

BILINGUAL EDUCATION



The origins of bilingual education date to the 1960's, when Florida was flooded with Cuban refugees, most of them middle to upper class. These new immigrants fully intended to return to Cuba to restore freedom to their nation. Consequently, they considered themselves temporary residents of the United States and did not want their children to lose the ability to speak Spanish.

The parents of the Spanish-speaking children lobbied Florida public schools successfully, with the result that the schools would not only be responsible to teach their children English, but also to preserve Spanish, their native language. The experiment was a success. The students learned English, kept Spanish, and performed well academically in other subjects.

Principal instructional models for LEP students

Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE): Students are taught to read and write and do subject matter in their native tongue. English is taught for a small portion of the day and, over a period of years, instructional time in English is increased.

English as a Second Language (ESL): Students participate in regular classrooms with a pull-out period for English language instruction.

Structured immersion: Self-contained classrooms of LEP children learn English and subject matter simultaneously, but subject matter is introduced only as English comprehension allows.

Submersion: Sometimes called sink-or-swim, students are placed in English-only classrooms and receive no special language or subject matter instruction.

Senator Ralph Yarborough (D-Texas) saw the success of the Cuban refugees and championed the cause for other non-English speaking children who were doing poorly academically. In 1968, he helped pass the Bilingual Education Act, an amendment to Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.¹ Yarborough said the goal was “not to keep any specific language alive. It is not the purpose of the bill to create pockets of different languages...but just to try to make those children fully literate in English.”² This created a relatively small \$7.5 million dollar program of education for Hispanic students in the Southwest, where school districts were awarded grants by the U.S. Department of Education to try new bilingual education methods. In later acts the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA) were created.

Six years later, in 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Lau vs. Nichols*³ that, for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students, identical education is not equal education. In other words, being given the same text, same teacher, and same classroom as other students does not necessarily constitute a meaningful education. The high court determined that any student entering school speaking a language other than English has the right to a meaningful education.

The Supreme Court, however, did not define *meaningful*, nor did the justices provide

any certain remedies. They did indicate students could be taught in their native languages while they learn English or could be given intensive instruction in and extra help with English. But determining specific steps to take was left to the lower court.

In response to the 1974 Supreme Court ruling in *Lau vs. Nichols*, OCR created the “Lau remedies” which insisted transitional bilingual education (TBE) was the best—if not the only approach—to teaching limited-English-proficient students. In succeeding years, the selection of the TBE model and its effectiveness has become controversial. As researcher Sheldon Richman states in his review of TBE, “This approach was chosen without public discussion and without research to back it up. In the years since the 1974 ruling, in

spite of a lack of conclusive research supporting such actions, the federal government has consistently favored TBE programs by channeling funding in their direction . . .”⁴

In 1988, a three-year limit was placed on student participation in TBE and alternative programs, except under special circumstances.

A look at Washington state

In the school year 1999-2000, according to the Superintendent of Public Instruction’s 2000 Report: *Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State*,⁵ 66,281 students were served by the transitional

Washington state law

- The Washington Administrative Code, Chapter 392-160 and the Revised Code of Washington, Chapter 28A.180 outline the state’s transitional bilingual education program.
- The Transitional Bilingual Instruction Act of 1979, amended in 1984, funds school district bilingual ...programs for eligible students.
- House Bill 1673, Jan 21, 1998, allows parents to decline placement of their child in the transitional bilingual education program.
- E2SHB 2025, effective August 23, 2001, requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to review when the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) is administered to limited-English-proficient students to determine if it is developmentally appropriate for them and to implement an evaluation system to measure increases and progress of LEP students in academic and English language skills.

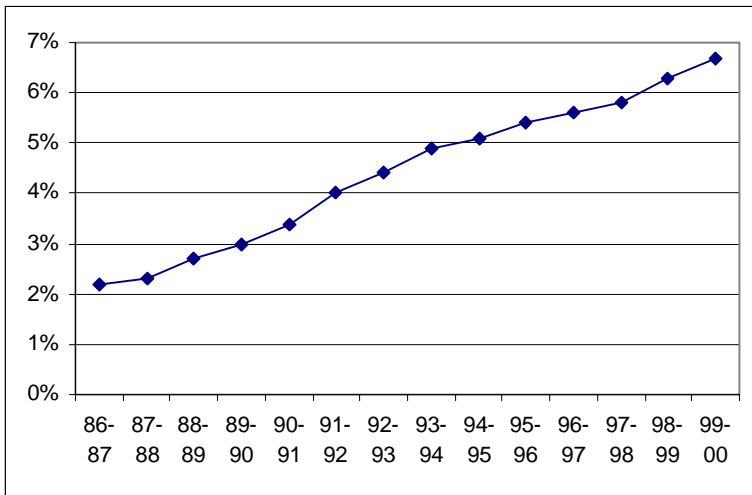


Figure BL-1: Percentage of LEP students statewide. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

bilingual education (TBE) program. To be eligible for this program a student must 1) use a language other than English to communicate in the home and 2) lack the necessary English skills to survive in a mainstream classroom without special services. Such students are known as limited-English-proficient (LEP).

Students in the TBE program make up 6.7 percent of Washington's total student population. Of these LEP students (half of which are in grades K-3) 52.8% are males and 47.2% are females—a proportion that has remained fairly constant for the past 15 years.⁶ As can be seen in *Figure BL-1*, the percentage of LEP students has continuously increased since 1986. The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) speculates that reasons

for this increase may be attributed to higher birth-rates among minority groups, higher levels of immigration, an increase in districts with approved TBE programs, and a higher rate of LEP students entering than exiting the TBE program. For example, in 1999-2000, 20,545 students entered the TBE program while 16,474 exited the program: a net difference of 4,171 students.

Transitional bilingual education programs exist in 185 of Washington's 296 school districts. These 185 districts represent 63 percent of total districts and enroll over 95 percent of the total student population.

- 19 districts have a TBE program whose LEP students represent at least 25 percent of the student body.
- 19 districts have a TBE program serving more than 20 languages.
- 56 districts have a TBE program whose LEP students are at least 95 percent Spanish-speaking.
- 20 districts have a TBE program that serves at least 1000 LEP students.

