

HISTORICAL STRUGGLES FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN AMERICA

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ABSTRACT: Even though bilingual education had always existed in the United States since the colonial period, America had both embraced and rejected its significance within its vastly diverse immigrant society. Most would agree that the immigrant languages and cultures in North America have certainly enriched the lives of many Americans, yet there are periodic waves of xenophobic tendencies to restrict the use of other languages and cultural expressions other than the English language in American communities. As a consequence of these educational policies which had restricted the use of other languages, public schools had greatly reduced the capacity for most U.S. citizens to speak another foreign language. Due to the English-only schooling programs in early American history, there was much cultural suppression and discrimination to the extent that the English language was often touted as being the key to patriotism and success in America.



In 1968, the English-only policies had all changed dramatically and made way for a more global platform for today's informational literate citizen of the 21st century. During the 1960s, the U.S. Congress made its first commitment to bilingual education by enacting the Bilingual Education Act. Subsequently, the social and political movements toward a more culturally and holistic method of teaching was adapted into its educational systems in recent decades to promote more multiculturalism in America.

For this research paper, a general overview in the development of bilingual education in the United States will be discussed. Through the evolution of the United States court system and prevailing state laws, the educational policies that surround the issues of bilingual education in America and its implementation programs have overturned the English-only tendencies. Moreover, this paper will also include the ongoing curriculum plans for America to embrace its diversity and to provide more multicultural learning opportunities for all students. These visionary changes have paved the way for America to become a more multilingual nation.

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INTRODUCTION

How did the advancement of bilingual education come about in the United States? This progress of bilingual education had moved forward in three fronts: cultural, legislative, and judicial. Culturally speaking, the people in the United States have accepted bilingualism when it has been economically useful and rejected it when immigrants were seen as a potential domestic threat. It can be noted that the legislative and judicial mandates had reflected this ambivalence as well and this is partly due to the political and social climate at various historical time periods. During periods of economic fortunes like the “Gold Rush” of California in 1849, the European immigrants were welcomed when the United States was booming and prospering. In this case, the European languages were not forbidden, but in contrast, the languages and cultures of people from other racial/ethnic backgrounds were suppressed. These linguistic and cultural barriers were enforced to prevent new immigrants from complete assimilation into American mainstream culture (Crawford, 1999).

Throughout American history, the English language has been proposed to be the national language through a bill entitled, “Declaration of Official Language Act of 1999” [H.R. 50]. Although this bill was introduced into the legal and political arena, it was never enacted into law. Even today, the English language has not been declared the “official language” under national law. In light of this fact though, there are 23 individual states that have passed laws proclaiming English as the official language (English First, 1999).

In America, the individual states have the right to decide educational policy, and to implement bilingual education programs. Specifically, these individual state rights are contingent on the judicial interpretations of the law within each state as well as federal laws. When the U.S. Congress enacted federal legislation to begin Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, national funding sources became available for bilingual education programs. Almost simultaneously after Title VII was enacted, the state courts upheld the law for students who were deprived of bilingual education as a constitutional right. The combination of historical precedents, federal and legislative initiatives, and judicial decisions all helped to support the foundations for bilingual education in the United States. With regard to state-to-state differences, this was the reason that caused the wide range of disparity in implementing a structural and unified standard for a comprehensive bilingual education program.

AN EARLY PERSPECTIVE ON BILINGUALISM

In 1664, at least 18 colonial languages were spoken on the eastern side of the United States. Generally speaking, historians had noted that German, Dutch, Swedish, and Polish could be heard in the armies of the American Revolution between 1775 -1777. Indeed, the Spanish language was the dominant language spoken when Christopher Columbus representing Spain landed in America to claim

its land as part of the Spanish Empire in 1492. Basically, it was fairly common both among working and educated classes in American history to speak at least two languages when they first arrived to the New World. In this regard, there were schools that were established to preserve the linguistic heritage of new immigrant arrivals.

