Phase Three

The Bilingual Act of 1978 heralded an end to the brief and controversial experiment of a full bilingual education program. It states that "the objective of the program shall be to assist children of limited English proficiency to improve their language skills" (1978). Instruction in the primary language is allowed "to the extent necessary to permit a child to achieve competence in the English language." Referring to English monolinguals, the Act stipulated that "participation of other children in the program must be for the principal purpose of contributing to the acquisition of English by the LEP students."

The controversy between cultural pluralists and cultural uniformists seems to have been temporarily settled in favor of the uniformists. Emphasis is on "transition" programs and "mainstreaming," along with a general movement toward federal deregulation. At the state level in California, for example, there is no longer any mention of the possibility of a full bilingual maintenance program. Bilingual education bills now require strict entry criteria into programs that limit the number of participating students. At the same time, exit criteria encourage early student withdrawal and set a maximum of five years for all students in the program, regardless of their competence in English.

Conclusions

It is perhaps indicative of the American pragmatic tradition to approach a reform such as bilingual education without clear pedagogical definitions of expected results. And true to form, federal, state, and local education agencies never reached a clear consensus over the specific goals of bilingual education. A problem existed, it became acute, a solution was proposed, and monies were appropriated to "see if it worked." "Optimals" were vague: to give learners a "better start," or "greater access to education." Federal funds,

Bilingual Education in Mexico

Robert Miller

While policy makers in the United States debate the merits of bilingual education, the Mexican Ministry of Education is in the process of completing bilingual textbooks for students who do not speak Spanish.

In Mexico, over three million people speak between 125 and 150 different languages and dialects (Miller, 1981). They tend to be poor and live in rural areas of Mexico accessible only by horse or donkey. Since it is difficult to reach these people, it is important to educate them as quickly and as economically as possible.

The Mexican government realizes the implications of research that shows students learn faster when they are instructed in their native language. Studies in Mexico (Modiano, 1966), Canada (Lambert and Tucker, 1972), and the United States (Zappert and Cruz, 1977) all conclude that bilingual education is beneficial to students.

Several years ago, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) began developing materials, based on the work of Paulo Freire, in which students become literate by first learning 17 or 18 words in their native language that contain all the sounds of that language. The words have special meaning to their culture and center on adult occupations, animals, food, or holidays. These words are printed in a primer and a picture is attached. Students discuss each word, divide the word into syllables to make new words, and continue this process until they learn all the basic words. In about six weeks, students can read the newspaper and write simple letters. After they become literate, they are introduced to Spanish words. By teaching literacy first in the native language, students learn about symbol-sound relationships, left-to-right progression, the concept of sentences, and the idea that words are printed speech (Miller, 1982).

Four years ago, the Mexican government recognized the success that INI was having with bilingual education and created a department within the Ministry of Education. The original textbooks produced by INI were replaced with full-color textbooks, teachers manuals, and specific goals and objectives for the teachers.

As of June 1982, the Mexican Ministry of Education had developed primers in 40 languages and 30 dialects (Torres, 1982). The series begins with a book without words in which students manipulate pictures and numbers to learn reading readiness skills such as shapes, color, and direction.

The Mexican government is committed to improving literacy among the non-Spanish-speaking population. Through the use of bilingual textbooks and specially trained bilingual teachers, Mexicans who speak a variety of languages and dialects are learning how to read and write in Spanish as well as in their native languages.□

References

Lambert, Wallace, and Tucker, Richard. *Bilingual Education of Children. The St. Lambert Experiment.* Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1972.

Miller, Robert. "The Mexican Approach to Developing Bilingual Materials and Teaching Literacy to Bilingual Students." *The Reading Teacher* 35 (April 1982): 800–804.

Miller, Robert. *The Primary Schools of Mexico.* Los Gatos, Calif.: Paradox Press, 1981.

Modiano, Nancy. "Reading Comprehension in the National Language: A Comparative Study of Bilingual and All Spanish Approaches to Reading Instruction in Selected Indian Schools in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico." Doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1966.

Torres, Hernandez. Jeffe de Dirección Technica, Dirección General de Educacíon Indigena. Secretaría de Educacíon Pública, Mexico City. Interview, June 15, 1982.

Zappert, Loraine, and Cruz, Robert. *Bilingual Education—An Appraisal of Empirical Research.* Berkeley, Calif.: Bay Area Bilingual Education League, 1977.

Robert Miller is Reading Specialist, Los Gatos, California