

# **Bilingual Education**

**Noriyoshi Miyamoto**

## **(Background)**

According to 1990 census preliminarily released in 1991, the Hispanic population in the U.S. numbers 22.4 million, the growth rate of more than 50% in the last decade. They now make up 9% of the total population, compared with only 6.4% in 1980. It can also be said that the Hispanic population has grown five times as fast as the non-Hispanic population since 1980, or that the Hispanic population is growing more than twice as fast as the black population, and Hispanics and Asians, taken together, are now almost as numerous as blacks. About half of the Hispanic increase is due to immigration and the increase was also a result of high birth rates among them, the naturalization of many new Hispanic citizens and the counting of illegal residents. If this tendency continues, and probabilities are that it will be, Hispanics will be the largest ethnic minority early in the 21st century.

These demographic changes are occurring at a time when the world technology is constantly advancing, which requires increased level of literacy, analytical as well as technical skills for gainful employment. National Commission on Excellence in Education proclaimed in 1983 the U.S. a nation at risk of losing its slim competitive edge in world markets because of the poor quality of its educational system.

As to many Hispanics, mobility is strictly downward. In one of the two recent studies conducted at the University of Texas, Frank Bean and Jorge Chapa found that the longer Mexican-American families are in the U.S., the lower their children's educational level will sink. It is very hard to pinpoint the exact reasons why some Hispanics are not upward mobile, but Frank Bean speculates that first generation parents are often the more highly motivated because they made the choice to leave their homelands. They usually push themselves and their children to do well. The second generation who often has better education than the first, however, loses that drive after getting stuck on welfare or in low-paying jobs. Frank Bean says that they are more likely to give up and unlikely to push their own children as hard.

Education has long been regarded as the primary means of upward mobility for disadvantaged individuals and groups, and most immigrants, particularly Asians, have succeeded in overcoming their handicaps and getting into the mainstream with better education. What's important in this case is the fact that they were usually placed in regular classes and given no special help in learning English. This "sink or swim" method was the one experienced by most immigrants to the U.S. before the

1960s.

However, many Hispanics are exceptional in this regard. They continue to have the highest dropout rates of any major group ; 42.3% for males and 41.1% for females. In addition, by the traditional measure of literacy – the completion of less than five years of schooling – Hispanics are six times as likely as Whites and two and half times as likely as Blacks to be illiterate. Nearly one in eight Hispanics 25 years of age and older (12.2%) have completed less than five years of schooling, compared to 2% of Whites and 4.8% of Blacks, as of 1988. More than two in five Hispanics drop out of school before high school graduation. Over half of Hispanic adults may be functionally illiterate, making Hispanics the most undereducated subgroup in the country.

There are some variations among them, though. Cubans do best ; 9.5% of them are considered to be illiterate. Mexican-Americans do the worst ; 16.1% are so. And other groups are in between : 9.5% of Puerto Ricans, 7.5% of Central and South Americans, and 5.5% of other Hispanics.

National Council of La Raza, a powerful Hispanic lobbying group in Washington D.C., says that Hispanics are least educated major population in the U.S. By the year 2000, Hispanics will account for 10% of the nation's labor force. This raises concerns about Hispanic educational attainment, because the gap between Hispanics and non-Hispanics will continue to widen. Poverty is the single greatest obstacle to schoolwork. With blacks competing against Hispanics for job, frequently on the lower rungs of the economic ladder, the potential division between them is intensifying. For example, the relationship between Hispanics and Washington's civil rights establishment has never been smooth. Anyway, reversing the trend of Hispanic undereducation is a national imperative.

### **(The Present Situation of Bilingual Education)**

The Bilingual Education Act was enacted in 1968 under the influence of the civil rights movement. It covered all children who couldn't speak English, and provided funds for teacher training, development of materials and a variety of experimental programs. In 1974, the Supreme Court decided that the failure of school system to provide supplemental language instruction denied the students the right to equal educational opportunity under the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. This decision brought bilingual education into the realm of civil rights. Congress immediately amended the act which had three main goals ; (1) to the extent necessary to allow a child to achieve competence in the English language, (2) instruction in the "cultural heritage of such children," and (3) instruction in all subjects "which allow a child to meet grade-promotion and graduation standard."

In 1984, Congress approved a major overhaul of federal aid to bilingual education; a portion of the money appropriated for bilingual grants would be earmarked for

alternatives to transitional bilingual education. The primary purpose of the law was not to produce bilingual children, but to teach English to limited-English-proficient children.

Incidentally, there are many methods in bilingual education, such as Transitional Bilingual Education, Submersion, English as a Second Language, Structured Immersion, Two-Way Bilingual Education, Maintenance Bilingual Education, etc., according to its own philosophy and practice. But the following three primary types of federally-funded education programs are popular and approved by the Education Ministry as effective in teaching Hispanic children: (1) *Transitional Bilingual Education* programs utilize a child's native language as a vehicle for transitioning students into an all-English instruction program, (2) *Developmental English Education* programs are designed to help students achieve full bilingualism in English and a second language, (3) *Special Alternative Instruction* programs use specialized ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction and supplementary services to assist limited English proficient studies.

Above all, the type of bilingual education that dominates American public school today is a method known as "transitional" bilingual education. It generally involves teaching foreign-language children academic courses such as math and social studies in their native languages while at the same time helping them gain fluency in English.

