

Letters

More on Structured Immersion

The September 1985 issue of *Educational Leadership* featured an exchange between Russell Gersten and John Woodward (pp. 75 and 83) and Ramon Santiago (p. 79) on immersion programs for teaching English to language-minority students in the United States. These authors all made extensive but occasionally inaccurate reference to my research.

One of the questions raised by Santiago concerns jargon; he questions what "structured immersion" might be. One answer is simple: it is defined by the characteristics of the programs Gersten and Woodward described. It is also a term my colleagues and I made up one afternoon in 1981. Some years ago, some Canadian parents wanted more effective French-as-a-second-language classes for their children. The researchers who reported on the resulting program called it "immersion." We noted the characteristics of this *method* of teaching a second language and considered using it to teach English to American language-minority students (Baker and de Kanter 1981).

It seems, however, that this phrase upsets Santiago and those who share his ideology. Immersion, by their definition, is not a method, but a result: it produces a student fluent in two languages. Since we were focusing only on the question of whether immersion would produce fluent English, they argued, we were using the term incorrectly. Consequently, we tried to find another name.

The best alternative we thought of was Structured Program for English Acquisition and Knowledge. Everybody liked that until they realized what the acronym was. We finally settled on *structured immersion*; *immersion* because that's what the method is, and *structured* to denote that it is somehow different from immersion for those who think you can't teach English to children in Texas the same way you teach French to children in Quebec.

Whatever its name, this method seems to be a very effective way of teaching second languages. It is so

effective that people pay Berlitz to learn this way. It is so effective that the military uses it. It is so effective that linguists praise its use in teaching German to children in Wisconsin, Spanish to children in California, and French to children in Maryland. But never, says Santiago, should we use it to teach English to Spanish-speaking children in Texas.

Santiago bases his conclusion solely on ideology. No empirical evidence shows that immersion is less effective for teaching English in Texas than it is for teaching other languages in other places.

Whether immersion works for language-minority children is, as Gersten and Woodward point out, an empirical question. That is why the Department of Education has funded Gersten and Woodward's retrospective study of two immersion programs and a major prospective study of the effects of immersion programs for teaching English to language-minority students.

Santiago criticizes Gersten and Woodward for their "uncritical acceptance of Baker and de Kanter's and my contention that 'transitional bilingual education has had minimal success, that there is no empirical evidence to support its use'" (page 2). But Santiago, as well as Gersten and Woodward, misstate our findings. Here is what we actually said about bilingual education in the paper Santiago cited: "TBE [transitional bilingual education] has had mixed success. Although it has worked in some settings, it has proved ineffective in others, and has had negative effects in some places" (Baker and de Kanter n.d.).

Santiago also mistakenly writes that we said "immersion is superior to bilingual education...." After discussing the literature on alternative ways of teaching bilingual students, including immersion and bilingual education, we said "...this literature offers little guidance in choosing among these alternatives ... a widespread structured immersion demonstration program is especially needed.... Immersion may not transfer successfully from Canada to the United States, but this is an empirical question that

should be answered by direct test." We are not advocates of immersion; we are advocates of experimentation with a variety of methods so that the education of bilingual students can be improved.

Santiago also criticizes us for restricting our review of the literature to English and math skills while ignoring science, social studies, dropout rates, and so on. In fact, we tried to look at these other variables but found no scientifically valid studies of them. Again, this is an empirical issue, and Santiago's claims of benefits in these areas on ideological grounds provide poor policy guidance.

I must also take issue with Santiago's assertion that "the absence of comparison groups in the Uvalde program [would] by Baker and de Kanter's standards invalidate the results." There are two problems with Santiago's assertion. First, Gersten and Woodward do, in fact, present data for comparison groups. Their first analysis used as its comparison group national estimates generated by Danoff (1978) for achievement among low-income Hispanic students. In two other analyses, the comparison group was local students of similar background. Second, Santiago seems to be referring to our conclusions that the norm-referenced evaluation model is invalid in assessing the impact of bilingual programs. Santiago has mistakenly equated the use of percentile scores as a measure with the norm-referenced model. In the norm-referenced model, percentile scores incorporate the norming group as the comparison against which the tested students' progress is measured. It is not proper to do this for bilingual students, if the norms are derived from a monolingual population. But Gersten and Woodward did not use this type of evaluation model. They compared the performance of one group of Hispanic students to another, using percentile scores to provide a common standard of measurement. (NCES would have been better if the two studies used different tests but, given the magnitude of the differences found, it is unlikely that NCES would have

changed the conclusion.)

I share Santiago's belief that there are grounds to have some methodological reservations but, even keeping those reservations in mind, Gersten and Woodward have firmly settled one issue. Advocates of bilingual education have claimed, with scant empirical basis, that English immersion programs will not work as a method of teaching language minority children in the United States. Gersten and Woodward provide two examples of immersion programs that refute this claim. The bilingual program advocates are wrong on this point. However, one unanswered question is whether immersion is superior to bilingual education. Even if there were no reason for reservations about Gersten and Woodward's methodology, this would still be an open question because two programs, no matter how impressive they are, are not enough to settle the issue.

