



Bilingual Education: The Quest for Diversity and Quality

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For students with limited ability in English, equal opportunity means being taught in their first language while learning the second.

On the opening day of school, Maria walked slowly to the auditorium for a new students' orientation meeting. Like her classmates, she was excited about entering seventh grade and looked forward to making new friends, meeting new teachers, and learning. But, unlike other students, Maria was also apprehensive about what she might not learn. On the way to the auditorium, she continually asked herself, "Will I learn English?"

Maria is a non-English speaking student. Born in Mexico, she is now beginning her third year in this country. She lives in a suburb of Los Angeles known as East Los Angeles, where Spanish is the dominant language spoken. She attended a neighborhood elementary school for two years, but did not learn any English. Her teachers considered her a well-behaved and socially adjusted child who attended school regu-

larly and generally attempted to meet the requirements of daily class lessons and home assignments. Because she has not learned English, she is now behind in mathematics, geography, science, and reading in Spanish. Her inability to comprehend English makes her experiences at school unrewarding.

Maria's parents, like many immigrant parents before them, believe that their daughter is being formally educated in a system that provides not only an equal opportunity to learn, but a quality education for all. This, they believe, is part of the American Dream. But the reality for many students like Maria is that it is only a dream.

Equality Does Not Mean Sameness

In our democratic society we take pride in providing children the opportunity for an equal



Bilingual education means individualized instruction that meets the needs of non- and limited-English-speaking students. Academic achievement is simultaneous in the dominant language, and second language, and in other disciplines.

public education. Our society mandates this for its citizens and residents. We value human rights, equality of opportunity, and the right of every individual to develop to his or her full potential. The foundation of our public education is equality.

But equality does not mean sameness because people are not the same. We are a nation of differing values, languages, religions, and traditions. We are also a society of people who inherently have differing cognitive styles, educational needs, and goals.

Because of our diversity, equality in education must mean the opportunity to learn in school programs that provide appropriate educational learning experiences for all children. Consideration of individual needs is of paramount importance as a foundation for providing learning opportunities for our students. In our culturally pluralistic society, bilingual education attempts to enhance the dignity of the individual.

Maria is typical of thousands of students in our schools who understand little or no English. She may be a recent immigrant or a third generation citizen, but she has the legal right to attend a public school. And educators have a professional and moral obligation to provide an equal

opportunity for her to learn. If we are to provide equal education for children, then we must carefully look at the needs of students like Maria. Those students' needs, often complex and diverse, can be met.

Bilingual education is individualized instruction because it uses the dominant language of the student as an important vehicle to transmit knowledge. In the case of Maria, the dominant language is Spanish. In order not to retard her average achievement, in a bilingual program she would initially be taught subjects such as mathematics and social sciences in her dominant language, and eventually be taught in both English and Spanish. Teaching bilingually means using appropriate methods of instruction dependent on sound curriculum development. It does not mean going over the same content twice.

Bilingual education also means the simultaneous teaching of the second language while reinforcing the student's dominant language. This reinforcement will offer a greater chance for the student to transfer basic reading skills to English.

Sound Implementation Strategies

School officials who say they are providing bilingual programs for a segment of their school enrollment and then point to the failure of these programs as evidenced by declining norm-referenced test scores need to examine carefully steps that have been implemented in successful programs. These steps, not new to curriculum developers, are: (1) needs assessment; (2) curriculum development models and instructional planning; (3) planned evaluation processes; and (4) a plan for initiating change.

A complete needs assessment must be initiated—Bilingual programs require thorough assessment of needs and resources. This process includes: (a) a profile of the students who are to be served by the program; (b) identification of faculty needs and competencies, and resources available at the school; (c) a socioeconomic and cultural profile of the school community; and (d) parental advisement and support in all phases of planning.

Based on the results of this needs assessment, the planner can better select one of the four bilingual strategies identified by Fishman

and Lovas.¹ The strategies are: transitional programs, monolingual programs, partial programs, and full programs.

Curriculum model selection and instructional planning—Successful programs demand participation in planning by those professionals who will implement the program. The curriculum writer needs to consider many factors inherent in curriculum development, some of which include: (a) development of a local school bilingual education philosophy and goals; (b) curriculum defined and a particular model selected; (c) course content defined and rationale stated; (d) learning objectives defined as per Bloom²; (e) appropriate learning activities designed and matched with objectives as suggested by Tyler³; and (f) appropriate bilingual methodologies identified and selected to match objectives, activities within instructional frameworks as suggested by Joyce and Weil⁴ including information processing, social interaction, personal, and behavior modification.

An evaluation strategy that is formative—An evaluation plan must be designed and based on objective measurement. It must consider at least four distinct areas of evaluation: (a) a process of evaluation of instructional materials, purchased or teacher-developed, as outlined by Tyler and Klein⁵; (b) an evaluation plan of ongoing teacher in-service programs; (c) identification and implementation of appropriate norm-referenced test instruments as well as the identification of valid and reliable criterion-referenced tests commercially developed or teacher-developed; and (d) implementation of program-developed student feedback instruments.

A strategy for implementing change at a school—Paul Berman of the Rand Corporation recently stated that many factors exist in schools that will jeopardize the smooth implementation of innovative educational programs.⁶ Programs may be endangered if they: (a) are imposed on schools by outside sources (not school-based); (b) are "politically" motivated; (c) are motivated only toward obtaining special funding (local, state, or federal); (d) fail to adapt to local school conditions; and (e) are isolated on a school site.

Curriculum writers and program managers must come to grips with the reality of a school's climate and initiate sound management principles that will ensure the success of bilingual programs.

Bilingual Education Can Make a Difference

Bilingual programs in our nation's schools are not new; some existed as far back as the late 1800s. What is new in contemporary American education is the knowledge curriculum developers have for the skillful planning and implementation of such programs. For the non- and limited-English speaking student, bilingual programs provide the fulfillment of the American educational dream—an equal opportunity to learn within quality programs that best meet individual needs.

Maria, with the approval of her parents, was enrolled this year in a successful bilingual program in the Los Angeles Unified School District. She is making good progress toward learning her second language, English, while keeping abreast with other students in content areas. Maria is not only a student and learner, she is a teacher—a transmitter of a culture that can only make all of our lives richer in our pluralistic society.

¹ J. A. Fishman and J. Lovas. "Bilingual Education in Sociolinguistic Perspective." *TESCOL Quarterly*, 1970, p. 4.

² B. S. Bloom *et al.* *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Cognitive Domain*. New York: David McKay Co., 1956.

³ R. W. Tyler. *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950.

⁴ B. Joyce and M. Weil. *Models of Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972.

⁵ L. Tyler, M. F. Klein *et al.* *Evaluating and Choosing Curriculum and Instructional Materials*. Los Angeles: Educational Resource Associates, 1976.

⁶ P. Berman. *Keynote Address*. Title IV-C (ESEA), California State Department of Education, Institute for Project Directors, San Diego, September 27, 1978.



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