

3-1-2016

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## BILINGUAL EDUCATION: HISTORY, CONTROVERSIES, AND THE PHILOSOPHIES THAT DRIVE IT

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### Introduction

Bilingual education has been, and is, a controversial and emotive topic in the United States. Immigrants have flocked to the United States in search of something better than what they had in their home country. Immigrants come for financial reasons, political asylum, and search for wealth and prosperity. Immigration is a global phenomenon, not inclusive to the United States. In recent months Hungarian police “supervised” hundreds of immigrants into an “Alien Holding Center” who are seeking asylum from war torn countries such as Serbia. According to Grulovic, Djurica and Robinson, (2015) an 11.5-foot fence was constructed along the borders of Hungary with Serbia to keep immigrants from crossing the border. Overwhelmed, 104 busloads of immigrants were sent to Austria and Germany as a way of reducing the impact of such an influx of people. In the United States border guards deport 11.7 million refugees back to their homeland, (Preston, 2013). According to Martin and Yankey 69,900 legally entered the United States in 2014 for political asylum. Dicerbo, (2006) estimates that one in five will be a school -aged child, requiring access to a free and appropriate public education. Because of immigration, both legal, and illegal, the U.S. public School system has felt the “strain” of providing an appropriate and free education to all. The National Center for Public Policy Research (n.d.) issued the following news release, “Each of the tens of thousands of illegal immigrant children pouring across the U.S.-Mexico border remaining in this country is legally entitled to a free public education.”

The U.S. Constitution stipulates in the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment that no state may deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws (The U.S Constitution online, 2007). Within those rights comes a legal obligation to educate all children within the borders of the United States.

Enforcing the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment in the public school system has been a duty since the judgment held by the Supreme Court in the case of Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka in 1954 (Webb, 2006). That responsibility has continued to be a controversial subject in the community, in the school system, and in the court system (Mora 2000). The daunting question that politically has been a major issue remains to be: *how do we educate them appropriately?*

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the history of bilingual education. The literature review will investigate the various controversies that surround bilingual education, and the philosophical forces behind bilingual education.

### Review of the literature

*The History of Bilingual Education*

The passing of the Bilingual Act of 1968 reinforced the necessity for bilingual education in the United States several years after the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) (Tafoya 2007). The *Brown* case was the beginning of legislation focusing on equal opportunities in education for all children. The Bilingual Act of 1968 created federal grants for the promotion of fair and equitable educational opportunities. Title VII under that act appropriated funding to the public school districts to implement programs that would meet the needs of the growing immigration population.

In 1970 the department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) summarized the bilingual act and determined that no one could be excluded from the funding provided by Title VII because they were non proficient in English (Mora, 2005). From 1968-1994 The Bilingual Act of 1968 underwent five reauthorizations to further accommodate English Language (ELL) Learners (Mora 2000). The latest changes have occurred with the legislation of No Child Left Behind in 2001 (Verdugo and Flores,2007).

When society deems that current legislation is in violation of the constitution, laws change. Legislation that legally enforces bilingual education is not an exception. *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974 drew attention to Chinese speaking students in San Francisco, California. It was determined that those students were floundering in school because they lacked the ability to interact in English. The Supreme Court ruled that equality did not exist if the children did not understand the vernacular in which the instruction was delivered. Moreover, *Castaneda v. Pickard* was an additional case that advanced the promotion of bilingual education. *Castaneda v. Pickard* determined that school districts must have: (1) a pedagogically sound plan for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, (2) sufficient qualified staff to implement the plan, and (3) a system to establish and evaluate the program (Tafoya 2007).

