using a standard variety of both languages.

This high degree of language competence takes years to develop. It is usually not possible for such proficiency to be developed exclusively in the regular four-year teacher preparation pro-

gram. It is recommended, therefore, that the future bilingual education teacher have a solid base in the target language prior to entry in the preparation program. Further, colleges and universities should provide numerous opportunities for language experiences, including the use of the target language as a medium of instruction for a certain portion of the teacher preparation program.

Attitudes

As a result of the preparation program, the candidate should develop certain attitudes concerning the education of linguistically and culturally diverse children. Certainly one of the most important is that all children have intellectual, linguistic, and sociocultural strengths that can form the basis for the educational process. That children's language is a structured system of communication is important for the teacher to know. Equally important is to realize that children have a culture in which they have been raised and which permits them to interact with their family and peers. Future teachers should also recognize that bilingual education need not be restricted to minority children, but that this form of education is an enriching experience for all children regardless of linguistic, cultural, or socioeconomic background.

Knowledge

Since bilingual education is multidisciplinary in nature, the following fields are necessary components of a bilingual education teacher preparation program: English, foreign language, ethnic studies, linguistics, social sciences, natural sciences, library science, mathematics, speech, drama, music, art, and physical education. Teacher candidates should have a solid base in these areas to form the base for the methods or teaching skills to be developed. Because of space limitations, only some basic linguistic and cultural competencies will be identified here.

Linguistics

The future teacher should be able to:

1. Identify phonological, grammatical, and lexical elements of English and the target language of the program and determine implications for instruction.

2. Explain basic principles of the nature of language, language acquisition, and bilingualism.

3. Identify and understand regional, social, and developmental varieties of the students' languages.

Culture

The future teacher should be able to:

1. Identify elements of the students' home culture and of the mainstream society.

2. Identify significant contributions of the target cultural group in the arts, science, technology, and so on.

3. Identify salient facts of the history of the target cultural group.

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Teaching Skills

It should be stated at this point that bilingual education should be looked on as regular education. That is, children are exposed to the same subject matter as children in a monolingual program: arithmetic, science, social studies, art, music, language arts, and so on. There is nothing exotic about bilingual education. The main difference is that part or all of the basic instruction is conducted in two languages. Although this may sound overly simple, an effective bilingual education program must develop in the teacher a high degree of classroom management skills to avoid duplication of information and to make the most use of the two languages of the program.

The following pedagogical competencies have been selected from the previously mentioned sources, and, though they should not be considered as all inclusive in the opinion of this

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writer, they are indispensable for the bilingual education teacher. The future teacher should be able to:

1. Plan and present instructional units in the curriculum areas in both languages of the program.

2. Incorporate into the instructional program significant elements of the child's culture.

3. Develop language assessment skills and utilize the results in the instructional program.

4. Develop evaluation strategies for the various subject areas.

5. Modify existing teaching materials to meet the specific needs of the learner.

The Center for Applied Linguistics (1974) recommends that the future teacher be able to:

Utilize innovative techniques effectively and appropriately in the learner's language(s) in the various content areas, namely:

1. Formulation of realistic performance objectives and their assessment

2. Inquiry/discovery strategies

3. Individualized instruction

4. Learning centers

5. Uses of media and audiovisual materials

6. Systems approaches to the teaching of reading and mathematic skills

7. Team teaching and cross grouping

8. Interaction analysis.

The future teacher should be given ample opportunity to apply the foregoing knowledge and skills to a real situation. Field experiences are of utmost importance and should be provided throughout the training program, preferably beginning at the freshman level.

The foregoing represents minimum knowledge and skills that bilingual education teachers should have. It is recognized that there are many additional areas not covered here, and the reader is referred to the sources cited.

It is hoped that as local bilingual education programs continue to grow and flourish, so too will teacher-preparation institutions make the necessary programmatic changes to improve the training of bilingual education teachers. In this manner, children of limited English-speaking ability will have a better chance to experience academic success, and all children will have the opportunity of intellectual and social enrichment through bilingual education.

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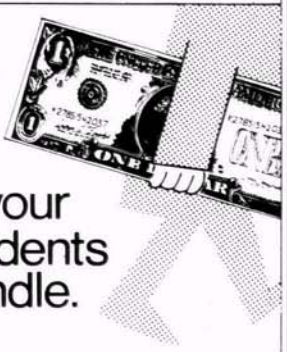

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