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### A Review of the Literature on Bilingual Education

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The Mauricio Gastón Institute  
for Latino Community Development  
and Public Policy

## Latinos in Massachusetts: EDUCATION

### A Review of the Literature on Bilingual Education

by Lorna Rivera

*The Mauricio Gastón Institute of the University of Massachusetts Boston conducts research on and for the Latino population. A goal is to generate the kind of information and analysis necessary to develop sound public policy, and to improve Latino participation in the policy-making process. The Gastón Institute has produced this series of fact sheets in an effort to present up-to-date information about the issues affecting Latinos in a number of key areas: Education, Health, Housing, Immigration, and Political Representation.*

#### INTRODUCTION

CHANGES IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT IMPACT ON THE FUTURE WELL-BEING OF THE GROWING LATINO COMMUNITY IN MASSACHUSETTS. This report summarizes some of the major research findings regarding the purposes and effectiveness of bilingual education. Questions that will be addressed include: What are the existing bilingual education models? Which bilingual education models work best? Should there be time limits for bilingual education? Do immigrants resist learning English? Does speaking another language interfere with learning? Should bilingual students be exempt from state-mandated testing? Are bilingual teachers qualified? Are bilingual education students more likely to dropout?

It is hoped that readers will examine the studies cited in this report more closely, and that this information will be used to better inform decisions about the future of bilingual education.

#### What are the existing bilingual education models?

A REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE FINDS A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM MODELS (BRISK, 1998; MORAN AND HAKUTA, 1995; ROBERTS, 1995). Simply put, how a school district interprets the purpose of bilingual education determines the structure of their bilingual education programs. Roberts (1995) classifies the various bilingual education programs into three categories:

## 1. TRANSITIONAL MODELS

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The purpose of transitional models is to teach students English as quickly as possible and once students have learned English, usually within a specific time limit, to ensure that students are *exited* or *mainstreamed* into regular English-only classes. Transitional bilingual education programs include the following examples: early-exit transitional bilingual education, late-exit transitional bilingual education, English as a second language pull-out, and one-year structured English immersion.

## 2. MAINTENANCE MODELS

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Maintenance models are designed to provide instruction in academic subject areas in a student's native language while they also learn English for a specific amount of time during the school day. The goal of these programs is to transition bilingual students into mainstream English-only classes. Maintenance programs are also called *developmental* programs because they are long-term and generally have no time-limits.

## 3. ENRICHMENT MODELS

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Enrichment models seek to promote cross-cultural understanding among students who learn their academic subjects in two languages. The models are unique because the student population also includes native English speakers. Examples of enrichment programs include: *two-way* or *dual-language* models where two languages are used in instruction. Because some enrichment bilingual programs are part of transitional bilingual education programs, they sometimes have time limits.

There are differences within and across these various program models and most school districts use a combination of these approaches. In Massachusetts, for example, there are at least six different prototypes (MDOE, 1991, 1994). Nationally, most bilingual education approaches use a *pullout* program where students receive English as a Second Language (ESL) for some period of the school day. The pullout approach is used most often in schools where there is a lack of bilingual teachers, where there are English learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, and where there is a lack of resources and knowledge about bilingual education (Chambers and Parrish, 1992).

In general, the major differences among these different bilingual education models pertain to:

- a) *when* the transition to English should happen and,
- b) *how much* instruction in a particular language should take place.

For example, in the majority of two-way bilingual programs about half the students are native speakers of English and the other half are LEP. The instruction typically begins with 90% instruction in non-English and 10% in English with increasing instruction to 50% English and 50% non-English. However, the research shows a wide variety in the way two-way bilingual education programs are structured (Calderon and Carreon, 2001).

### Which bilingual education models work best?

GIVEN THE VARIETY OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS, THERE IS NO EASY ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, DOES BILINGUAL EDUCATION WORK? A review of the research summarized in this report, finds that bilingual education is effective in teaching both English and content-area knowledge. Unlike

the public, researchers are not concerned with the issue of whether or not bilingual education *should* be offered.

Instead, researchers are concerned with assessing the effectiveness of bilingual education and determining which models are more successful than others. Most research on bilingual education programs focuses on the following:

- a) the relationships between languages of instruction and bilingual student performance in academic subjects (or content areas).
- b) the specific instructional practices, such as the diversity of methods used by bilingual education teachers or measures to assess student learning.