The recently concluded Significant Bilingual Instructional Features Study, the most extensive (and expensive) study ever done of bilingual education programs, found that outstanding bilingual programs use immersion to teach English. These programs differ from those described by Gersten and Woodward in their use of a language other than English as the medium for teaching in some part of the school day. Given that the goal of bilingual programs is to teach English, the question is this: since we know the most effective bilingual programs use immersion for 60 percent of the school day, would it not be even more effective to use it 100 percent of the school day?

KEITH BAKER

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*This manuscript, which Santiago incorrectly cites as a U.S. Department of Education document, is a working draft of a manuscript we were invited to contribute to a collection of readings on bilingual education. The manuscript is not final, and no one has been given permission to read, reference, or quote this draft document. Santiago also indicates that this manuscript was the Baker/de Kanter source relied upon by Gersten and Woodward. That is incorrect. Gersten and Woodward do not cite this manuscript in their references. Moreover, Gersten and Woodward have not had access to the document.

The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent either the policy or opinions of the U.S. Department of Education.

One School's Approach to Character Education

I have just finished perusing the January 1986 issue of *Educational Leadership*. Your overview entitled "Character and Critical Thinking" is a wonderful attempt to kindle the feeling that American schools need to continue developing character. It brings to mind a lot of truly appealing images for most of us as adults and as educators.

There is no doubt that public schools need to help students learn to act in accord with their beliefs to produce a better world. At the Drew School we have worked very hard on the tenets of Global Education for the past four years. As one of the leading schools in our state to work toward this, we have developed various programs relating to world hunger, community outreach, and a study of current events. I am very proud of what our staff has done, and I am sure that they will enjoy several of the articles in

this issue. Thank you again for giving us so much food for thought.

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Honest Adults Model Values Best

In "Fulfilling the Great Tradition Through Interpersonal Honesty: A Response to Wynne" by David Aspy, Cheryl Aspy, and Flora Roebuck, the authors state that "If we want to reinvigorate the great tradition [solid moral values] we must practice it, there is no shortcut."

I commend their practical and accurate message. Children deserve diligent, honest, and patriotic adults—nothing less.

JEANETTE E. TAMAGINI

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No Absolute Values?

Absolutely No Tax Dollars

James A. Beane, in "The Continuing Controversy Over Affective Education," absolutely excludes those of us he terms "absolutist." If he were a racist, then he would send us back to Africa. Lucky for us he is only a bigoted

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Letters

educator who would send us to the private schools where, of course, we belong! Like Professor Beane, I live and work in this "all the people" democracy; therefore, I fully believe my ideas ought to receive just consideration and equal acceptance in the market place of education. However, because Professor Beane feels he has the right and responsibility to shut the public school door in my face, then please allow my graceful exit—WITH MY TAX DOLLAR!

JERRY MALONE

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Beane Replies: Open Inquiry Demands More Questions

I am uncertain as to whether Mr. Malone believes his values are unwelcome in a public school, or whether he disagrees with my emphasis on open inquiry, critical analysis, and valued diversity. Are there beliefs—beyond those basic ones characteristic of a democratic society (I refer here to those "public" values outlined in the article)—that Mr. Malone would insist on for everyone? Are there not alternatives to an *exit* from public schools?

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We Need the Hatch Amendment: "Federal Control of Education" Is a Reality, Not a "Threat"

"Observing the Birth of the Hatch Amendment Regulations: . . ." December 1985/January 1986, is a well-balanced portrayal of the Hatch regulations saga. One flaw, however, must be corrected. The authors state, "This may be the beginning of more direct federal control of education. Our collective task is to alert the profession about what has happened and the potential threat to local control of schools."

First, local control of the schools is a fantasy. According to an August 1981, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement paper entitled "OERI: An Overview," "Federal funds account for ap-

proximately 10 percent of national expenditures on education. *The federal share of educational research and related activities, however, is approximately 90 percent of the total national investment.*" The Mission Statement of the Committee on Coordinating Educational Information and Research (CEIR), Council of Chief State School Officers, 1981, defines "educational information and research" as follows: "basic and applied research, development, improvement, evaluation, policy study, information systems development, data reporting and analysis, and the dissemination of knowledge and information gained from such inquiry." In other words, just about everything that goes on in the classroom is federally funded!

Second, what other than federal regulations for a federal law can protect students against controversial programs developed with federal funds? If all programs and methods covered by the Hatch Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment were dumped and none were funded in the future, there would be no need for the Hatch Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment.

The educational establishment would do well to practice what it is recommending nationwide—the use by students of critical thinking. Such an outlandish statement regarding the regulations leading to a loss of local control should be subjected to the various steps involved in the critical thinking process.

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Letters to the Editor

Comments on Educational Leadership articles are welcome. Address letters to Editor, Educational Leadership, 125 N. West Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Letters may be edited for brevity and clarity.

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