Two U.S. states have passed legislation determining that Language Immersion (English Only) is the dominant and appropriate strategy when educating non-native English speakers. The state of California led the initiative entitled Proposition 227. Allowing for only one year of structured instruction in English, following years enforced "English Only". In 1998, 61% (California, 1998) of the constituency voted in favor of Proposition 227. Essentially the proposition stated that non-English speaking students enroll in English-only educational programs. Closely imitating California, Arizona, in 2000 passed Proposition 203 with a 63% supporting vote, which was very comparable to Proposition 227. The Arizona legislation was similar in the fact that a limited enrollment of one school year in structured English instruction with "English Only" following. In both cases structured immersion offered little first language support (Combs, Evans, Fletcher and Jimenez, 2005). Again in 2002, in the same vein, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandated that non-English speaking students be placed in structured immersion classes for no longer than one year before mainstreaming into the general education milieu. NCLB also stated that English language learners must be tested in English on State accountability tests (Combs et al., 2005; Crawford, 2002a). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has strengthened the voice of community members who are proponents of English Only. However, on November 5, 2002 Colorado voters defeated Amendment 31, with a margin of 56% to 44% (Mitchell 2002). According to Escamila, (2003) grass roots leadership, public participation, and strategic publicity made the difference.

Supporters of bilingual education continue to champion that voice by upholding past victories (*Lau V. Nichols*, 1974), which legislated that teaching must be in a language that the child can understand. Needless to say it is still one of the hottest debates in educational circles today (Crawford, 2002b). During the primary presidential election for 2016, Donald Trump and opponent Jeb Bush debated immigration and English Only status. Bush, who occasionally responded in the Spanish language, outraged Trump who asserted that Bush should "set the example by speaking English while in the United States", (Egan, 2015).

## *Controversies concerning bilingual education*

English-only sentiment is not something new to present day society. According to Snyderman and Herrnstein (1983) it was believed that I.Q. tests were administered to immigrants in the early 1900's as a form of documentation to exclude him or her from entry into the United States. Those who appeared to be feebleminded as evidenced by the scores on the assessment were determined unworthy of entering the United States. Administering English assessments to non English participants is somewhat synonymous with present N0 Child Left Behind legislation that mandates *All* children are tested in English on state high stakes evaluations.

During the twenty-first century, one of the loudest opposing voices to bilingual education was that of Ronald Unz. An affluent Californian, Unz financially supported California's Proposition 207, and Arizona's 203 (Escamilla, 2003). When questioned about the successfulness of English only, his replies stated that he was reasonably confident that the opposition to the propositions would diminish when test scores revealed improvement in English skills (Delevett, 1999). Contrary to the bold belief that Mr. Unz projected, some opponents expressed the notion that the California and Arizona laws have simply shifted the responsibility for English language learners to teachers who are monolingual and have less training in teaching English as a second language (Mora 2000).

Multiple studies have concluded that it takes a non-native speaker at least two to ten years to become fluent in a second language (Fillmore and Snow, 2002; Hakuta, 1984; Thomas, 1997). Thomas and Collier (1997) conducted an extensive long-term study from 1982-1996. This study compared programs designed for second language learners and their effectiveness for positive student outcomes. Six school districts were compared in several regions within the United States. They concluded that non-English speakers over the long term benefit from dual language programs. Dual language programs teach academic content area in the native language before teaching content in English. Thomas and Collier (1997) further elaborated that by teaching a child in their native language transitioning to English would happen at a smoother and more rapid rate. Combs et al. (2005) conducted a study that researched the effects of Proposition 203 on teacher, administrator, students and families. The survey concluded that dual language programs were superior to structured immersion programs. Despite research advocating for bilingual education proponents of English Only continue to proclaim the benefits of immersion. Hakuta, (1984) conducted a study to determine what the public sentiment and understanding was of the bilingual programs in the New Haven School District. The study consisted of a Likert type survey with various questions about the bilingual programs in the school district. Participants were chosen randomly from the telephone book and then mailed a survey. Those that did not return the surveys were contacted. The researchers found that community members in opposition to bilingual education were basing their opinions on personal experience. Comments included were, "No one taught me in my own language. I had to learn the hard way and it took me less than a year even though I spoke my own language at home." "This is an English speaking country. If parents want their kids to speak Spanish, they should teach them at home like I taught my kids". Bennett (1986), former Secretary of Education reported that seventeen years of bilingual education from 1969-1986 presented no evidence that bilingual education benefitted those children who it was intended to serve.