Grade levels

Fifty percent of all LEP students are in grades K-3. In school year 1999-2000, kindergarteners represented 39.2 percent of the new LEP population. The percentage of LEP students gradually declines after first grade. However, in 9th grade, there is an increase in the number of *new* and *total* LEP students.⁷ *Figure BL-2*

One program administrator in Grandview attributes the re-entry of LEP students who have previously been served by the TBE program to insufficient language preparation in elementary school and a more challenging curriculum in high school.⁸

Languages

A total of 159 primary, non-English languages were represented among the students served by the program in school year 1999-2000. Some districts could not identify the names of the languages spoken by their LEP students, so more than 159 languages may exist.⁹ *Figure BL-3* shows the most common languages.

A majority (61%) of LEP students in Washington speak Spanish. Nationwide, seventy-five percent of the United States' LEP students speak Spanish. *Figure BL-4* shows a steady increase in Spanish-speaking LEP students in Washington.

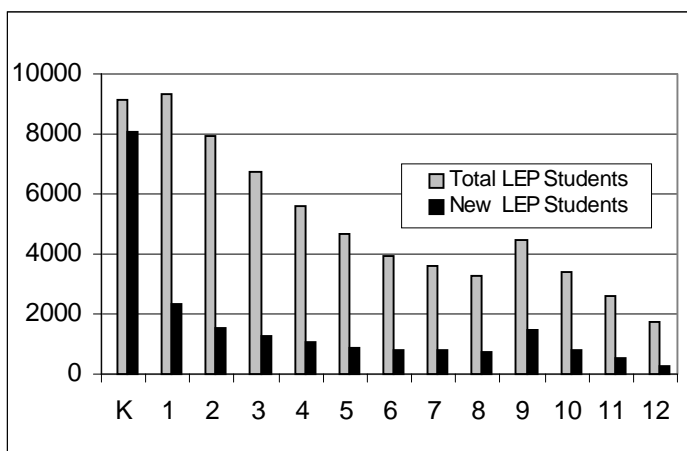


Figure BL-2: LEP students by grade, 1999-2000. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

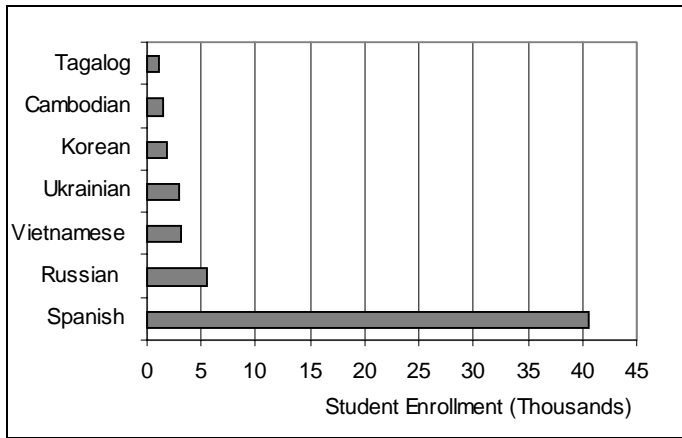


Figure BL-3 Languages of LEP students. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

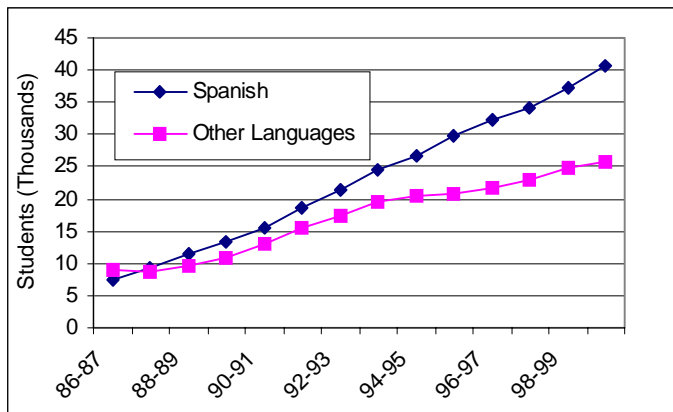


Figure BL-4 Spanish-speaking students. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

Entrance and exit criteria

Entrance. To be eligible to participate in the TBE program, a school district determines that a student's primary language is not English and that the student is unable to communicate in English "to any practical extent" (WAC 392-160-015). The student's inability to communicate is determined in an interview with appropriate school district staff. If the interviewer determines that the student is eligible for TBE, no other test is needed. However, if a student's eligibility isn't apparent in an interview, then s/he must score below a minimum level on an oral proficiency test administered by the district. According to the OSPI, most districts use the Language Assessment Scales (LAS), or Pre-LAS oral proficiency tests. The bilingual advisory committee, at the time of publication of its 2000 report, was studying assessments to recommend that only one be used statewide.¹⁰

Exit. A student must be reassessed annually to continue in the TBE program. To exit, a student must score above the 35th percentile in the reading and language arts portions of an approved normed written test. The tests taken in Washington are the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Once a student scores above the 35th percentile, s/he must exit the TBE program.¹¹

New Legislation. New state legislation (HB 2025), effective August 23, 2001, requires the OSPI to review the criteria determining when LEP students are required to take the WASL. Currently, all students take the WASL in grades 4, 7, and 10, and the test scores of LEP students are included with all district scores when they are reported to the state.

According to HB 2025, the review by the OSPI shall determine if the testing criteria are "developmentally appropriate for students." The OSPI is also to develop an evaluation tool to measure increases and progress in the academic and English proficiency of LEP students.

The legislation further states that districts are to assess potential LEP students *within 10 days* of school registration using state-approved tests, reporting results to the OSPI.¹² Previously, districts were required to establish eligibility *within 20 days* after a student began attendance in a school district.

HB 2025 also states that districts shall annually assess LEP students *at the end of the school year, reporting results to the SPI*. Districts used to evaluate LEP students annually "before the conclusion of each school year" to measure improvement in learning the English language and overall academic progress, an evaluation that must include a standardized test in reading and language arts (RCW 28A.180.040, WAC 392-160-015). The new addition to this portion of the law seems to be that districts must test students at the *end* of the school year and must report test results to the OSPI.

In summary, the effects of HB 2025:

- LEP students may no longer be required to take the WASL until it is deemed developmentally appropriate.
- Development and implementation of an assessment tool that will measure LEP progress in English proficiency.
- Determination of student eligibility for the TBE program within 10 days instead of 20, reporting results to the SPI.
- Annual assessment required at the *end* of the school year, reporting results to the OSPI.