In fact, the Continental Congress had published many official documents in German and French (Crawford, 1999). Based on Crawford's research, there were German schools operating as early as 1694 in Philadelphia city in the state of Pennsylvania. At that time, there were approximately 4% of the population who were speaking either partially or exclusively in German at elementary schools in the early beginnings of United States' history. In 1847, the state of Louisiana authorized instruction in French, English, or both based upon the parental request at schools. As early as 1850, the territory of New Mexico state gave full authorization to maintain bilingual educational programs in Spanish and English.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF LANGUAGE RESTRICTION IN THE USA

Although there were several pockets of acceptance of bilingual education, other areas of the country were restricting or even eradicating immigrant and minority languages. Under the 1828 treaty, the U.S. government acknowledged the language rights of the Cherokee Indian tribe. Eventually, the Cherokees established a 21-school educational system that used the Cherokee syllabary sound systems to achieve a 90 percent literacy rate in the native language. This all changed in 1879 when the federal government forced Native Americans to attend off-reservation English-only schools. Enforcement of the Native American children to speak English were attempts at full assimilation into American society, and school officials punished anyone for using their native languages in class. When a large wave of Jews, Italians and Slavs immigrated to New York State where the immigration checkpoint was known as "Ellis Island," the original English settlers began to feel growing resentment against their newcomers. Subsequent waves of Mexican and Asian immigrants to America were another social threat in ensuring the English-only rule for language usage as a majority concern. The English-only language instructions in both private and public schools in the new U.S. territory of the Philippines and Puerto Rico were also implemented and enforced in these areas as well. (Crawford 1999).

World War I brought anti-German hysteria and various states began to criminalize the use of German in all areas of public life (Cartagena, 1991). As World War I ended, the political climate in Ohio state were against the Germans, and the German textbooks from the elementary schools were burned in order to remove all traces of the Germanic language from creating roots in this state. Subsequently after the World War I, there were 15 states that legislated English as the main language of instruction at all levels of schooling. These repressive and restrictive educational policies against other languages were evident during World War II when Japanese language schools were forced to close down by the American government. Even in the late 1960s, there was "Spanish-detention" as a form a criminal punishment. Elementary school students were kept after school if another language was spoken other than English in the city of Rio Grande Valley in the state of Texas. There are many other examples that

relate to the non-acceptance of other cultural/ethnic/racial groups too numerous to name in this paper though. Over the last two decades of legal struggle for a more multilingual and multicultural society, Americans had finally changed their perceptions about newly-arrived immigrant populations. This turn of events had become more evident in the passages of federal and state laws which promoted a more acceptable stance toward the tolerance of diversity in our ever-growing population of new immigrant groups (Crawford 1999).

SWEEPING SOCIAL CHANGES DUE TO RISING IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS

For the past three hundred years, immigrants from every corner of the world have settled in America, thus creating the most diversely populated nation on earth. From 1607-1820, the wave of immigrants who were seen to be “youths of a robust nature” wanted to colonize America due to the lack of employment in England during the 1590s. Specifically, six out of 10 immigrants in the Colonial period times came from England while there were also other mixtures of European bloods in this pool of immigrants. While the most vocal ones were Puritans, Pilgrims and Quakers who came to America in order to avoid religious persecution, the majority of early European immigrants just wanted to find work, and a new opportunity to develop this new frontier.

By the time of the Revolutionary War, America was a diverse land with some 200 Indian tribal groups. The country in 1780 had approximately 3.2 million Europeans, and nearly 800,000 Africans who were forced into slavery and indentured servitude. These general population figures represent how America had first started as English colonies.

The general attitude was that most immigrants were welcomed with open arms. According to various historical accounts, this was the prevailing sentiment in early American history as the country developed to establish its presence among other European nations. There were exceptions though, it was said that the Roman Catholics were not accepted as well as Scot-Irish immigrants. From early historical writings found in William Penn’s and Benjamin Franklin’s journal notes on their thoughts on the development of Pennsylvania as a colonial state, the pertinent question was asked, “Why should Pennsylvania, founded by English, become a colony of aliens?” The founding fathers of America had generally stated that these first American colonies desperately needed the most basic resource any new country needed, and without which they could not survive. The simple answer to their rhetorical question was the need for more people or manpower.

LEGAL PRECEDENTS MOVED TOWARD BILINGUAL EDUCATION

The acceptance of bilingual education was an evolutionary process of social change and legal precedents stemming from many social movements waged by various political organizations in the United States. The historical tensions based on the incoming waves of new immigrants prompted the formation of various political circles asserting that English should be the official language in the United States. These social theories for progressive social assimilation were based on the assertion

that such inclusion of various languages would cause more disunity for American citizens as a whole. The opposing discourse in the English-only viewpoint is the social movement toward multiculturalism, in that, there were prevailing legal considerations for America to embrace all immigrant cultures no matter what color, race, creed or religious affiliation under the American Constitutional legal precepts and formalized amendments. The final tug-of-war between these two social and political constructs had finally been resolved through the judicial processes that upheld the Constitutional rights of an individual.