Rossell (2000) challenged the effectiveness of bilingual education by saying that the best programs for second language learners are structured immersion programs. Her opinion was based on classroom observations where the majority of English language learners were of Mexican American heritage. She further elaborated that those of a Mexican American heritage are the ethnic group that is most likely to fill up a classroom, and most likely to have a Spanish speaking teacher. Therefore, it was easier to find a qualified bilingual teacher for them to teach

academic content in their native language. Rossell summarized that Mexican American children whose native language is Spanish will have an easier time transitioning from Spanish to English because they also have a Roman alphabet similar to the English alphabet. However, Rossell's major concerns included equity for children from an Asian, African or Eastern European heritage whose first language did not have a Roman alphabet. She argued that there is a lack of consistency in programs regarding bilingual education and that equal access to a free and appropriate education was not pervasive. She asserted that programs catered to Mexican American students and did not offer the same standards to other ethnic groups.

According to DiCerbo (2006) 900,000 immigrants were admitted for lawful permanent residence in the United States. One in six (175,364) of those immigrants were from Mexico. However, 70,116 immigrated from India, 57,827 immigrated from the Philippines, 51,156 from China, 31,514 from Vietnam, 30,492 from the Dominican Republic, and 29,795 immigrated from El Salvador. Although Spanish-speaking students outnumbered all the other languages, equity for all students, as determined by *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), did not prevail.

According to Kymlicka (1999) immigrant communities have chosen to immigrate and therefore have chosen the right to assimilate into the community in which they are living. He claims that group rights conflict with individual rights and that there is confusion over the group rights and individual rights. Kymlicka (1999) stated in an interview with Marin (1999) that in his growing up years he thought that the concept of justice meant giving the Quebecois and Aboriginals special status. Lee (2014) found that even if bilingual education is provided, children do not always take advantage of the instruction. In her study of kindergarten children in a two-way immersion class with an equal population of Korean speakers, and English speakers the Korean children chose to speak in English to peers and teachers. Lee concluded that the children saw "English" as a language of power and chose to use it even when 70% of the curriculum was delivered in the Korean language. In a similar study, Tabari and Sadighi (2014) found that students who were more advanced in a second language were less willing to use, or to agree that instruction in the native tongue was not an inhibitor towards second language acquisition.

Webb (2006) and Orvando (2003) posited that bilingual education has been a topic of debate among educators as early as the Common School era. In the early history of the public school bilingualism was the norm in public schools for those communities that had a large percentage of migrant populations. German was frequently the language of instruction, and early settlers feared that America would become a land of multiple languages and ethnicities. The debate against bilingualism at that time was much the same as it is today. Many feared that English language acquisition would be delayed if the child's mother tongue was used, and that tax dollars would be spent unwisely. The most dominant perception at the time was that by immigrating, participants had "chosen" a land and therefore should speak English. Those who were advocates encouraged the notion that English would be learned at a faster rate if lessons were in the mother tongue first, and therefore would transfer to English at a faster rate. By maintaining their and culture the students would value where they came from and who they were as an individual.

### *The philosophies that drive bilingual education*

According to Williamson (2007) there are two main philosophical views that surround equity in education. The first is Assimilation, the belief that immigrants should assimilate into the mainstream culture and strive to blend in with the rest of the population (Williamson, 2007). Kymlicka (1999) makes the assertion that immigrants should not be catered to because they have chosen to immigrate; therefore by free will they have relocated to a new land. The second view is a liberal philosophy of equity in education.