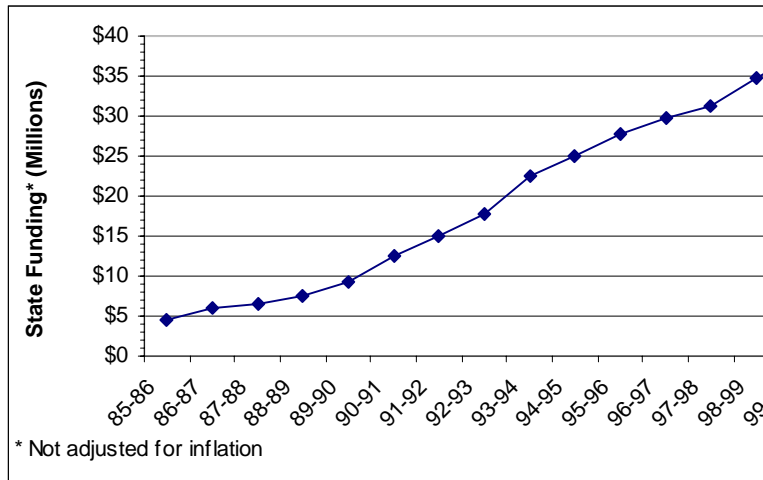


Figure BL-5 Growth in TBE funding. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

What does it cost?

Districts receive extra state funding based on the average number of LEP students enrolled each month. In 1999-2000, districts were awarded about \$691 per student for 55,651 students—the average enrolled each month. The total number of students served was 66,281. The amount provided by the state in 1999-2000 totaled \$38.4 million, an 11% increase from the previous year.

For the school year 2000-01, districts were awarded \$711 per student, a three percent increase from school year 1999-2000. The appropriations for the biennial budget of 2000-2002 were \$73.5 million. Appropriations are adjusted annually.

Total LEP funding is about 18 percent more than the base amount provided for all students. Figure BL-5 shows growth in Washington's TBE program funding since 1985.

School districts rely not only on state funding to support TBE, but also use local and federal funds. In school year 1999-2000, Washington districts used \$11.9 million in local funding for LEP students. Federal funding is minimal compared to state and local funding. Expenditures including local, state, and federal funding totaled \$52.3 million and break down as follows:

- 73% state
- 23% local districts
- 4% federal (includes Title I and Special Education) ¹³ Figure BL-6 shows the number of students also receiving funding from other programs.

Where funds are spent

Most expenditures in the TBE program are staff related.¹⁴ In 1999-2000, ninety-five percent of non-federal spending paid staff benefits and salaries, totaling about \$47,785,000.

As the Superintendent of Public Instruction report states, "Districts have relied more heavily on instructional aides than certificated teachers when it comes to teaching LEP students."¹⁵ In school year 1999-2000, a total of 2,556 staff were involved in providing instruction in the TBE program: 1,772 were aides, more than double the 834 teachers. Of the state-funded teachers instructing LEP students,

only 45 percent had an English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement and 17 percent had a bilingual endorsement (some have both). The state has no data on qualifications and training of staff hired by a district with funds not provided by the state.

Figure BL-7 shows Washington's five-year full-time equivalent (FTE) trend of staff involved in the TBE program. In 1999-2000, aides represented about 56 percent of total FTEs, which is less than the two previous years. In the five years shown, FTE staff has increased by 250, while state funding has increased from \$28 million to \$38 million, a total increase of about \$10 million.

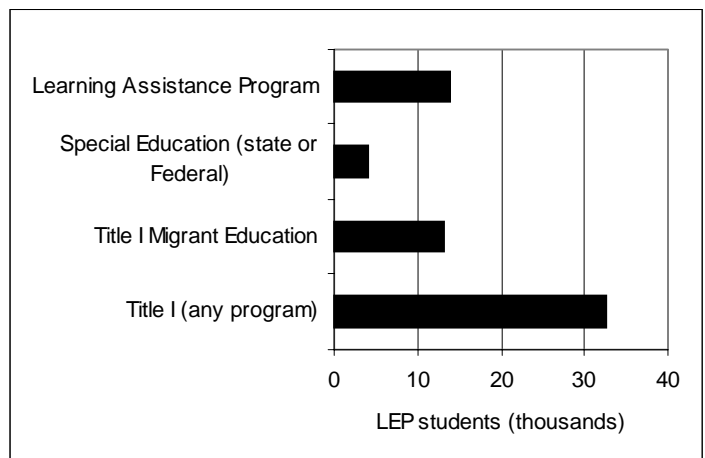


Figure BL-6 LEP students in other programs, 1999-2000. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

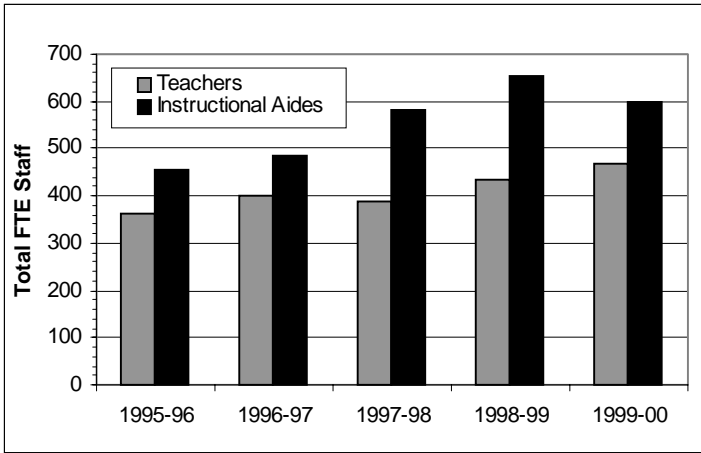


Figure BL-7 FTE staff in TBE. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

What are we getting for the money?

Some glaring deficiencies exist in Washington's TBE program.

