

The Imporatanza von Éducation Bilingüe:
Perspectives on bilingual education at the elementary level

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By

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“Language as an emergent symbolism cannot be static, since it is dynamic it many on occasion be erratic. But those who believe it to be the source of all human error, because it is and must always be in a process of adjustment so long as it is spoken, make the mistake of regarding it as a strait jacket as it if were all habit and no choice. Over long periods of time language has been liberating rather than inhibiting, and its liberating qualities, which are vastly more important, are precisely those which have been forgotten by some modern theorists.”

-Joshua Whatmough

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Introduction

Miguel Rojas Sanchez once said, “education is the evening gown to attend the celebration of life.” Today, this phrase is still, and perhaps more than ever, true. In a world driven by globalization and technology, borders have been erased, communication has become instantaneous and the business world has been forever changed. To help create a strong and secure future in our ever-changing society, education of today’s students is imperative. However, education needs to change with the world, and the world has changed; as more nations have become increasingly interdependent, the exchange of ideas and the interchange between economies have been consequently created. Nevertheless, for these opportunities to occur the world needs people who can communicate in various languages to reach across borders and adapt to the interconnected community of today’s world.

The necessity for reform in the bilingual education system within the United States has been illuminated by the metamorphosis of today’s interconnected culture. Bilingual education needs to be strengthened to achieve optimal success for the next generation of citizens. Changes in the length of time a language is studied, as well as the structure of the bilingual program would create enormous benefits in the comprehension of foreign language skills. Furthermore, if this education began at the elementary level, a foreign language could be learned with greater success and considerable ease.

The purpose of this investigation is to demonstrate the advantages that bilingual education creates when started among children at the earliest age possible. Foreign language acquisition among elementary level students leads to greater achievement in

fluency as well as increased improvements in other areas of cognitive development (Stewart).

Overview

The National Association for Bilingual Education is devoted to advocating the need for bilingualism in the United States. Their mission statement articulates their dedication to “cultivate a multilingual multicultural society by supporting and promoting policy, programs, pedagogy, research, and professional development that yield academic success, value native language, lead to English proficiency, and respect cultural and linguistic diversity” (NABE). However, in order to assess the need for structural reform in most educational systems, the broad term of bilingual education must be defined. At its most basic level, bilingual education is the presence of two or more languages used in an academic setting. The degrees to which the languages are used, as well as in what manner, vary greatly between programs. Bilingual education could be used solely in language instruction classes, taking the form, for instance, of a high school Spanish class. In contrast, it could also be used in a much broader sense and be integrated into core-curriculum classes, for instance through a history class taught in German. Further variations include the age level at which this education occurs as well as the duration of time that it persists. Bilingual education, in the United States, also refers to the instruction of the English language to immigrants and foreign language speaking inhabitants.

History of Bilingual Education in the United States

The concept of bilingual education is not new to the twenty-first century, nor has it always been encouraged and appreciated. In effect, its beginning in the United States can be traced back to the blend of Native American languages and those that immigrants from England, Italy, France and Germany, among many others, introduced to North America. Professor David Nieto of The University of Boston notes that immigration is “one of the authenticities of the United States of America” (Nieto 61). He explains that as a nation one of the foremost elements of the American culture is immigration, which therefore leads to a mixture and presence of multiple languages. However, as the United States began to form, the importance of culturally diverse languages was held to very low regard. In the beginning of the 1880’s Anglicization was forced upon the Native Americans. Although not entirely successful, children of Native American descent were forced to attend boarding schools in an attempt to learn English and abandon their native tongue. Furthermore, the United States attempted to create a solely English speaking nation by changing or eliminating borders to force the population of English speakers to override that of foreign language speakers. For instance, state borders were manipulated to split Spanish-speaking communities in half, to create an English language majority. Another forced marginalization arose from the denying of statehood to areas that lacked a sufficient amount of English-speaking habitants. For instance, when New Mexico was incorporated in 1848 it encompassed the territory of Arizona within its borders. However, because the ratio of English-speaking individuals was too low to declare Arizona as a separate entity, it could not be divided until two years later, when the ratio was sufficient (Nieto 62).

Authors Diego Castellanos and Pamela Leggio also acknowledge the struggle between cultural distinction and a new cultural formation in the United States. In their book, The Best of Two Worlds: Bilingual-Bicultural Education in the United States they assert that in the early development of the country the pressure to create a unified society outweighed the need to remain ethnically diverse. They argue that although immigration was rising rapidly in the late 1880s the concept of pluralism was declining, especially in an educational setting. Similarly, they also state that when the United States occupied Puerto Rico in 1898, annexed Hawaii in 1900 and gained control of the Philippines in 1901 all political and educational proceedings were ordered to be done so in English, forcing the language upon an even more diverse population.

This rationality is furthermore proved with the ratification of the Nationality act of 1906, in which English was officially designated as the sole language to be used in schools. The act also created a stipulation for immigrants who wished to apply for naturalization; section eight of the act explicitly declares “that no alien shall hereafter be naturalized or admitted as a citizen of the United States who can not speak the English language.” This intolerance toward foreign languages was vastly promoted by American politicians as is exemplified by a statement set forth by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1926, “We have room for but one language in this country and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house,” (Nieto 62)

With the gaining popularity of the civil rights movement in the middle of the century, however, the negativity towards diversity led way to appreciation and ethnic application. With the ruling of *Brown vs. The Board of Education* in 1954 the educational

policy that would eventually allow for the creation, and even more so the promotion, of bilingual education was established. The civil rights movement acted as the vital turning point for the reinforcement and reestablishment of bilingual education in the United States. Firstly, the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 established the requirement for the presence of diversity within the educational system. Secondly, Title VI prohibited discrimination within schools and allowed for the denial of governmental funds to schools who failed to provide equal opportunities for learning in regard to a student's national origin.

With this key provision the necessity of bilingual education in the United States became clearly apparent and acted upon. In 1968 the first legislation regarding bilingual education was signed into effect by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Bilingual Education Act serves as Title VII to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In its initial formation it was intended to aid "children who come from environments where the dominant language is other than English" (Liebowitz 17). However, by 1978 the law was expanded upon to incorporate all students who fell into the category of possessing a limited proficiency in the English language. The legislation provides for governmental aid through the compensation of competitive based grants to local school districts to develop programs to help teach students of languages other than English. The act has been most recently amended in 1994 under the Improving America's Schools Act which included several provisions, including the "establishment of new categories of local bilingual education grants, the elimination of mandatory research projects, and the establishment of new categories of personnel training grants" (Osorio-O'Dea 8).