Studies suggest that two-way bilingual education programs are most effective for attaining academic success and that a "comprehensive" approach works best (August and Hakuta, 1997; Calderon et al., 1998). Students in two-way programs often out-perform their mainstream peers (Hakuta, 1986; Krashen, 1982). For example, Christian (1994) studied over 160 schools between 1991 and 1994, and found that two-way bilingual programs not only developed second-language skills, but also improved relationships among students and enhanced "cross-cultural understanding and appreciation" (p. 1). Colon, et al. (1990), argue that the two-way model "may be the only model that places both groups at the same starting point and this sensitizes English speakers to the complex process of learning a second language and becoming more aware of other systems of thought (p. 7)."

Roberts (1995) finds that two-way programs face several obstacles including: their structure is more complicated and difficult to set up; they rely upon team-

teaching, which has drawbacks; English tends to dominate in instructional activities; and, time is not used effectively because there is repetition in two languages. Furthermore, research by Valdes (1997) found that in one two-way program studied, the

Mexican-origin students had lower test scores on the Spanish-language reading tests than their native English-speaking classmates. Thus, Valdes argues that

attention to issues of power and language are key to the success of two-way programs. Differences among two-way students were also noted by Sugarman and Howard (2001) who found that although both native-English and native-Spanish speakers showed progress in their language and literacy skills, native Spanish speakers had more "balanced" language and literacy in two languages than native English speakers who were dominant in English.

A study of the Amigos program, a two-way bilingual education program in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Lambert and Cazabon, 1994), and a national review of two-way bilingual programs (Mahrer and Christian, 1993) found that English-language learners (ELL) in these programs outperformed ELL students who were enrolled in structured immersion programs. A survey administered to all students in the Amigos Program concluded that: "both native English-speaking and native Spanish-speaking groups are approaching balanced skills in two languages in reading and math, and are gaining appreciation and knowledge of other's cultures" (Cazabon, Nicoladis, and Lambert, 1998: 1).

There are conflicting findings regarding the success of *transitional* and *sheltered immersion* programs for bilingual students in the United States (Baker, 1998). The findings are contradictory as to how quickly students master English and how well they achieve in the long-term. A study by Ramirez (1991) compared English-only immersion and bilingual programs. He found that students in the bilingual programs learned as well or "better than" students in immersion programs. Collier's (1992) review of studies on the academic achievements of English-language learners confirms a positive correlation between native-language instruction and academic achievement. Collier's research concludes that maintenance

bilingual education models are more effective in improving academic achievement in the long-term. Studies

*... two-way bilingual programs not only developed second-language skills, but also improved relationships among students and enhanced "cross-cultural understanding and appreciation"*

show that such transitional models as sheltered immersion help bilingual students learn English, but do not improve their cognitive skills. For example, Snow (2001) argues that the intensive one-year immersion programs in California (resulting from Proposition 227) are not well-designed, resources are sorely lacking, and one year of English immersion is not enough to improve reading comprehension.

August and Hakuta (1997) suggest a need for more longitudinal studies that evaluate the long-term impacts of bilingual education. For example, Thomas and Collier (1997) argue that short-term studies often produce inconclusive results because they do not study the academic achievements of bilingual students once they transition to mainstream classes. Thomas and Collier's (1997) longitudinal research found that English learners reduced the gap between their achievement and that of native English-speaking students. However, these gains happened in late elementary school and high school. They found that it took the students in English-only instruction seven to ten years to reach average achievement, as opposed to four to seven years for students who had native-language support.

### **Should there be time limits for bilingual education?**

A FEW RESEARCHERS, SUCH AS ROSSELL AND ROSS (1986), ARGUE THAT NATIVE-LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION DELAYS THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH. The proposed bilingual education referendum in

Massachusetts would require that school districts offer intensive English-only immersion classes for one year. But how long does it take to learn another language? In Massachusetts, most bilingual education programs transition students into mainstream classes within their first three years. Only a small percent (17-25%) actually stay in these programs longer, up to five years (Snow, 2001).

Hakuta et al. (2000), investigated data from four different school districts to see how long it takes students to attain English-language proficiency. They concluded that oral proficiency takes three to five years to develop and academic English proficiency takes four to seven years. A National Academy of Sciences (1997) report, *Improving Schooling for Language-Minority Children: A Research Agenda*, concluded that some children take longer to learn English depending on the age they entered school in the U.S. as well as their proficiency in their native language. Research by Crawford (1989), Hakuta (1986), and Snow (1987) suggests that older children (as well as adults) are often more efficient language learners.

The Congressional Hispanic Caucus has recommended that five years is a reasonable goal for children to learn English (USDOE, 1998).