- LEP students stagnate in "separate but equal" education classes. Nearly one-half (40%) of LEP students have not, after the three-year time limit, been transitioned out of the TBE program. Presumably this means that they are unable to succeed in an English-speaking school system. Figure 3-8 shows length of stay in the program, excluding new students in school year 1999-2000. Students represented in the graph have been enrolled in the TBE program at least since 1998-99.
- TBE has officially existed in Washington since 1979, but the Superintendent of Public Instruction has not yet implemented a useful system of collecting statewide data to determine which

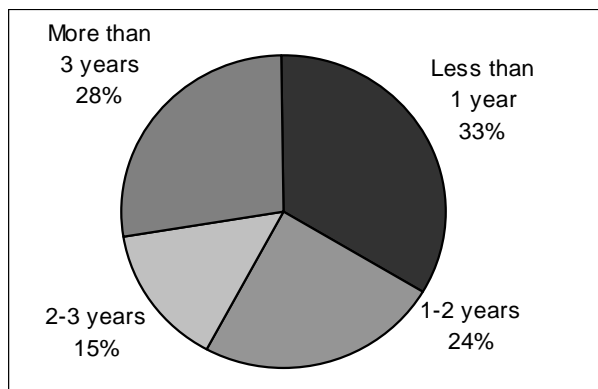


Figure BL-8 TBE students by time in program. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

aspects of the program are beneficial to students and which are not. However, an improved system has been in the works for the past two years and should be finished in 2002. Without access to more detailed data, accurate analysis cannot be completed.

- Less than half of teachers instructing LEP students are certified to do so, and the qualifications of instructional aides are either unknown or unreported.
- The Superintendent of Public Instruction's goal of providing instruction in the primary language speaking and teaching in the languages of LEP students—a goal all the more difficult as the number of different languages increases.
- Increases in funding have not produced increases in results.

Back to TBE's beginning—almost

For decades researchers have been reporting an achievement gap between white and minority students. Christine Rossell and Keith Baker, longtime researchers of bilingual education, explain succinctly the reason that bilingual education was instituted: "All-English instruction didn't eliminate the achievement gap. So it was replaced by its opposite."¹⁶ The Bilingual Education Act was implemented in 1965—with good intentions but no scientific foundation to support a policy and ideology favoring native language instruction over English instruction.

The rationale behind TBE relies on two hypotheses as explained by James Cummins, a professor of Education at the University of Toronto. The hypotheses are based on the facilitation theory.¹⁷ Supporters of TBE, including Washington's Superintendent of Public Instruction, use these two premises as the basis for the necessity of instruction in a student's native language:

- For young children, learning to read first in the native language is necessary for optimal reading ability in English.¹⁸ **In other words, for a child to read to the best of his/her ability in English, s/he must first learn to read in the primary language.**
- For all children, learning a second language takes time and students should not lose ground in other subject matters.

James Cummins first wrote about the facilitation theory in 1978. It has two parts:

1. The threshold hypothesis states that an LEP child must attain a high level of ability in the native language before transitioning completely to English to avoid cognitive disadvantages.

According to Rossell and Baker, the theory is vague regarding the exact level of proficiency in the native language that meets the required threshold where complete English instruction may begin without damaging the child. The writings of Cummins imply that it takes up to *seven years* before the threshold is attained.¹⁹ If TBE is implemented according to the facilitation theory, a child would be taught in his or her native language for up to seven years before transitioning fully to English instruction. Why? Not to become bilingual, but to avoid theoretical and unproven cognitive disadvantages. Kenji Hakuta, a researcher and supporter of bilingual education, admits that there are no known links between cognitive ability and bilingualism.²⁰

2. The developmental interdependence hypothesis states that acquisition of a second language (English) is facilitated by reading skills already developed in the first language.

Certainly, an immigrant child with a higher level of education from his or her home country will initially acquire English at a faster rate than a child of the same age with less education. Knowing this, should we then educate Joaquin in Spanish—pretending that he is still in Nicaragua—so that his eventual transition to English will hopefully be easier than for an illiterate child? Since it takes 3-4 years to acquire literacy in Roman-alphabet languages, he will not completely acquire English literacy until 5-7 years after bilingual instruction begins.²¹ Assuming Joaquin enters school in 1st grade, he will not start learning to read in English (optimistically) until third or fourth grade, and won't have basic reading skills in English until sixth or seventh grade.

A serious flaw of the facilitation theory is the lack of attention it gives to languages that are not based on the Roman alphabet and that have no similarity to English. For children from such a language background, it may very well be more difficult to learn to read in the native language than in English. Rossell and Baker found no non-Roman-alphabet bilingual programs in the United States that taught initial literacy in the native language.

Rossell and Baker, whose breadth of work analyzing bilingual programs research surpasses most, summarize findings on the facilitation theory by stating that it “has been overwhelmingly accepted by educators in bilingual education as a proven fact and as the explanation for TBE’s superiority to all other second language acquisition techniques, even though more than 15 years of research and literally thousands of studies have confirmed neither the theory nor the predicted effectiveness of bilingual education programs.”²²

In fact, two important studies suggest that the threshold hypothesis may work in reverse, meaning that a certain level of *English* ability needs to be achieved, not native language ability, before instruction in English is consistently superior to native language instruction.²³

Regarding literacy and the facilitation theory, a review of additional research is necessary. For now, suffice it to say that bilingual education research shows that

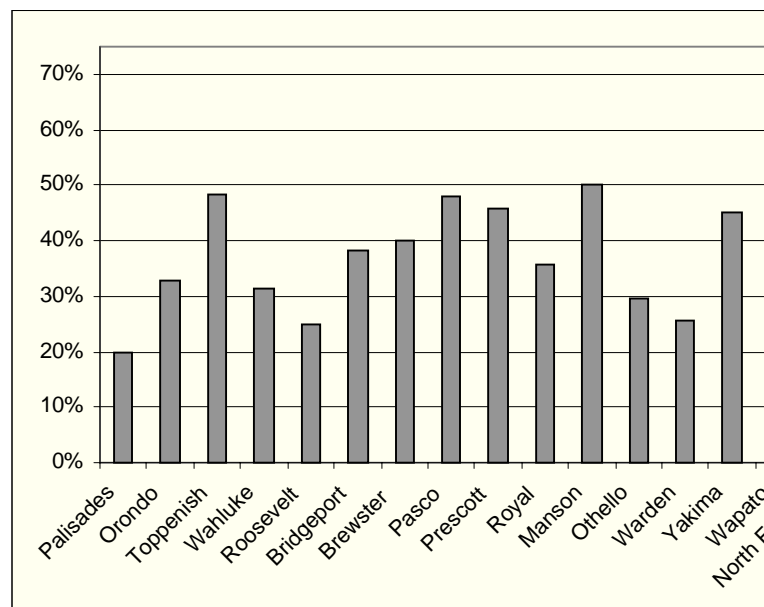


Figure LP-9 Percent of students in TBE >3 years, Districts with at least 25% LEP. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

teaching students to read and write in their native language is at least “marginally detrimental to overall education and acquisition of English.”²⁴ It is not necessary for students to learn to read in a native language before doing so in English.²⁵ In fact, it is not only unnecessary, but teaching literacy in English *first* has no ill effects.²⁶ It is extremely important to note that a child’s reading level in 1st grade is a predictor of reading achievement into high school.²⁷

Kenji Hakuta, in *Mirror of Language*, concludes:

There is a sober truth that even the ardent advocate of bilingual education would not deny. Evaluation studies of the effectiveness of bilingual education in improving either English or math scores have not been overwhelmingly in favor of bilingual education An awkward tension blankets the lack of empirical demonstration of the success of bilingual education programs. Someone promised bacon, but it’s not there.²⁸

It takes time!