Not only did the 1994 provisions improve the quality of education for non-English speakers, it also provided a commitment to developing a cultural understanding along with bilingual language abilities. With this fundamental change, the perspective on bilingual education viewed foreign languages as a much more valuable resource than previously believed. Tapping into the nation's resource of various languages transformed the United States into a much more competitive nation within the developing international economy (Crawford 20). This notion created two distinctly different, yet intertwining, bilingual educational programs: one aimed at improving the English skills of foreign language speakers, and one aimed at teaching English speaking students a foreign language (Nieto 65). From this act the multifaceted bilingual educational system that is seen within schools today began to emerge.

Survey of Bilingualism in the United States and other World Nations

While it is often seen as necessary to develop English language skills of immigrants and non-native English speakers from as earliest a time as possible, this same approach is not always used in regards to the acquisition of a second language by native English students. It is comparable, however, that if the knowledge of the English language can be improved greatly by vast years of experience, that the same can be said of the study of a second language. For this reason, all foreign language education within the United States should start from as early of an age as possible, most advantageously at the elementary or preschool school level.

Bilingualism within Borders

However, before the validity of this statement can be examined, the necessity for this facet of bilingual education must be developed. In the world in which we live in

today less than nineteen percent of the overall population speaks English as their native tongue. Additionally, within the two hundred countries that encompass the globe, there are over six thousand different languages spoken. Consequently, within single countries there are various languages spoken within its borders (Wei Dewaele and Housen 1). It can be therefore inferred that for many being bilingual is a necessity within one's own country. For instance, in Spain there are four official languages: Castilian (traditionally referred to as simply Spanish), Catalan, Euskara and Galician. Castilian, whose origin is drawn from the Castilla Kingdom which makes up part of the Spanish country today, is considered the universal language of Spain, as each Spaniard will be able to both speak and understand the language. However, regionally other variations of the language are more popularly spoken. In Cataluña and Valencia, most citizens are fonder of speaking Catalan, which is referred to as Valenciano in Valencia but Catalan in Cataluña. Spoken by approximately four million people, the language can also be found in parts of Italy, France and Andorra. Similarly, in the community of País Vasco and the Basque region, which is located near the French Border the inhabitants more commonly speak their own language, Euskara. The Eukaran language is not derived from the traditional Castilian and therefore is not understood by the majority of the Spaniards. Citizens of Galicia, furthermore, prefer to speak Galician, which greatly resembles the Portuguese language. Aside from the four official languages traces of the gypsy tongue Caló, among many others, can also still be heard. Spain is just one example of countries in which bilingual speakers of the same nationality reside.

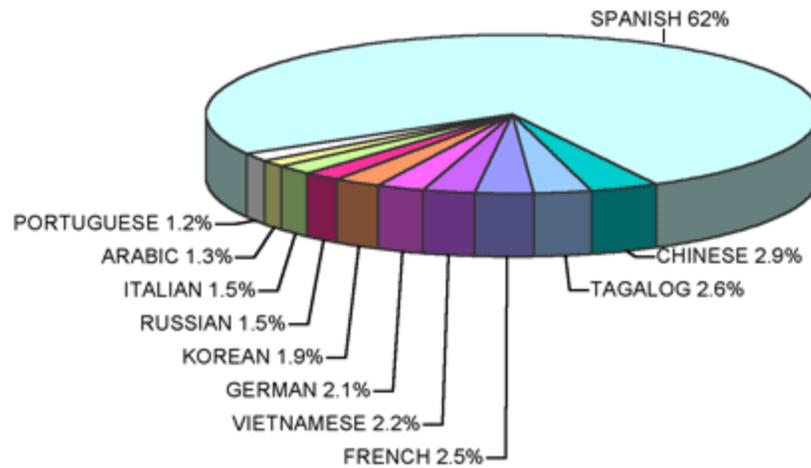
Similarly, in the Amazon region where the borders of Brazil and Colombia meet, more than twenty-five languages exist. Although there is one common language, deriving

from the Tukano tribe, each respective tribe carries the pride of their own tongue, and no languages are held to higher regard. The Tukano language is viewed solely as a mode of communication between varying tribes, rather than as the most important, dominant tongue. In the country of Paraguay the ancestral language Guaraní and Spanish are spoken interchangeably by almost all citizens. The government, governmental agencies and most businesses provide services in Spanish while the ancestral language remains as the preference, spirit and heart of Paraguay. The schools in modern day Paraguay allow for bilingual education systems in which both languages co-exist, an act that works to keep both languages alive and prosperous (Harlan 26-28).

Countries such as this overcome the language barrier by teaching both languages at an early age. If this rest of the world also took this approach the bilingualism communication across cultural barriers would be greatly increased.

The Bilingual Standing in the United States

The United States has also been presented with the problem of overcoming language barriers among its residents. It has become increasingly more necessary to know languages other than English within our nation for various reasons. Firstly, there is no official language in the United States. English is considered the de facto language and eighty two percent of the American population claims to speak it. However, of the 307,006,550 habitants of the country as of 2009, close to ten percent, or 28,101,052 people, speak Spanish. Additionally, the other eight percent of the population speak a total of eighteen different languages (Modern Language Association). The graphic below, breaks down the languages other than English that are most popularly spoken within the country's borders, as of 2005.



Source: MLA Language Map Center

This dispersion of language that can be evidently seen above creates many daily problems for American citizens. Those that do not speak English are often forced to work lower paying jobs; health care facilities often need interpreters of many languages dispensable to help bridge the communication gap between physicians and patients; even the simple pleasure of going out to eat can be complicated by a lack of understanding between individuals of different languages. But perhaps the most challenging obstacle arises within the educational system. Investigations have shown that students of a minority language often obtain grades that are below that of the English-speaking students. Additionally, the rate of students who abandon their studies and do not complete their education is far greater.