Many more bilingual education programs are funded by state and local education agencies. Some school districts, such as Fairfax County, Va., and Los Angeles, Cal., serve more than seventy different language groups, but, as far as bilingual education is concerned, the main subject, quality – and quantity – wise, is always Hispanics. Eleven states have their own bilingual education laws. Most state laws require that children who are not proficient in English be taught in a bilingual program using their native language if a minimum number of children are present in a school, grade or district. The common idea is designed to enable students to achieve full competence in English and to meet academic grade promotion and graduation requirements. Some bilingual education programs additionally strive to promote development of student competence in a second language.

Now the world is ever more interdependent and peoples are requested to know about other cultures and histories. At the same time, the American people themselves are becoming increasingly more diverse. American educators recognize that they can no longer treat all Americans as if they sprang from the same mold and they must teach them about their diverse selves. Therefore, California has moved toward implementing an ambitious multicultural curriculum.

This trend is supposed to reinforce the necessity of bilingual education, but actually, only in California and Arizona has the rate of bilingual services for Hispanics increased lately, and in most states, it has been decreasing in recent years, at a time when the demand for services has been increasing – due to increased Hispanic en-

rollment and an increased number of limited English efficient children.

A strong attack was made on bilingual education from the conservative side of the society. This had been expected from the beginning. American society is now and always has been pluralistic and multicultural. Even though American people have become increasingly diverse, there is broad recognition that they are one people and all Americans. What it is that binds them as a people is their political system and the political values that they cherish—those values of liberty, equality and so on. However, some attach greater importance on unity as a nation and others on each ethnic group's identity. In other words, the bilingual education question represents the historical conflict between a "melting pot" and "pluralism."

The most serious attack against bilingual education is the one to make English the official language of the country. The first and substantial wave was Proposition 63 of 1986 in California. It aimed to preserve, protect and strengthen English by making it the official language of the state and it passed by an overwhelming 73%. This was sold as a symbolic expression of support for English and denial of bilingual education. The sponsors of the proposition claimed that the new law would simply acknowledge reality and further the notion of one country and one language.

Supporters of bilingual education fear it could be used to justify discrimination against the newest immigrants in a country built on immigration. At the least, it could mean costly and divisive legal wrangling over exactly how to enforce such a measure. In the four years since the Proposition was approved, the "official English" movement has been pushed for laws that would restrict the multilingual services California provides—bilingual education, ballots and driver's license exams provided in more than one language.

U.S. English, one of the prominent organizations to promote the movement, now claims 400,000 members nationwide. It asserts that the English language is endangered; they need to protect it — make it official — because it is the only glue that can bind together a country whose residents speak a multitude of different languages. It claims keeping up with one's native language shouldn't be at the expense of learning English or at the expense of the taxpayer. It works to restrict bilingual education, eliminate multilingual ballots and fend off court challenges to official-English laws. The group's major goal is to pass an amendment to the U.S. Constitution making English the official language of the U.S.

Influenced by this movement, 13 states have declared English the official language. The main concern is assimilation. The ultimate fear of U.S. English is that bilingual education programs will create isolated pockets of ethnic groups, unable to communicate with other Americans and thus unable to participate in American society.

Both sides of pro — and anti — bilingual education have been in severe controversy. Critics of bilingual education have been attacked as racist and xenophobic. Supporters have been accused of being hostile to American values and having a self-interest

in perpetuating the bilingual-education industry.

### (Conclusion)

The persons who stand to benefit most from bilingual education are Hispanics (66%), but educators still don't agree on the best instructional method, nor even the ultimate goal of bilingual education. Nearly 40% of the nation's non-English-speaking first graders are taught in both English and the students' native language, then the native language teaching is phased out over time. On the other hand, 26% are taught in both languages with the intention of maintaining bilingual fluency.

As is mentioned above, the real cause of the controversies about bilingualism can be traced back to the old conflict, "Will multiculturalism (that is, bilingualism in this case) divide the nation or not." Some assert it will. Take Peter Primelow, author of *The Patriot Game : Canada and the Canadian Question Revisited*, for instance. He analyzes Quebec separatism in Canada and says the bilingual problem in the U.S. may turn out to be even more serious in its own way than it has been in Canada and has a chilling prospect for the unity of the nation.

Others have a different view. James Fallows, an American journalist, is an example of this school. He asserts that never before in world history has a language been as dominant as English is now and bilingualism may actually enrich everyone involved. He also says that Americans have not to declare English their official language because it already is and no one knows it better than the immigrants and their children.

At the bottom of this controversy lie poor academic achievements by Hispanics and this is one of the most serious causes of alienation of Hispanics in the U.S. In California, teachers tell of Spanish speaking children who have remained in predominantly Spanish classes from kindergarten through sixth grade and are sent on to junior high school with a weak grasp of English. In Massachusetts, 68% are still in bilingual program in their sixth year, although only 19% of Asians are.

The 1987-88 School and Staffing Survey of the U.S. Department of Education data show that Hispanics are seriously underrepresented as teachers, at both the elementary and secondary levels, in both public and private levels, to show just an illustration of barriers Hispanics face in overcoming undereducation problem. La Raza report, *Hispanic Education*, concludes that Hispanic undereducation represents a critical barrier to the full participation of Hispanics in U.S. society, and that the rapid growth of the Hispanic population, along with the rapid technological advances placing new educational demands on the workforce of the 21st century, combine to make the closing of the Hispanic education gap a national imperative.

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