One year is not enough time to learn English, claim supporters of bilingual education. Hakuta, Butler, and Witt write about oral and academic proficiency, concluding — along the same lines as the facilitation theory — that oral proficiency takes three to five years, and academic proficiency takes four to seven years.²⁹ This may very well be true, as anyone who has studied a language knows that it usually takes years to obtain fluency.

However, the research conclusions of Hakuta et al., focus on how long until a student is *fluent*, not on how long a student *needs services*. Nearly all students understand enough English within the first year to comprehend English instruction.³⁰ It must be recognized that the length of time it takes to achieve parity and to participate with native English speakers does not equal the length of time a student should be in separate ESL or TBE classes.³¹

Another side of the story

In a review of the National Research Council’s report, Charles Glenn, a professor of educational policy at Boston University, asks, “Why have we kept mandating a particular form of schooling for language-minority children if we know so little about whether it is working?”³² This is a valid question, since more than thirty years of research have come to contradictory conclusions about the efficacy of bilingual education and

in fact relatively few studies have been carried out in such a way as to render the results scientifically valid.

A major argument by those who oppose bilingual education is that the amount of time a student spends studying English determines the extent to which English is learned. This is known as the time-on-task theory, which implies that bilingual instruction is inferior to all-English instruction. However, Rossell points out that if time on task were the most important factor, “all-English instruction would always be superior to any form of bilingual education.” Time on task does indeed have a significant effect on language acquisition. Other variables, however, such as classroom atmosphere, pace of instruction, curriculum content, a child’s family characteristics, intelligence, classmates, and the intelligence and talent of his or her teacher also greatly influence achievement.³³

In a study by Rossell and Ross, some factors are outlined that may explain why “some methodologically sound research studies show TBE (i.e., less English language time on task) to be no different from or superior to submersion.” (Submersion means placing LEP students in a mainstream classroom without any special language assistance). First, much of the learning in a submersion environment is initially not effective because the student does not understand what is going on. As English becomes more understandable, more time spent on English becomes more advantageous. Therefore, at the end of three years, Rossell explains, students in submersion and TBE “may end up with the same amount of effective learning time in the English language, with TBE producing more at the beginning and submersion more at the end.”³⁴

The second factor “explaining the lack of harm of TBE . . . is that the supporters of bilingual education may be at least partially right—bilingual education may have important psychological effects that compensate for the reduced English language learning time.” If TBE provides an environment where students feel protected and safe, where they do not feel alienated or inferior, and that makes school more enjoyable, students may come to school more often and pay better attention.³⁵

Definite disagreement exists among educators of LEP students as to when English instruction should begin. It is important to note that age of exposure is directly related to second language proficiency. Glenn, in a review of the NRC report tells us that older language learners (such as a teenager) are able to learn grammar and vocabulary more efficiently but lack ability to

pronounce a new language without an accent, especially when the language is learned as an adult. Glenn states, “‘The earlier the better’ is not a good rule if efficient learning is the goal, though no harm seems to be done by early exposure to learning a second language and often...it can result in greater language proficiency over the long run.”³⁶

Middle Ground?

Does an effective middle ground exist built upon the effective components of both TBE and immersion programs? Likely, yes. Following is a brief list of components common to both TBE and immersion:³⁷

- Some native language instruction, especially initially when a child knows no English
- Native language used to clarify instructions
- A relatively early phasing-in of English instruction
- Teachers specially trained in instructing English-language learners
- Schools that are prepared for the needs of newcomers
- Eighty percent of class time used for academic learning
- Content areas (such as math and social studies) taught in English

Washington state’s goals

The stated goal of transitional bilingual education in Washington state is to develop competent and adequate English language skills—a worthy goal. The means set by the state to achieve that goal, however, have proven unrealistic and seemingly impossible.

Let’s take a quick look at Washington’s statistics again: at least 159 languages; 66,281 limited-English-proficient students; only 45 percent of teachers teaching LEP students have ESL certification, 17 percent have bilingual certification (some have both); between 1995 and 2000, a mere 8.1 percent (average) of LEP students were transitioned out of the program into mainstream classes. These statistics paint a picture of a troubled TBE program.

Superintendent Terri Bergeson believes the locus of the problem is non-native language instruction, stating:

The problem is, most LEP students in Washington receive little or no instruction in their primary language. The lack of qualified teachers who speak other languages and the sheer number of different languages spoken

by students limit schools’ ability to provide comprehensive instruction in both English and the primary language.

However, if one agrees with Superintendent Bergeson’s analysis of the problem, to remedy the teacher shortage so all LEP students can be taught in their primary language requires funding and recruitment on a massive scale. Currently, an estimated 20.1 percent of LEP students are educated in a program that utilizes the native language for instruction; 68 percent are educated primarily in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program; and 11.7 percent are in an unknown type of program.³⁴ It is clear that most students are not being educated according to the goals of the TBE program: they are not transitioning within three years, and the majority are not even in what could be labeled transitional bilingual education.

The Colorado Department of Education’s *Handbook on Planning for LEP Student Success* cites four conditions to place on the goals for LEP students:³⁹

- Their meaning should be clear to the people involved. [Students, parents, educators, school districts, lawmakers]
- They should be agreed upon by educational planners and decision makers. [Parents, educators, school districts, lawmakers]
- They should be clearly identifiable as dealing with an *end product*.
- They should be *realistic* in terms of the time and money available.