A recent study analyzed this hypothesis. A 2008 report of thirty three schools in the state of Virginia investigated the challenges that these foreign language speaking students face. The study affirmed that public schools are “charged with assimilating and educating immigrant children” (Cho and Reich 236) but, as a result of sparsely dispersed

immigrant settlement patterns, the percentage of foreign students is often too small to justify the creation of highly functional programs for English language learners. The study further found that as a result of this small percentage of students, the non-English speaking students are often put into classes where their special needs are “marginalized and their lived experiences are ignored by their teacher” (Cho and Reich 237). The students are thus left without sufficient education or adequate assimilation to succeed in a competitive career driven world, thus creating a cycle of immobility for non-English speakers.

As can therefore be inferred by the study, creating more bilingualism in the United States would immensely benefit those who live within the nation that do not speak English. In public schools immigrants as well as non-English speakers would be able to easily communicate with teachers and students who are bilingual. Less marginalization would therefore occur if a student was placed in a classroom where other students, or the teacher, could give additional help in a student’s native tongue. Cho and Reich state that, “English language learners learn better and faster while learning academic content simultaneously” (236). A bilingual teacher would thusly be able to not only communicate with a student in a native tongue to provide additional aid, but also be able to teach content rich information and allow for immersion education.

The American Attitude of Bilingual Education

Immigrants and non-English speakers are not the only individuals who would benefit from bilingualism. In comparison with many other world nations, The United States is greatly lacking in the education of world languages. Authors Donna Christian,

Ingrid Pufahl and Nancy Rhodes describe one perspective on the incipience of this lack of education. They argue that, “The U.S. doesn’t often look beyond its own borders for new ideas in education, perhaps because many Americans view their country as a global leader, always on the forefront of social innovation” (226). This at times can also foster into sentiments of hostility and arrogance on the part of many Americans. For instance, a republican candidate for governor of Alabama in 2010, Tim James, released a statement in regards to immigration and language assimilation. In the statement he declared, ““This is Alabama. We speak English. If you want to live here, learn it.” This negative attitude that exists in profound amounts is a large part as to why the bilingual rate in the United States is much lower than countries abroad. However, the politician fails to acknowledge one key point of the American society: that within the United States there is no official language.

Assimilation and Accommodation

This brings to question two paradoxical ideas within today’s society: assimilation and multiculturalism. Within the United States there tends to be a misconception between these concepts as well as a contradiction within our values as Americans. As a nation, our patriotism often prides itself on the label of being the world’s melting pot, yet there is also an apparent and overlying presumption of what is American and what is not. A melting pot assumes that many cultures can live together and thusly form the creation of a culture of cultures. The presumption of an American, however, suggests that one culture is superior and dominant above the others. With assimilation, in regards to culture, ethnic identities and heritages are combined and molded into one broader, more encompassing culture, usually one that is already in existence. For instance, assimilation occurs among immigrants when they adopt the use of a different language and adhere to

the culture of their new home. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, consists of the presence of various and diverse cultures and cultural identities within one cohesive society. Multiculturalism is apparent when, for instance, an immigrant arrives in the United States and remains true to his or her own ethnic culture while also living within the American way of life. The way that the government of the United States is structured one could presume multiculturalism is more suited for the American culture. The lack of an official language, the large heritage make-up that the country was built upon as well as the access to programs of naturalization all lean toward a society in which individuals can live side by side in peace, yet diversity. For this peace to exist, however, more tolerance and appreciation of other cultures is imperative. Perhaps within the United States foreign language education could lead to a better understanding of a non-ethnocentric reality. Learning to communicate in the native languages of those who live within our own borders could consequently create a greater sense of world unity and decreased hostility.

The Empowerment of Foreign Languages

Authors Achugar and Pessoa describe the magnitude of language attitude within societal and economic relationships today. They define such attitudes as the “shared evaluations that associate particular language varieties with particular values,” (2). Furthermore they examine how these attitudes, traditionally and modernly, create predispositions on the importance of foreign languages in the American society. Traditionally, languages of the minority, and the individuals who speak them, were seen as less powerful and unintelligent than the language of the majority, English. In contrast however, this point of view has and transformed into a new language attitude and predilection, one that favors and empowers the use of foreign languages. This new

attitude is directly related to the interconnectedness that has been necessitated and shaped by the new realities of the twenty first century.

Arguments for Strengthening Bilingual Education in the United States

To maintain business relations abroad today, for instance, many companies require individuals who can speak the languages of people in different countries. Additionally businesses within the nation also seek bilingual individuals to cater to the existing diverse ethnic make-up. For instance in various parts of California, including Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, police officers and firefighters can add an extra five to ten percent onto their annual salary by exhibiting fluency in Spanish (Stokely 126). The World Bank grants a similar premium for bilingual efficiency, and offers more bilingual positions than positions in any other discipline, as they deal with every part of the world (127). State Farm agent Mike Livingston of Santa Rosa, California realizes the importance of bilingual employees. He explains that, "For me, it's especially important because almost sixty percent of my business is from the Latino community, I have three team members who are bilingual and [they] take pride in what they do, as well as providing excellent customer service," (Hollister 1).

Lessons from International Models

Regardless of the field or domain under which an organization conducts business, bilingual fluency has become a necessity, consequently making a strong program for bilingual education absolutely imperative. To fortalice the system within the United States foreign language education systems abroad should be examined and used as a template. In Austria, for instance, students learn English beginning at the elementary

level, and continuing throughout the secondary level and above. The students “know chemical formulas, higher algebra, and, above all, spoken and written English,” (Frank 380). English is the official second language of the country and is extremely prevalent throughout the daily life of its citizens. In addition to its presence in all of Austria’s public schools, English lectures, movies, newspapers and books are also widespread throughout the small country. The positive language attitude toward the prevalence of English can be seen throughout the popularity of these English learning tools. In fact, lectures and movies conducted in English are often much more populated by the Austrians than are those performed in German because of the desire to learn, and preserve knowledge of the language (Frank 379). In the educational programs students are “drilled in pronunciation and grammar,” given frequent oral examinations, involved in translation activities, vocabulary building exercises and creative writing, (Frank 380).