THE FIRST BILINGUAL PROGRAM IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA

Given the historical tensions and policy cycles that swung back and forth from acceptance of other language usages to the English-only restrictions, the most prevalent social example that stabilized the need for more bilingual education occurred in the 1960s in Dade County in the State of Florida. This was all due to the Cuban immigrants who fled to America due to the 1959 revolution in Cuba. Upon settlement, the parents of Cuban elementary school students sought bilingual schooling for their children during the assimilation process.

The first program to accommodate these parental requests started at Coral Way Elementary School which allowed English and Spanish to be spoken at the school. Subsequent evaluations of this bilingual program in the United States showed success in both English and Spanish speakers. The objective was fluency and literacy in both languages. According to Hakuta (1986), school records showed that English-speaking students were able to speak in English, and that the Spanish-speaking students were able to speak in both English and Spanish. Based on Hakuta's early research figures in 1974, there were 3,583 students in bilingual programs in the elementary schools and approximately 2,000 in the secondary schools. Thus, there was some evidence of a more acceptable implementation of bilingualism at the public schools through revised educational policy changes and standards.

BILINGUAL EDUCATIONAL ACT OF 1968

The focus on bilingual education was based on dual-language immersion and these sweeping educational changes were due to the passage of the Bilingual Educational Act of 1968 (Title VII, an amendment to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Educational Act). What made the difference in accommodating these changes so quickly was the fact that this particular legal act was explicitly compensatory to the school systems in the state of Florida. The fundamental point of this law was that since these children from Cuba were unable to speak English initially, they were considered to be handicapped and educationally disadvantaged to fully participate in American society. Thus, the advent or the rebirth of bilingual education became the answer to strengthen and build young immigrant youths for the future. Indeed, the population of Spanish-speaking people had increased twofold due to the political and social movements in Cuba. The call for state-wide action was a necessity in closing the educational gaps and to promote a better transition for the immigrant population of the State of

Florida as well as other surrounding states.

From the onset of the involvement of the U.S. federal government, there was monetary aid to those schools who complied with this law and while this law was more of a remedial solution, the need for more innovative approaches still needed to be sought (Wiese & Garcia, 1998). After 1989, the educational focus in America shifted again, and the development of bilingual programs expanded on a more nationwide basis. The goal in bilingual programs was to help maintain and develop the native language of students, and this was the important breakthrough for bilingual education in America.

THE EMERGENCE OF NEW NATIVISM IN THE YEAR 1999

Many of the U.S. communities were feeling the global pressure not only of the increased presence of newly-arrived immigrants, but also the acceptance of immigrants from underdeveloped countries. In 1998, over 600,000 legal immigrants were admitted under the U.S. Immigration Department. According to the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service as of 1999, approximately one-third of these new immigrants in 1998 included people from the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico, thus accounting for nearly 38.8 percent of the total U.S. population. From the Asian countries, there were 33.3 percent, and from the European countries, there were only 13.7 percent.

Since the Bilingual Educational Act of 1968, this was the first major law that recognized the unique educational disadvantage faced by non-English-speaking students. From this federal law, it authorized \$7.5 million to finance 76 projects serving 27,000 children. The educational goal from federal funding sources was to support educational programs that trained teachers and aides, developed and disseminated instructional materials, and encouraged parental involvement.

From the implementation of these legal underpinnings in support of bilingual education, the emergence of a new source of majority concern came to being from English-speaking students who were feeling socially deprived of their European cultural background. The new concern felt by native English-speaking students was the general feeling of loss for their own European cultures that dated back some fifteen to sixteen generations during the opening of the New Colonial America in the early 1700s (Crawford, 1999). These student-oriented needs for a more multicultural perspective created the essential platform for these sweeping educational reforms for bilingual education today.

MAINTENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

What is a bilingual program exactly? A bilingual program supports education and communication in the students' primary language as well as the students' heritage and culture as designed by a maintenance bilingual education (MBE) design. This is also been known as the developmental bilingual education program. The major assumptions in such a program were that bilingualism was a valuable asset, not only for the individuals who are bilingual but also for society as a whole. Students in an MBE design did not quickly transitioned into an English-speaking environment, rather they are encouraged to be proficient in both English and their native tongue. According to Roberts (1995),

“Literacy in two languages was often an important goal.” These goals enhanced self-concept and pride within the students’ cultural background. This has been the cornerstone of a successfully implemented program at elementary schools from kindergarten to either 5th or 6th grade levels, depending on the school district.