The last requirement suggests reasons for the state of Washington to reevaluate its TBE program since, as the Superintendent of Public Instruction has noted, our state contains so many speakers of other languages that it would be impossible to provide all LEP students with instruction in their native language. Such a vast expansion of instructional staff hasn’t happened yet, and it’s not likely that it will.

“The purpose of the program is to provide temporary services for up to three years until limited-English-proficient students can develop adequate English language skills. Thus, instruction is provided in a ‘transitional’ program.”

–SPI report, p. 31

Accountability for results

The fact remains that the goal of Washington state's program is to help LEP students achieve English language success. This is a broad goal that renders itself achievable by any number of avenues, but, upon closer scrutiny, lends itself to confusing, inefficient, and often ineffective methods of implementation.

In Texas, a state with one of the largest LEP populations, the League of Women Voters of Houston conducted a survey and found "confusion and disagreement among educators and community leaders about the definition, purpose, and goals of bilingual education."⁴⁰ This finding is not uncommon and is, in fact, one of the defining elements that causes bilingual education to be such a hot topic.

The origins of bilingual education in America were noble. As Linda Chavez states, "The original intent of the law was to teach English so that students could become full participants in society and citizens of the USA."⁴¹ That ideal has changed. Instead it has been replaced with a desire to preserve culture and language. (While this may be valuable, the question revolves around who has the preservation responsibility: our public education system or families?) For many people in the bilingual bureaucracy, native language instruction has become *the goal*, rather than the means to a better education.⁴²

We must decide whether our mission is to maintain languages and cultures, or to overcome barriers to successful

Oftentimes, fear that students will lose their native language outweighs the importance of learning English.⁴³ We must decide whether our mission is to maintain languages and cultures, or to overcome barriers to successful participation in society. Our decision should bring about the full participation of LEP students in their education, helping them to be-

come productive citizens. Schools must be held accountable to achieve such results within a reasonable amount of time.⁴⁴

A different agenda?

Bilingual education has earned the distrust of many citizens because of attitudes within the education administration that seem to use bilingual education as a

tool to advance an agenda unrelated to student academic welfare. For example, bilingual education is supported by some as the means to advance a movement to recognize Spanish as the second national language of the United States.

Spanish "should no longer be regarded as a 'foreign' language," according to Josuè González, director of bilingual education in the Carter Administration and now a professor at Columbia University Teachers College. Instead, he writes in *Reinventing Urban Education*, Spanish should be "a second national language."⁴⁵

According to Rosalie Pedalino Porter, herself an immigrant and previous director of bilingual and ESL programs in Newton, MA, the initial expectations of bilingual education were: "better and more rapid learning of English, better mastery of school subjects, and higher self-esteem among students by using their native language in the classroom, which could lead to higher academic achievement and lower rates of school drop-outs."⁴⁶ Unfortunately, for too many students in bilingual education none of these goals have been achieved. Yet the bureaucracy of bilingual education seems to ignore the fact that the status quo and ever increasing funding has done little to change the achievement gap for the very students it originally intended to protect.

Who has the responsibility to maintain native languages and cultures: families or schools? In *Forked Tongue*, Rosalie Pedalino Porter submits that the goal of education is not to teach each group only about its own family and culture.⁴⁷ Rather, the focus must be on preparing students to become empowered participants in society.

National Action

Arizona

In November of 2000, voters passed Proposition 203 by a 2-1 margin.⁴⁸ The new legislation, affecting about 100,000 LEP students (or nearly 1 in 8 students)⁴⁹ requires that all students be "taught English as rapidly and effectively as possible" in one-year structured English immersion programs. Students may be placed in an alternative program only by receiving a parental waiver.

A look at Arizona test scores gives some insight as to why Arizona has followed California's lead in eliminating bilingual education. The Center for Equal

Opportunity reported that in 1998-99, students in bilingual programs scored between the 25th and 17th percentiles on the Stanford 9 test in English, while those in ESL programs scored at the 41st percentile (native English speakers scored at the 53rd).⁵⁰

At the request of the Arizona Department of Education, the Institute for Research in English Acquisition and Development (READ) analyzed a model bilingual program to identify key elements of its success.⁵¹ Creighton Elementary School District was selected because it provided TBE instruction to a large number of LEP students, it had a high transition rate, and it was recommended by leaders in the bilingual education field.

Parental involvement in program choice is a key component to Creighton's success. The three programs choices offered are: 1) traditional bilingual/bicultural, which develops native language literacy before English literacy; 2) pull-in ESL, where ESL is provided within a mainstream classroom; 3) a dual language program which puts LEP and native English speaking students together in order to teach proficiency in both languages.

The student population is over 50 percent LEP and growing. The district has a year-round schedule with three inter-sessions and a preschool program to provide remedial assistance as needed. There is a strong commitment to training and professional development of both teachers and aides; Creighton receives federal Title VII funds to assist with this. All teachers who work with LEP students are either bilingual/ESL certified or are currently seeking certification. Interestingly, Creighton does not use smaller class sizes for LEP students; instead, LEP students are integrated as much as possible with mainstream students.

As a result of Proposition 203 (requiring students to be mainstreamed in one year), for the 2001-2002 school year, the old ESL program will become a new Structured English Immersion program; the bilingual program will become a language support program with at least fifty percent of instruction in English and with literacy instruction beginning in English instead of Spanish; and the dual language program will remain unchanged.

Salient features contributing to Creighton's success:

- Parents choose how their child is educated
- All teachers and aides who work with LEP receive special training
- LEP students are integrated as much as possible with native English speakers

- Extra help is offered for students that need remedial assistance

California

This is a state with 1.4 million LEP students as of school year 1999-2000,⁵² representing about 50 percent of the nation's LEP population, 82 percent of whom speak Spanish. Understandably, California has been the focal point of dramatic changes in bilingual education. Frustrated with bilingual programs that didn't deliver what they promised, California voters passed Proposition 227 in June 1998 requiring that all LEP students be educated through structured English immersion with the firm goal of mainstreaming after one year. Students can be placed in a bilingual program by receiving a parental waiver.