In the United Kingdom the Department of Education and Skills set forth a goal to address the growing need of bilingualism and knowledge of world diversity. The department developed a goal declaring that “The people of the U.K. should have the knowledge, skills, and understanding they need to live in and contribute effectively to a global society and to work in a competitive global economy” (V. Stewart 230). Bilingual education in the United Kingdom begins at the average age of seven and incorporates not only language education but also education concerning economic growth and cultural content. The department also established an International School Award program that rewards schools for integrating “international content into their curriculum,” (V. Stewart 230). Similarly, China realized the importance of language and world diversity and implemented an educational program to reflect this need. English is the official second

language of the country and is taught to students beginning in the third grade. In addition, world geography and history classes are incorporated into the curriculum to try and prepare students for the increasingly interconnected world. The Project on Education for International Understanding furthermore allows for the updating of school textbooks to include more recent knowledge of global concepts (Stewart 231). The attributes of bilingual education abroad have had immense benefits on students and cultures as a whole.

Arguments in Favor of Bilingual Education at the Elementary Level

The benefits of bilingual education throughout the many aspects of the educational field can be further expanded when this instruction begins at the elementary level. Children at younger ages are more responsive to foreign language acquisition and more likely to develop a native like pronunciation (Marcos 1). Introducing a child to a foreign language at an early age, firstly, allows for a longer period of time to study the language. Secondly, when the language begins at earlier ages the students are able to develop a sense of what sounds and syntax is appropriate and correct, rather than simply learning to memorize and repeat these language infrastructures. Similar to the way in which children grow to learn how to speak the English language correctly, they can learn to do so with foreign languages. Through the implementation of elementary level instruction students will acquire the skill of “hearing and distinguishing different sounds, understanding that those sounds have meaning to many, though they are constructed in ways that are different from their first language” (Stewart 13-14).

Increased Cognitive Abilities

When this foreign language acquisition is provided at earlier ages there is also a greater increase in knowledge in other educational disciplines. Studying a second language leads to greater creativity, better problem solving skills and a more prevalent understanding of overall vocabulary and structure of the students native tongue (Stewart 11-12). A 2001 investigation of an elementary school in Charlotte, North Carolina studied the progress and benefits of a language immersion program. In the program the students chose one foreign language, French, German or Japanese, beginning at the kindergarten level. In contrast, they do not begin studying the syntax of the English language-including vocabulary, grammar and spelling-until the students begin the third grade. The study found that “ninety four percent of the third graders and one hundred percent of the fifth graders in the immersion school scored at or above grade level in reading in English” (Stewart 14). Another study conducted by Turnbull, Lapkin and Hart in 2001 examined test scores in various educative disciplines of over five thousand students throughout Ontario, Canada. Each of the students were participants in a language immersion program and were tested in the areas of math, reading and writing. By grade six the test scores proved that the grades of the students in the program exceeded those of the students who did not participate in the bilingual education program in both the disciplines of math and writing (Stewart 14). Furthermore, an investigation by Bournot-Trites and Reeder conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching mathematics with the use of a foreign language studied to distinct groups of students. The first was comprised of students who were taught the subject through the use of the French language eighty percent of the time and the use of English only twenty percent of the time. The second group, however, split the time between the foreign language and native

language fifty percent of the time evenly. By the end of the sixth grade the results of the experiment showed that the group that spent their time evenly distributed between both languages scored lower on standardized test scores than the group in which the majority of the instruction was done through the foreign language (Lazaruk 616).

Understanding the Importance of Diversity

Students who study a foreign language also develop a deeper understanding of diversity and global culture. Bilingual education can enhance geographical knowledge as well as provide for a more widespread comprehension of history and science.

Appreciation of art and music may also be consequently enhanced (Stewart 14). A hypothesis set forth by Cummins and Swain in 1986 also suggests that students can apply academic aptitudes from one language toward the acquisition of a second language. They explain that these skills are “manifestations of a common underlying proficiency” which can therefore be used to increase “linguistic awareness, greater flexibility in thought, and more internal examination of language” (Lazaruk 614).

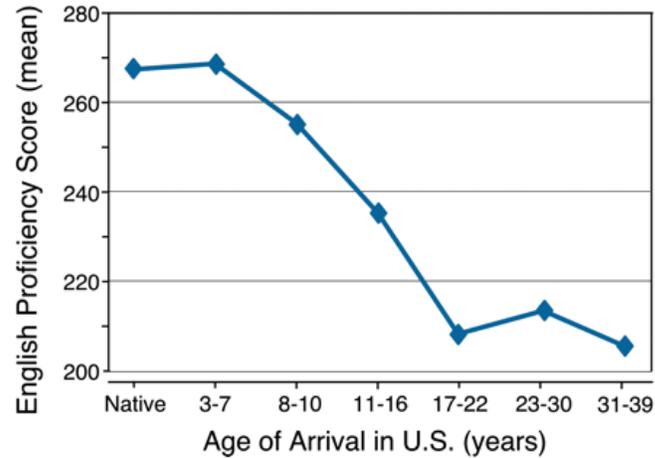
The Age Debate

Teachers and linguistic experts claim, however, that there is a critical age in which this foreign language acquisition should begin. Although opinions vary on the exact age, suggestions vary from the ages of two, three, five and seven, with a cut off at the age of thirteen (Chura). This time frame, often referred to as the window of opportunity or the critical period, reflects an environment of complete immersion. Students at these ages are more capable of reproducing sounds in a way that does more than act as a simple replication, but rather creates meaning and significance (Stewart14). Professor of Psychology, Dr. Fred Genessee, of McGill University asserts that children are able to learn multiple languages simultaneously when this education occurs at the age

in which they are learning their first language (Patterson and Thomas). In other words, it is plausible and beneficial for a child to learn a second language, for example French, at the same time at which they are learning their first language, like English. At this age children will be able to develop an innate knowledge of both languages, rather than learning a new language after the correct syntax and language structure of one has been fully developed.

The development of native English speakers learning a foreign language can be compared to the immigrants who arrive in the United States and learn English as a second language. One study that examined this comparison looked at a selection of children from the latter group. In the study immigrants from both Korea and China were studied. The children spoke their native tongue within their households, but learned to speak English in school and in the outside community. The results of the investigation illustrated that immigrants between the ages of three and seven developed a higher proficiency of the English language, in regards to grammar, than those who arrived in the United States at older ages. Particularly, the younger students obtained grammar skills that were distinctly comparable to American born adults. The following chart maps the relation between age and language development, pertaining to the study regarding Korean and Chinese immigrants. As can be inferred from the chart, with an increase in age at the time in which an immigrant will begin studying the English language, the lower the score of the English proficiency (AERA 3)

Figure 2: Comparing Immigration Age and English Proficiency



Source: American Educational Research Association

Johnson J. S. , Newport E. L. (1989) *Cognitive. Psychol.* 21:60-99.