Thus, most research supports the "linguistic mismatch" theory—"that children cannot learn in a language they do not understand" (Walsh, 1991, p. 56; also see Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1984, 1981). Studies by Hakuta (1986), Snow (1987), and other researchers, suggest that reading skills acquired in the native language are transferable to reading skills in English (Cazden and Snow, 1990). International research studies also confirm the findings of U.S. research. Research by the World Bank examined second-language acquisition in several countries and found that it

*... reading skills acquired in the native language are transferable to reading skills in English.*

takes four to seven years to learn a second language, that individuals develop literacy skills more easily in a familiar language, and that these skills, once acquired, transfer from one language to another (Dutcher, 1994; Tucker, 1999).

### **Do immigrants resist learning English?**

IN GENERAL, RESEARCH STUDIES DO NOT SUPPORT THE CLAIM THAT IMMIGRANTS RESIST LEARNING ENGLISH. Most studies show that immigrants do want to learn English when they arrive in the United States (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Veltman, 1988). For example, research by Portes and Rumbault (1996) on children of immigrants found that the majority of them knew English and that the children who maintained both languages had higher self-esteem, higher educational aspirations, and higher test scores in both English and math in junior high school.

Hernandez-Chavez (1995) and Kjolseth (1972) studied trends in native-language loss among recent immigrants. They found differences among various immigrant groups in their attitudes about second-language acquisition. For example, Hernandez-Chavez (1995) noted differences among new Latino immigrants who learned English quickly as opposed to "established" Latinos, such as Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, who "maintain their language in an effort to gain political power and shun assimilation in a discriminatory society" (quoted in Montero-Sieburth, 2001, p. 341). Commins' (1989) research with bilingual Latino students found that they felt ashamed for speaking Spanish and they believed that Spanish was for "dumb kids." Other research argues that "the loss of native language often sinks [immigrants] even further into the silence of the oppressed" (Garcia, 1995, p. 144).

### **Does speaking another language interfere with learning?**

CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, THE BODY OF LITERATURE ABOUT BILINGUAL EDUCATION SHOWS THAT SPEAKING ANOTHER LANGUAGE DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

For example, a study with first-, second-, and third-generation Mexican-American high school students found that "Spanish was not an impediment to academic achievement" (quoted in Nieto, 1996, p. 188; also see Buriel and Cardoza, 1988; Matute-Bianchi, 1991). Another study of nineteen Puerto Rican families in New York's El Barrio neighborhood found that Spanish was an "asset" that enhanced academic achievement

*... the children who maintained both languages had higher self-esteem, higher educational aspirations, and higher test scores in both English and math in junior high school.*

(Zentella, 1992). Nieto (1996) argues that "lack of English skills alone cannot explain the poor academic achievement of students... Cuban students, for example, have the highest educational level of all Latinos, yet they are the most likely to speak Spanish at home. They are also most likely to come from middle-class backgrounds than any other Latino children" (p. 188).

### **Should bilingual students be exempt from state-mandated testing?**

RESEARCHERS SNOW (1987), HAKUTA (1986), AND CRAWFORD (1989), ARGUE THAT LEARNING TO *speak* ENGLISH DOES NOT NECESSARILY TRANSLATE INTO *reading* ENGLISH OR

BEING ABLE TO DO CLASS ASSIGNMENTS IN ENGLISH. The research findings are mixed concerning *when, or if, bilingual students should be exempt from state-mandated*

assessment tests. A number of states have tried to accommodate ELL students

*... the body of literature about bilingual education shows that speaking another language does not interfere with academic achievement.*

by allowing extra time to complete tests, administering the tests in small groups, allowing the use of bilingual dictionaries, and in some cases, allowing ELL students to take a test over a few days and making special efforts to ensure that testing instructions are clear. Massachusetts, along with six other states (Arizona, California, Hawaii, New York, Rhode Island, and Texas), allows native-language testing and has translated all of its tests into Spanish, with the exception of language arts (Stansfield, 1998). However, the proposed November referendum would mandate that all testing of bilingual students be in English.

### **Are bilingual teachers qualified?**

IN 1993, MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNOR WELD ORDERED A REVIEW OF THE TRANSITIONAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION ACT OF 1971 TO STUDY THE EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN THE STATE. The subsequent *Bilingual Education Commission Report* (MDOE, 1994) highlighted the statewide shortage of certified bilingual education teachers. Nationally, other studies have also documented the lack of qualified bilingual education teachers in public schools, as well as the growing demand for bilingual teachers (Lockwood, 1996; MDOE, 1994; USDOE, 2000).