Some of the consequences of this change are as follows:⁵³

- Since the implementation of Proposition 227, test scores on the Stanford-9 achievement test have shown greater improvement in the younger grades, suggesting immersion works well for younger LEP students.
- Oceanside Unified School District fully implemented Proposition 227, completely doing away with bilingual instruction. Since then, Oceanside has experienced amazing test score increases. Other districts, such as Ceres and Santa Barbara, that chose to fully implement English immersion programs, also showed great test score increases among LEP students. It is difficult to isolate what influenced the change in test scores since a switch from bilingual education to English immersion was accompanied by a reduction in class size in grades K-2 and implementation of a phonics approach to reading. Dr. Joseph Farley, assistant Superintendent of Oceanside School District and former bilingual educator, testifying before a U.S. House Subcommittee on June 24, 1999, commented on the results: "Our Superintendent [Ken Noonan] was the founding president of the California Association for Bilingual Education and we all campaigned against the initiative, but these results are forcing us to reevaluate our position on bilingual education."
- Only one district, San Jose Unified School District, is legally exempt from complying with Proposition 227 because of a court-ordered consent decree mandating bilingual education.

San Jose also showed some of the least impressive improvements in LEP test scores, especially in reading and language, remaining below average for the past two years.

- Many districts aren't complying with Prop 227 or have used the parental waiver process to pressure parents into continuing their children in bilingual programs. Three districts maintaining bilingual programs are Santa Ana Unified, Vista Unified, and Ocean View (Ventura County). These districts are cited by bilingual advocates as providing good bilingual programs, but did not produce test score results that were better than the previously listed districts that switched to English immersion.
- Other districts, such as San Francisco Unified and Oakland, selectively administered the Stanford-9 test only to LEP students who were thought likely to pass, therefore skewing test results to create the appearance of a successful bilingual program.

California will be closely monitored to see how LEP students are fairing in school systems that implement English immersion. So far, the harsh criticism of widespread English immersion—which predicted harm and failure for California's 1.5 million LEP students—has not been proven accurate.

Colorado

Voters in 2002 will choose whether or not to replace bilingual education with a one-year immersion program. Last year a similar proposal was challenged by a court and taken off the ballot.⁵⁴ The latest petition would require schools to implement a one-year English immersion program unless parents choose otherwise.

Connecticut

After twenty years of mandatory placement in bilingual education, schools must now seek parental consent before enrolling students in bilingual programs. Public Act 99-211, *An Act Improving Bilingual Education*, went into effect in the Fall of 2000. Connecticut has well over 19,000 LEP students, about 3.6 percent of the student population.⁵⁵

Massachusetts

Massachusetts has more than 122,000 LEP students (over 13 percent of the student population).⁵⁶ On July 31, 2001, a ballot initiative similar to those in California, Colorado, and Arizona was launched on the front steps of the Statehouse in Boston. Thirty years ago, Massachusetts was the first state to establish a mandate for

bilingual education. Now, many education leaders—who themselves taught in the bilingual system and have become disenchanted with it—are lobbying for change with the English for the Children campaign. Supporters hope the initiative will be on the 2002 ballot.⁵⁷

New York, NY

As one writer for the New York Times put it, "Over the last 25 years, bilingual programs at many schools have become foreign-language ghettos from which many children never escape."⁵⁸ The New York City Board of Education enacted a policy in March, 2001, supposedly overhauling the bilingual education program with a 7-to-0 vote. The purpose: to expose more LEP students to English during the school day. It gives parents the right to choose whether their child will be educated in new classes that emphasize instruction in English, or to remain in classes with native language instruction.

Previously, about half of the 176,000 students enrolled in the bilingual program participated in ESL classes (subjects are taught in English). The rest of the bilingual students received some instruction in English but other courses—such as math and social studies—were taught mainly in their native languages. Parents will now be given several choices ranging from traditional bilingual to virtually full-time English immersion, with the goal of moving students into mainstream classes as quickly as possible. Speculation exists as to how many changes will actually be enacted due to funding conflicts.

March 2001 also began the first phase of Saturday school classes: 34,000 children were invited to participate, 16,000 of whom were offered English classes if they had been in bilingual or ESL classes for more than three years.⁵⁹

Research

Two competing theories exist when it comes to bilingual education models:

- Teach students first in their native language
- Teach in English as soon and as much as possible

Each is either accused of linguistic and cultural imperialism, or ethnic separatism and self-interest.⁶⁰ Research can be found to support both of these conflicting theories, however, relatively few studies are methodologically sound.

Is one year enough?

This is quickly becoming the most asked question regarding LEP students. Before answering the question, it must first be expanded. Is one year enough to become as fluent as a native English speaker? Not usually. Is one year enough to participate in mainstream classes with native English speakers? Usually.⁶¹

Rossell points out that research focuses on how long until a student is *fluent*, not on how long a student *needs services*.⁶² Predictions of three to seven years until fluency is achieved do not mean that a student must be in TBE classes the entire time.

In fact, a look at the methods used to educate immigrant children in other Western democracies (France, Germany, Australia, Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Switzerland) will prove insightful. Two types of programs have been implemented. The first is a one-year reception class, where newcomers intensively study the language of the school for one year (two if necessary) and then are integrated into regular classes with ongoing support as needed. Kindergarteners are placed directly into a mainstream classroom, and older students' previous education is assessed for the best placement so classes will continue in subjects previously learned.⁶³ Accountability for results is essential to the effectiveness of such an approach.⁶⁴

The second program offers students the opportunity to voluntarily continue development of their native language as an elective, sometimes after school.

The goal of both of these programs is to integrate immigrant students as quickly as possible into the mainstream while supporting native language development.

One-year immersion programs are also found in the U.S., although they do not all carry the same label. In *The ABC's of English Immersion: A teacher's guide*, Rossell lists many cities across America with "newcomer" schools, and quotes a description of them:

The newcomer schools in our sample are impressive places: In their clear sense of mission, innovative curricula, professional teaching staff, and links to the larger community, they represent the kinds of schools to which all children, immigrant and native born, should have access.... The newcomer schools in our sample are all self-contained programs that students attend full-time for one or two semesters, and all but the Los Angeles high school operate in physically separate locations. However, there are a

variety of other newcomer models, including ones that students attend for half the day and then spend the remainder of the day in mainstream classes.⁶⁵

Rossell concludes by addressing why California's Proposition 227 limits to one year the time a student can be placed in a separate below-grade level classroom: not because anyone thinks non-English speaking children will have mastered English in one year, but because evidence suggests that sometime during their first year, immigrant children will understand enough English so that they will be better off in a grade-level mainstream classroom than in a remedial classroom.⁶⁶

In addition, the school year is packed with subject material students must learn. Stressing maintenance of the native language or balanced bilingualism distracts from instruction that produces improved English ability.⁶⁷ The fact of the matter is that when a new subject such as native language maintenance is added, a trade-off is made between English language instruction or subject matter. Beneath all the rhetoric remains the fact that students can understand and function effectively in English long before they have achieved parity.⁶⁸

Assessment

An essential, but disappointingly undefined and inaccurate area of bilingual education is the assessment of LEP students. English proficiency tests and standardized achievement tests are both used to assess fluency in the English language. However, determining fluency based on these tests is inaccurate because the tests cannot separate fluency from academic ability. In other words, a wrong answer may be wrong for one of two reasons: either the student didn't know the answer (academics), or they couldn't understand the question (language fluency). In addition, standardized tests are designed on a bell curve so that 35 percent of students taking a test—even if they are fluent English speakers—will score at or below the 35th percentile.