When this rationale is applied to the other spectrum of bilingual education- teaching a foreign language to an English speaking student- it is clearly evident that the earlier the language acquisition begins, the greater the level of proficiency that will be gained. A literature review of findings from three different studies, Genessee 1988, Snow 1987 and Long 1990, concluded that each one showed that bilingual education is most effective when commenced between the ages of zero to six. Furthermore, each of the studies showed that when foreign language learning occurs after this window of opportunity ultimate language achievement is decreased, especially in the area of phonetics (Hyltenstam and Viberg 197).

Evidence for this rationality can be confirmed by investigating how a child first and foremost learns to communicate through language. Children develop the knowledge of spoken language through the use of observation and association between sounds and meaning, most intensively within the first three years of life. Primarily, infants must learn

to distinguish individual words as well as patterns of sounds within sentences. This melody of language involves the pattern of sounds and pauses, the intonation of pitches as well as the volume of the voice. Only after these fundamental aspects of language are absorbed by a child can he or she begin to assign meaning to the sounds that they detect. The development of language in the first three years of life can be briefly explained in the chart below.

Figure 3: Language Development from Birth to 5 Years

Age	Language Development
Birth	Sounds
0-3 months	Differentiating cries - baby uses a different cry for different situations
4-6 Months	Vocal Play - gurgling, babbling
7-12 Months	Speech like babbling including the use of consonants and vowels. First words - "mama", "doggie"
1-2 Years	Use of two word questions - "No doggie?", "Where ball?"
2-3 Years	Two/three word utterances. Use of attributes - "Big", "Furry"
3-4 Years	Combination of four or more words in sentence form
4-5 Years	Use of long and detailed sentences. Use of "adult-like" grammar

Source: ADD/ADHD Online Information
ADDers.org

A 2001 study further found that infants at the age of nine months can distinguish between sounds relative to their language. By the age of nine months infants tend to recognize, and favor, the sounds of their native tongue. In the study infants of English speaking parents listened longer to the phonetics that make of the English language than those of the Dutch language. Additionally, children born to Dutch speaking parents

preferred listening to sounds found within the native tongue. Through this study it is clear that children learn language at a much more natural and effortless rate than that of adults. It can therefore be concluded that children have an easier disposition toward learning languages (Driscoll and Nagel).

With the realization of greater ease that a second language can be obtained during childhood years, paired with the various benefits from both other educative disciplines, as well as the expanded opportunities of communication that are thusly created, foreign language education should begin at the earliest level possible. To ensure that all children are given a chance to develop this skill, regardless of parental ethnicity and heritage, bilingual education should begin at the earliest grade level possible.

Constructing an efficient bilingual education program

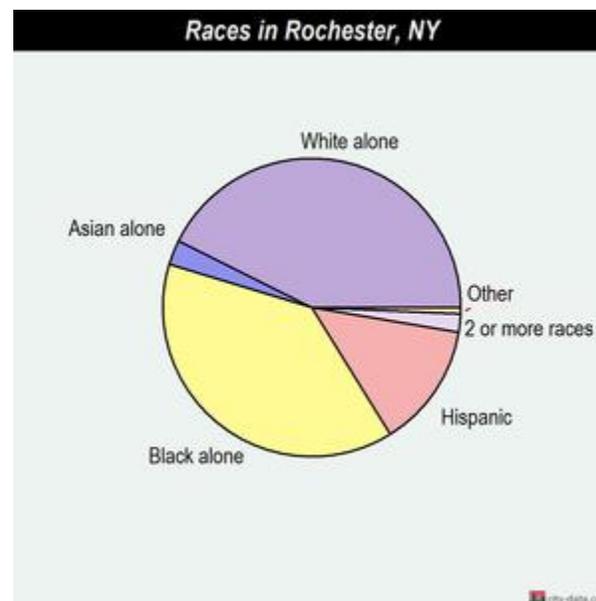
After the necessity and benefits of bilingual education among children of young ages has been identified, each school or school district must develop a program that is appropriate for their respective needs. This includes not only choosing how to integrate the language into the school's curriculum but also which languages should be studied.

Choosing the Optimal Languages

To select the most advantageous languages for each region three important aspects should be investigated and considered. Primarily, which languages would be economically profitable in the future of the students? Secondly, which languages will provide students with greater opportunities for employment after the completion of their schooling? Lastly, which languages, if developed, will provide for greater salaries on behalf of the students as future employees? (Grosse, Tuman and Critz 458) In other

words, the individuals developing the education programs should consider whether or not fluency in a certain language would be useful and practical based on not only regional make-up but opportunities for use of the language abroad. For instance, a particular region may choose to focus on two main languages such as Mandarin Chinese and Spanish based on the ethnic make-up of their respective population as well as the profound presence of both of these languages found throughout the world. Running a search of races found within regions may also help to develop the best suited foreign language programs. In Rochester, New York, for example, the ethnic make-up is fairly diverse and a need for bilingualism is clear, as is demonstrated in the pie chart below.

Figure 3: Ethnic Diversity of Rochester, NY



Source: City-data.com Zip code 14602, 2009

Studying the chart, the school district of Rochester could fairly conclude that encompassing a Spanish language program would be beneficial for the city. Using the three question model of Grosse, Tuman and Critz instruction of the Spanish language could be validated. Primarily, based on the ethnic make-up of Rochester, the language

would be economically beneficial to the students within the program. Secondly, because of the language's vast presence both nationally and internationally- Spanish is the second most spoken language within the United States (Modern Language Association) as well as ranked as the second most used throughout the world with an estimate that 4.93% of all world inhabitants speak Spanish as their native tongue (Central Intelligence Agency). -greater job opportunities will be available in the future to bilingual speakers. And lastly, from the statistics of its use, it can be determined that fluency in Spanish will also create higher advancements in a student's future salary.