The most compelling use of maintenance bilingual programs involve the education of Native American Indians. There are 74 schools operated by Native American organizations under governmental special grants and contracts with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In this bilingual program, there is a high priority placed on cultural and linguistic preservation (Reyhner, 1992). The attempt to increase the number of speakers of Native American languages is sometimes called “restorative” bilingual education. Primary language maintenance is carried out in school systems in the U.S. possessions of Guam, and the Marshall Islands, as well as in the state of Hawaii. Other states have followed in pursuit of integrating and evaluating bilingualism into their curriculums in the 1990s and beyond.

ACADEMIC/LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN IMMERSION PROGRAMS

In America, the basis for a bilingual program relies on the ongoing development of immersion programs which provide both academic and language instruction in two languages from grade levels K-12 (Kindergarten to 12th grade). The goal of immersion programs in the United States is for students to be proficient in both languages and to achieve an additive bilingualism to their base of language knowledge. The term, “immersion” came from the program models in the Canadian middle schools where English-speaking students were also instructed in the French language (Lambert, 1984). Specifically, these upper middle class French immersion programs were established in Quebec Province where both English and French have a high language status for instructional purposes. Due to this instructional model in Canada, the United States have gained much insight into the development of their own version of an immersion program suitable to its growing Hispanic and Latino populations in America, especially prominent in the State of California today.

DUAL OR TWO-WAY IMMERSION IN THE UNITED STATES

A two-way language immersion model provided an enhanced status of the students’ primary language by providing instruction in that language to native English speakers. Research has shown that students who enter school in the United States with limited or no proficiency in English make more progress in acquiring English and in developing academically if they receive instruction in their primary language as they are introduced to English as a second language (Cummins, 1981b, Ramirez, 1992; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Strong literacy skills in the primary language can be applied to the acquisition of English literacy as well.

Dual language immersion schools help English Learners (EL) to continue and develop their mother tongue while adding proficiency in English through enriching and challenging curriculums. Students

may act as hosts such as Spanish-speaking children serving as language models for native English-speaking students in a dual immersion program. By being language and cultural hosts, they can gain self-esteem while increasing cultural pride (Lindholm, 1992). Through these bilingual teaching methodologies, the levels of academic learning of content-based subjects led to higher motivation among EL students (Veeder & Tramutt, 2000).

This two-way immersion design had resulted in the students' high level of academic competency through dual language usages. Both EL students and native English speakers who participated in content-based instruction in one language plus the English language programs have been successful in many ways. One highly successful dual-language program at the Valley Center Pauma Joint Unified School District in California is a good model. Information about this program can be found at the following website: <http://www.cal.org/topics/fl/> In addition, the National Clearing house for Bilingual Education (NCBE) has much information about two-way programs at <http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/library/twoway.htm>. Based on these current findings, the development of these bilingual immersion programs have been a source for further study and research. While these model programs have established some level of success, the current American standards for a more unified approach are yet to be seen.

CONCLUSION

To date, there has been an overwhelming majority of American citizens, policymakers, and educators who believe that it was necessary to strengthen the nation's need for its citizens to be more multicultural, bilingual and even trilingual in their language usages. In this regard, this is the new patriotism that replaced the English-only mindset. For one, the diversity within the country pertains to the variety of languages and cultural resources that establish America to be a more globally conscious nation. In the wake of much economic restructuring and new technological innovations that help to reduce the borders that originally separated us, America is ever-changing to adapt and meet its multicultural educational goals. In today's market, the need for rapid language acquisition is becoming essential for economic survival.

While the controversy surrounding bilingualism may persist in some states, the overall national programs have been successful, and provide multiple educational models that allow state-to-state American educational systems to continue in its development. Even from these state-to-state disparities within America as a nation, there is an ongoing drive among American educators to consider new and innovative ways of teaching that will embrace the dual-language immersion standards. From this heightened level of commitment for bilingual education in the 21st century, the desired outcome for most educators are to establish a working standard that will unify rather than to divide our differences, and to promote the international benefits for a more global America.

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