Liberalism had its' beginning through Paulo Friere, who was a Brazilian educator. Friere was dedicated to bringing literacy skills to the impoverished as a way to liberate them from environments that kept them in a bondage of ignorance (Guttek, 2004). To a liberal, bilingual education is a way to help the downtrodden reach a higher potential.. The main belief underlying liberalism in education is the intent to raise a person's consciousness to think critically about the society that they are living in. With that acute sensitivity to the environment they can then change it for the betterment of humanity (Guttek, 2004).

In a similar vein John Dewey was also a proponent for bilingual education. He championed that the ability to communicate with others is the first step in the construction of knowledge. If students cannot communicate with each other than the sharing of knowledge is impossible. Dewey created an education theory fostering bilingual education until language acquisition mastery at grade level was achieved (Noddings, 2007).

In recent history, past president Ronald Reagan was one of the main voices promoting Assimilation. Regan strongly believed that it was against American ideals to have programs that intentionally preserved native language to the deficit of English acquisition. Regan's conservative views were based in the belief that institutions have a responsibility to preserve the past and to be dedicated to the original goal of education. That goal would be the basics. The basics included learning English as quickly as possible (Guttek, 2004). Comparatively, Rodriguez (2007), shared memories of her mother who instilled in her the "you've got to be better" ideal. Rodriguez compared her mother's words to the growth of a tree. If roots are not strong the plant will not grow. According to Rodriguez, family is the key to keeping a heritage alive and vibrant.

Rodriguez emphasized assimilation. Assimilation without losing your own culture was very important to her. She made mention of how her home was "Mexico" to her. The roles of her family as well as the activities, food, and furnishings in the home were all about Mexico. She stated that she felt like she was in Mexico when she was in her home. She defined culture as keeping a heritage identity as well as blending with the community that you are living in.

Crawford (2001) argues that civil rights and equity in education have been violated with the mandates in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Crawford, 2002b). Assessment in English, enrollment in structured immersion classes, and one-year enlistment limitations all violate civil rights laws. Mora (2005) would agree that language minority children are being denied an equal opportunity in the educational setting.

Is it possible to have a view of bilingual education based in the middle? Is it possible to have a philosophical model that is between the "sink or swim" philosophy and the "Uncle Sam dependency" model?

Essentialism might be one of those middle ground philosophies. Guttek (2004) states that essentialism is a cornerstone of what education should be. Essentialists demand that a curriculum be well defined, teach basic skills, and reflect moral characteristics.

Perhaps Communitarianism might be another middle ground. Communitarianism promotes individualization but also assimilation. In other words immigrants retain their heritage and culture in their private lives but assimilate into the dominant culture in their public lives. By doing so they can contribute to the society and the society can contribute to them. Rodriguez (2007) in her reference to having "Mexico" in her home meant retaining heritage and culture at home while participating in the dominant community.

*Conclusions*

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In reviewing the related literature the research illuminates that the ideal bilingual programs are one-way or dual language programs that teach children academic content in their native language and then add English after the students have several years of instruction in their first language (Thomas and Collier 1997). A typical program for one-way designs might be math, reading, language arts, social studies and science in the native language and perhaps art in English. The bulk of the day is taught in the first language. Dual language programs include native English speakers who desire to learn a second language. In these programs the percentage of English to second language may be the same. Thomas and Collier (1997) suggest that the best programs start with a 90% first language, 10 % second language and then increase teaching in the second language to a higher percentage in future years. Hakuta (1984) suggests that transition to a second language is easy if the child is fluent in academics in their first language. That transition to language acquisition may require seven to ten years to become fluent in a second language.

As evidenced by recent political debates and proposition initiatives, the controversy over bilingual education remains to be in the limelight of American society, especially political venues. As immigrants seek to find solace and calm in the United States, ethnicity and cultural differences may be perceived as a disability rather than desirable. It is ironic that after 61 years since the jury deliberated in *Brown vs. Topeka*, that equity in education is still a major issue. When adult men such as Donald Trump and Jeb Bush taunt each other about "English Only" from a public pulpit, it seems we still have a long way to go.

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