Strengthening the Structure

To further optimize the benefits for each student within the bilingual education system, the development of effectively structured programs are essential. The duration of years, daily time exposed to the language as well as the manner in which the language is instructed all vary throughout the various types of foreign language programs. Moreover, each of these areas affects the degree to which the students acquire the language as well as the proficiency attained.

A brochure issued by the American Educational Research Association on the *Essential Information for Education Policy* seeks to summarize the aspects of necessity that all bilingual education systems should encompass. The Association states four assertions that increase the effectiveness of early foreign language education:

1. "Integrating the second language with instruction in other subjects;
2. Giving learners ample opportunities to engage in meaningful discourse with other students and teachers using the foreign language;
3. Exposing learners to a variety of native speakers of the target language; and

4. Focusing instruction on attaining the language skills needed for communicating about and understanding academic subject matter, not on mastering a foreign language for its own sake” (AERA 2).

The Multilingual Children’s Association agrees with these four educational proposals. The organization explains that foreign language acquisition is much easier when children are exposed to not only adults who speak the language, but other children as well. In fact, the association claims that children learn much more from interaction between other students than rather from just direct instruction and educational exercises with adults and teachers. Additionally, the MCA articulates that students should spend at least three of their five school days with a focus on the language (Multilingual Children’s Association). Founder Christine Bosemark further recommends that children spend at least thirty percent of their “waking time” immersed in the target language (Chura). The association also agrees in the importance of developing “meaningful discourse.” It is not only the quantity of time exposed to the foreign language, but the quality of this duration of instruction. The use of books, movies and interactional activities can all help to reinforce the language through the use of repetition in addition to acting as a tool for engaging the attentiveness of the students. Similarly, the choice of instructors has an enormous impact on the quality of foreign language education received. It is imperative that the teachers within the program use correct grammar and sentence syntax, regardless of a student’s age, to ensure that the student’s are developing a correct internal sense for the language. In alignment with the American Educational Research Association’s forth assertion, the MCA also establishes that it is important to teach in an age appropriate

matter to be sure that the language is developed to the highest possible level with a complete enrichment of the language (MCA). This ensures that the language program is not overwhelming nor serves merely as a tool master “a foreign language for its own sake” (AERA).

Examining the Bilingual Education Models

There are three main program structures in existence today in the bilingual education system: FLES, FLEX and Immersion. Each model encompasses diverse guidelines and structure, and focuses on various language fluency targets. While all programs have strengths and weaknesses, it is most beneficial for a school district to select the one in which will most optimize the students as well as the community as a whole. Language acquisition, cost, role of teachers and re-organization needs should all be assessed when looking at each program. If this investigation is done and the most fitting program is chosen, the successfulness of the bilingual education program in all aspects, including scope, efficiency and ability to be sustained, will be optimized to the furthestmost extent.

FLES Programs

The first program is Foreign Language in Elementary Schools, commonly referred to as FLES. The structure of this model is fairly simple and categorizes language education as a separate academic subject. Students normally attend a foreign language class two to three times each week and develop a base on which further language acquisition can be attained.

Although the range and scope of FLES programs vary greatly the advantages and disadvantages are essentially consistent. One advantage of this program, aside from the creation of a fundamental base for future learning, is the presence of the language

education at the elementary school level. With this, children are being exposed to the idea of foreign languages and achievement in other academic fields can consequently be positively affected. This language presence may also create a lasting knowledge of appreciation for diversity and differing world cultures. Program supporters such as the FLES-Bilingual Section of the American Association of Teachers of French state that, “a foreign language component in the elementary school core curriculum is mandated if our basic educational philosophy involves providing for children experiences that help them learn to live harmoniously and purposefully in the world,” (Kunkle 5). Secondly, students may also develop near-native pronunciation of the target language (Stewart 12). Moreover, in programs of Foreign Language in Elementary Schools teachers of all core subjects are not required to be bilingual. In contrast, only the teachers assigned to language classes must be fluent in at least one language other than English. However, there are various drawbacks to the structure of FLES programs as well. Firstly, although adequate language proficiency can be attained, the level of fluency in a foreign language is often not as solidified as that of students in other bilingual education curriculums, such as immersion programs. Secondly, bilingual education is limited to only acquisition of minority languages to speakers of the majority language. In other words, a German immigrant within an American school who needs to develop English proficiency will not benefit from this type of program. Schools that incorporate FLES programs into their academic structure may therefore also need to develop separate plans for English language education to students of limited English proficiency.

The district of Fairfax County Public Schools in Falls Church, Virginia has adopted the use of the FLES program to promote bilingual education. Within the country

twenty three separate elementary schools offer this model of language instruction, with languages including Arabic, Spanish, Chinese and Latin. The curriculum includes three main content objectives: spoken performance, cultural knowledge and linguistic context focus. The overall goal of the program is to obtain communicative ability rather than focus of deep “grammatical mastery.” Within Fairfax County the majority of the bilingual education classes begin during the first grade with comparable programs throughout both the middle school and high school curriculums also in existence. The County states that the FLES program is the most cost efficient option while still developing proficiency in the target language as well as acting as a foundation for increasing other cognitive abilities (FCPC).

FLEX Programs

The second type of bilingual education program is referred to as Foreign Language Exploratory or Foreign Language Experience (FLEX). In this type of foreign language instruction, the target language, or languages, is studied in a much broader sense than those of FLES programs. Rather than developing proficient knowledge of the language spoken by a culture, students often study the cultural make-up of a country and learn basics of the languages spoken by those found within the society. A few languages are therefore studied on a habitual basis, which, like FLES programs, provides a respectable basis for further foreign language acquisition. The class instruction is usually conducted in English rather than in the language being studied, but some basic communication may be introduced. Class frequency and duration vary throughout districts and educational systems, but the majority of FLEX programs begin at the elementary school level (Reeves).

The main advantage of FLEX programs is the development of global diversity intelligence that students gain. The incorporation of FLEX programs into curriculums that lack a sufficient amount of bilingual teachers is also easier facilitated. Similarly, this structure also provides a platform for future education and allows students to survey various languages before choosing one or more languages to work toward gaining fluency in. An important achievement of the program is the creation of strong enthusiasm for bilingual education. The lack of proficiency gained through this model of program is the most evident disadvantage, as not enough language instruction is included to achieve fluency in reading, writing or speaking.