There is also a growing body of research that investigates effective professional development for bilingual teachers (Brisk, 2001; Calderon, 1995; Howard and Loeb, 1998). Evaluation studies of bilingual programs (Gandara, et al., 2000; Ramirez, 1992) find that there is much inconsistency in the instruction of English learners. Studies of bilingual education teachers confirm that they need to develop more subject-matter competence and effective teaching practices (Garcia, 1991; Slavin and Calderon, 2001). Teachers report that they often have to develop their own materials, and that preparing for two-way instruction is

more labor-intensive than other methods of instruction (Crandall, 1998; Howard and Loeb, 1998). Researchers argue that teacher training is "essential to effective bilingual education" (Schwartz, 2000, p. 4).

The Calexico School District in California is praised by researchers for its strong bilingual education programs, low Latino dropout rates, rigorous academic standards, and culturally relevant curriculum (Lockwood, 1996; USDOE, 1998). However, one of the keys to the school district's success is thought to be its high percentage of bilingual staff: 85% of the district's elementary school teachers are bilingual; 40% of its high school teachers are bilingual; and *all* elementary school principals in the district are bilingual. According to the assistant superintendent, the presence of bilingual staff sends an important message that students' culture is respected and that "until students transition to English, they will have much higher self-esteem in bilingual programs, working with bilingual staff, than if they had been told that their language was wrong" (quoted in Lockwood, 1996, p. 4).

### **Are bilingual education students more likely to dropout?**

RESEARCH DOES NOT SUPPORT THE VIEW THAT BILINGUAL STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO DROPOUT BECAUSE THEY ARE IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION. Multiple factors have been linked to student dropout rates, including recency of migration, being retained in a grade, and family poverty (Fine, 1991; Lockwood, 1996). For example, Hakuta, et al. (2000), suggest that English-language learners from low-income families learn English more slowly than others on average, and that parental education levels have an important impact on their academic achievements. Beykont, et al. (2000), argue that socioeconomic status is the primary predictor of academic success for Latino students. Bilingual education programs often serve poor students in poorly-funded schools. There is a need for more equi-

*There is a need for more equitable distribution of resources for teachers and students in bilingual education.*

table distribution of resources for teachers and students in bilingual education. Some studies suggest that bilingual education may even prevent high dropout rates (Slavin and Calderon, 2001; USDOE, 1998). For example, a study by the Massachusetts Advocacy Center (1990) argues that bilingual education is a "buffer" that prevents dropping out.

### **Conclusion**

CRITICS OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION ARGUE THAT: "THE BEST WAY TO TELL A GOOD BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FROM A BAD ONE IS TO MEASURE THE AMOUNT OF TIME IN THE SCHOOL DAY A CHILD SPENDS BEING TAUGHT IN ENGLISH. The more English that is being used, the better and faster children will learn English" (Amselle, 1997, p. 6). Yet, this review of research studies presents a more complex picture. First, bilingual education comes in many forms and the development of program models depends upon the timing of the transition to English and, how much instruction should take place in each language. Second, most research examines specific bilingual education models focusing on the correlation between language of instruction and performance of bilingual students in academic subject areas. A number of studies also examine the specific instructional practices used in bilingual education programs.

In sum, studies suggest that bilingual education is effective in teaching both English and content-area knowledge. Researchers argue that oral proficiency in English takes three to five years to develop and academic proficiency takes from four to seven years. Also, researchers have found that reading skills acquired in one's native language are transferable to reading skills in English. In addition, studies have documented a shortage of qualified bilingual education teachers and other important resources, such as books.

On the whole, researchers do not measure the success of bilingual educa-

tion solely in terms of how quickly students learn English, nor do they measure success by how quickly bilingual students are mainstreamed. The various studies cited in this report consider the effects of other factors, such as the age of the student, native-language proficiency and socio-economic status. According to Carnevale (1999), "Given the diversity of languages and cultures represented by students with limited English, it stands to reason that each of the different [bilingual education] approaches will work *somewhere, some* of the time, but that no one approach will work *everywhere, every time*" (p. 82).

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### About the author

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### Notes about terms

The term *bilingual education* has different meanings. Some researchers use the term to refer to programs that promote instruction in both a native language and English. Programs that focus on English-language instruction, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), are also considered types of bilingual education programs. There are many terms used to describe bilingual students who are at different levels of proficiency in English. Among these are the terms *English language learner* (ELL), *limited English proficient* (LEP), *second language learner*, *heritage language student*, *linguistic minority*, and *language minority*.