Fairfax County Public Schools also offer FLEX programs during summer sessions and as an after school program. In the after school option students meet two or three times each week for about an hour and offer investigation into various languages including Spanish, Chinese, French, Italian, German, Hindi, Arabic and Sign Language. The County's program teaches children about basic phrases and vocabulary as well as about the culture of the targeted language. The program uses interactive methods, such as games, art and music to teach the students about the languages, thusly creating high levels of enthusiasm among the children. The program is open to elementary school students, who make up two separate age categories, first through third graders and fourth through sixth grade students. The program's overall mission is to "enable children to enter foreign language classes in middle school at level II" (FCPC).

Immersion Programs

In programs of immersion, classes are instructed in the target language, or languages, throughout the entire class, or for at least one half of the time of instruction. In this particular model, the language is used more as a "vehicle of instruction" rather than

treated as a solitary subject, as is history or mathematics (Stewart 12). Typical immersion programs lead to vast development of the target language, as the students often develop a high level of proficiency. One drawback, however, is that each school requires a vast amount of bilingual teachers. Although a seemingly daunting task, it could be easily corrected by developing a staff of teachers who are either English-speakers or foreign language speakers, or teachers who are fluent in both. Each teacher could then rotate and teach various subjects in their assigned language, allowing at least half of the instruction to be perused in a language other than English. Furthermore, overtime with these suggested improvements to bilingual education as a whole, the statistic of bilingual individuals will be greatly increased.

In San Francisco, the Jose Ortega School possesses an immersion program that begins at the kindergarten level. The school's objective for the program is to teach students fluency in both English and Mandarin, which is the most spoken language worldwide. In the school, core subjects including math, history, science and art are instructed by a teacher who is completely fluent in Mandarin. The students are therefore instructed in Mandarin for eighty percent of the class time. The other twenty percent of class time is used to teach English language arts, by an English-speaking teacher. One beneficial aspect of this model is that the teachers do not necessarily have to be bilingual yet vast fluency in two separate languages is being achieved (Jose Ortega Elementary School).

A similar approach occurs in a specialized immersion program in Beijing, China. 3e International, which is supported by an independent foundation from Hong Kong, teaches children from all ethnicities to speak, read and write both Mandarin and English.

Within the school students from twenty five different nationalities are enrolled, many of which speak neither of the target languages. Nevertheless, the program boasts extremely high achievement rates. The curriculum includes two sectors of education to incorporate subjects that are instructed through both languages. In English classrooms, for instance, students are taught subjects of “English language arts plus science, mathematics, technology, and visual arts,” while in Chinese classrooms, “children turn their focus to Mandarin language arts, global studies, performing arts, and physical education” (Soderman 55). Within the first year of the program, students are able to communicate conversationally in both languages. Additionally, students who enroll in the 3e International School as preschoolers can proficiently read and write in mutually English and Mandarin by the first of second grade (Soderman 55-56).

When students within a school are non-native English-speakers immersion programs can also be extended to become dual language immersion programs. In this model, two target languages exist: English as well as one foreign language. Such models act as a vehicle to promote both English education, for speakers of other languages, as well as promote bilingualism for the speakers in which English is the native tongue. Authors Alanis and Rodriguez agree that dual language immersion is advantageous to both sectors of bilingual education students. They state that “English learners benefit from retention and development of their native language while acquiring English, and English speakers enjoy exposure to real speakers of the foreign language,” (306). Additionally, the authors describe specific guidelines that effective dual language immersion models should integrate. Firstly, the creation of rigorous standards for academic achievement must exist, regardless of the language in which the subjects are

educated through. Secondly, there should be a strong equality promoted between both languages. With this, the acquisition of one language is not placed above the attainment of the other. The students, therefore, should be able to interact with other students in both languages, and experience a sense of pride in being able to do so. Thirdly, academic achievements in regards to both language and subject knowledge should be age appropriate, and although challenging, realistic (Alanis and Rodriguez 312-313).

An elementary school in central Texas, City Elementary School, exhibits a dual language immersion program that began in 1995 and has received exemplary recognition for the success of their bilingual education instruction. The inspiration for the use of this model of bilingual education stemmed from the population makeup of the area. Within the community there is a large presence of Mexican American individuals. Consequently, close to thirty percent of the school's students derive from a household in which Spanish is the primary language spoken. The need for English education among these individuals and the obvious advantages of teaching Spanish to students of the majority language, English, led to the development of a ninety-ten dual language immersion program. A ninety-ten model provides that beginning at the kindergarten level the minority language is used as the language of instruction ninety percent of the time, and the majority language the remaining amount of class time. The City Elementary School begins their students on a schedule in which they are taught through the Spanish language through this ninety percent model, and English only ten percent. The school's model then decreases the use of Spanish by ten percent each year, consequently increasing the use of English by ten percent each year as well. This reduction and escalation occurs until the

languages are used an equal amount of time, becoming a fifty-fifty model. The goals of the program are threefold:

1. “To promote high levels of oral language proficiency and literacy in both Spanish and English.
2. To achieve proficiency in all academic subjects, meeting or exceeding district and state standards.
3. To cultivate an understanding and appreciation of other cultures and to develop positive attitudes toward fellow students, their families, and the community”
(Alanis and Rodriguez 309).

A study of the schools program resulted in a finding of a positive correlation between the length of time in which the languages were studied and fluency. The study looked at the English Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, a required standardized test occurring in primary and secondary schools, beginning in 1999 and culminating with the 2005 school year. The exam tests knowledge in the areas of reading, writing, social studies, mathematics and science. The study investigated the successfulness of the program by focusing on students test scores in the fifth grade in reading, mathematics and science, the final year of the curriculum. The results proved that the average score of the students within the dual language immersion program surpassed the grades of other fifth grade students across both the district as well as the state. The mathematics score was particularly impressive, with a one hundred percent passing rate for the City Elementary School fifth grade class throughout the 2000-2002 school year periods. (Alanis and Rodriguez 308-311). The immense triumph of this program to meet all three of its objectives is proof of the advantages of bilingual education. The program demonstrates

the possibility to increase bilingualism without hindering, rather conversely enhancing, scores in other academic areas.

Each school district must select the bilingual education program that will be most profitable for their respective needs. With the most advantageous gains resulting from immersion and dual language immersion programs, schools would most benefit from the incorporation of this system. However, when financial constraints and staffing issues make the attainment of these programs unreachable, FLES and FLEX programs provide a fundamental base of language intelligence, while still creating greater gains in language and academic development than students who do not bring this education until further on in their academic career.

Perspectives on the Disadvantages of Bilingual Education in an Elementary Setting

Regardless of the type of bilingual education program a school employs, there are many people who believe that the disadvantages of foreign language education among children of younger ages greatly outweigh the previously mentioned advantages. Some believe that bilingual education can create a magnified limitation within primary and targeted languages. This belief stems from the idea that if students are exposed to two languages, they will not be able to develop either language to a fully fluent extent. In other words, if the time is divided between the two languages, it is possible that students will not understand any language to a full level. Furthermore, others argue that the discovery of a student's own cultural identity will be hindered if they are exposed to various cultures on a regular basis. For instance, these individuals believe that if English speaking students are taught from an earlier age about the culture of Spanish America,

they may find it difficult to distinguish the Spanish culture from their own ethnic background (Baker and Jones 8). Another disadvantage stems from the concern that parents and guardians of students who partake in bilingual education programs in an elementary setting will not be able to help their children with homework pertaining to the foreign language. This reasoning explains that if the parents themselves are not fluent, or at least knowledgeable, in the target language they will not be able to give support and aid to their children (Baker and Jones 9).

Some critics of bilingual education believe that the instruction of foreign languages within American schools poses a dangerous threat to the American identity. Author Peter Duigan agrees with this assertion. He claims that bilingual education hinders the necessary assimilation of immigrants into the American culture. Furthermore he alleges that by allowing immigrants to be instructed in native languages rather than solely learning to speak in English, the aspiration for “Americanization” is decreased. Supporters of this conviction believe that bilingual education causes a dilution in the desire to obtain the American dream. Duigan advocates for the elimination of bilingual education systems, aside from the instruction of English to students of limited English proficiency, as a whole; he states that “if the number [of] immigrants is reduced, bilingualism eliminated, and Americanization encouraged, there will be little danger to U.S. unity” (Duigan 3).

Disputing the Disadvantages

Although critics to bilingual education find various flaws in the foreign language acquisition, many can be refuted by surveying the aforementioned investigations and studies. Firstly, the magnified limitation theory that many opponents believe is validated

can be disproved by the looking at the results of the children within City Elementary School. The standardized test scores of the students within the dual language immersion program challenge this hypothesis; the results demonstrated that the use of Spanish as a language of instruction did not hinder the development of English in neither writing nor reading. In fact, the scores illustrated that the use of the Spanish language advanced the knowledge of the students in these areas and caused them to outscore students in schools without the language immersion program. Therefore, bilingual education is not an impediment to the full development neither of the English language nor of the targeted language.

The second suggested disadvantage of an obstruction to the development of cultural identity can be disregarded when the interconnectedness of today's world is acknowledged. As a result of the globalized and internationally dependent economy and politics of the world today, it is critical that the students currently enrolled in the educational system, and the students of the future, become fully aware of cultural diversity. Being exposed to various cultures throughout the course of bilingual curriculums helps students to become aware of outside traditions and resistant to the fallacy of ethnocentrism. Consequently, they become aware of not only their sole culture practiced within their family and society but learn tolerance for the culture of others as well. Additionally, by looking within the melting pot society of America the argument that children only become acquainted with numerous cultures within school settings is invalidated. Among the ethnically diverse American population, children come into contact with different cultures and heritages among friends, neighbors and even within their own family. Individual cultural identity formation, therefore, if seen as existing and

favorable, is impeded on by the American population and ethnic diversity as a whole, not the presence of bilingual education.

The concern over a lack of parental knowledge and ability to aid their children with bilingual school work is a valid trepidation, but can be corrected through the proper utilization of the educational program. For instance, to ensure that children can gain access to the extra help they may need in the completion of homework and adequate test preparation tutors and after school programs should be in place. Additionally, parents and staff should be cooperatively supportive and communicate on a regular basis to voice and correct problems such as the aforesaid concern above. Other programs such as parental language classes could also be offered to close the knowledge gap resulting from a language communication barrier.

The final disadvantage, pertaining to the lack of Americanization as a direct result of bilingual education forces the clarification on the definition of American. With the vast cultural framework found within the nation it is seemingly impossible to categorize and describe an American. Americans are diverse; Americans lack an official language; Americans derive from all corners of the world. Denying the use and instruction of world languages in which American heritages derive from leads to the true deterioration of the American dream. In contrast, bilingual education helps to enforce the principles of liberty and freedom that encases the American culture. The benefits of diversity and multiculturalism protected by the bilingual education system can be best described by the opposing viewpoint presented in Duigan's proposal:

“Immigration has made and remade this country. Not only do immigrants not harm America but they have benefited it. The *Wall Street Journal* calls for high levels of

immigration because it means more consumers, more workers, and a larger economy with new blood for the United States. (Duigan 1).

Conclusion

The evidence portrayed throughout this investigation validates the theorized benefits of beginning bilingual education at the elementary school level. The positive correlation between length of time a target language is studied and the level of proficiency gained is a strong justification for increasing the duration of study by beginning language programs among earlier ages. Furthermore, the recorded high scores among dual language immersion program participants confirms the hypothesis that bilingual education aids improvements in other academic disciplines, including mathematics, and English language arts.

Reforms within the bilingual education system of the United States are imperative. The education of students today is the most important determinant of the continued success of the nation by future generations. The presence and instruction of language education within school systems will not only lead to an increased amount of bilingualism, but tolerance as well. With an increase in bilingualism also comes a promise for an increase in peace, as children will learn about diversity, acceptance and cultural relativism before they have the chance to become accustomed to prejudice and ethnocentrism.

With these changes in duration and quality of bilingual education, future generations will effectively foster a multicultural environment that parallels the principles

of the American way of life. As Benjamin Lee Whorf profoundly claimed, “Language shapes the way we think, and determines what we can think about.” With the improved acquisition of language education, the opportunities and possibilities for the future are endless.

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