With these odds, one can see why it could be very hard to test out of the TBE program. Another strike against the likelihood of testing out of the program is that students with lower socioeconomic status score

Research focuses on how long until a student is fluent, not on how long a student needs services

significantly lower on achievement tests, and immigrant children tend to be a high poverty group.⁶⁹ In Washington, 49.3 percent of LEP students were served by Title I in the 1999-2000 school year. Also, if the percentage of LEP students in a school district rises above 15 percent, the level of students meeting Math and Reading standards decreases below the state average. Districts with higher levels of LEP students have a higher percentage of low-income students and lower achievement test scores.⁷⁰ See *Figures BL-10, BL-11*.

It is no wonder that 40 percent of our state's LEP students stagnate in segregated classes when the state requires a test score above the 35th percentile on an achievement test to exit the TBE program, a score which

35 percent of fluent-English students taking the test would not achieve.

Proficiency Tests

Proficiency tests fare no better than achievement tests. Rossell verifies that all English proficiency tests, whether oral or written, are known to be (1) unreliable—the same outcome cannot be attained in subsequent tests of the same child; and (2) invalid—they do not accurately determine who is LEP.⁷¹

Defining proficiency itself is no easy task, as evidenced by a recent study for the U.S. Department of Education by Hakuta, Butler, and Witt, which found no agreement as to what proficiency is, concurring with a previous report by the National Institute of Education for the U.S. Department of Education, and verifying Rossell and Baker's conclusion that, "Language proficiency is one of the most poorly defined concepts in the field of language education."⁷²

To test the reliability and validity of proficiency tests, the same proficiency test that is predominantly used in Washington State—the LAS—was administered to above average, monolingual English-speaking children in Chicago. It misclassified nearly 50 percent of them as LEP. The study also showed an intriguing trend: 78 percent of the English-speaking five-year olds, but only 25 percent of the 14 year olds, were classified as LEP.⁷³ It is interesting to compare this finding to the distribution of LEP students across grade levels in Washington state, with 50 percent of LEP students enrolled in grades K-3.

A similar study in 1984, by the U.S. Department of Education, administered the Language Measurement and Assessment Instrument (LMAI) to a "nationally representative sample of monolingual English speaking school-aged children. The test classified 42 percent of them as LEP,"⁷⁴ even though each child spoke only English.

The basic flaw is this: *Neither standardized achievement tests nor proficiency tests can tell the difference between a student who does not know English and a student who does not know the answer.*⁷⁵ Indeed, students classified as LEP also may score as non-proficient in their native language because the tests do not measure fluency alone, but also academic ability.⁷⁶

Sharon Duncan and Edward De Avila studied language proficiency among Hispanic students in California in 1979. A majority (54) of the 101 students classified by the LAS as limited or non-English proficient were also classified as limited or non-Spanish proficient by

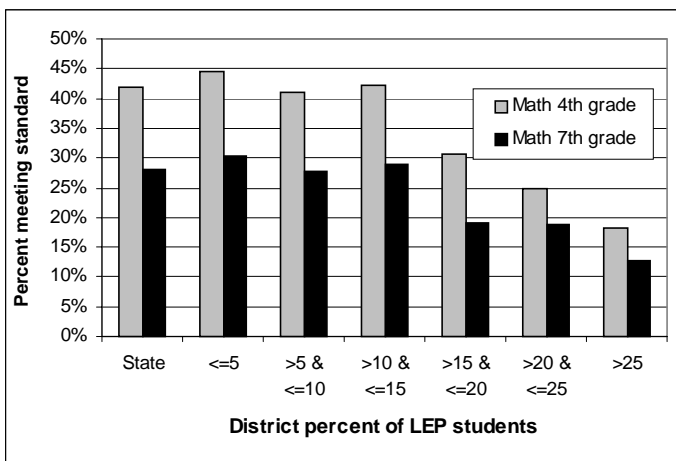


Figure BL-10 District math scores by percent of LEP students. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

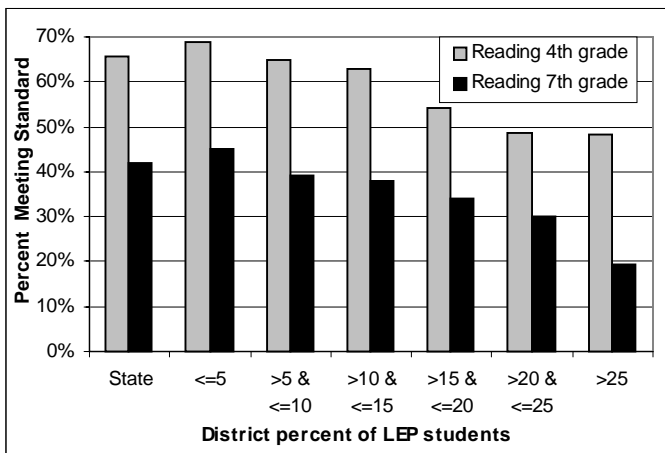


Figure BL-11 District reading scores by percent of LEP students. Source: Educating Limited-English-Proficient Students in Washington State, OSPI Report, December 2000

the Spanish LAS. Of the total 96 students classified as LEP, fewer than half (42) were considered proficient Spanish speakers according to their Spanish test score.⁷⁷ Another study by Heidi Dulay and Marina Burt in 1980 found that in a sample of California school districts, “only half the Hispanic students identified as LEP...were more fluent in Spanish than they were in English. In one school district, almost 40 percent of the Hispanic LEP children spoke no Spanish at all.”⁷⁸

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) national evaluation of Title VII programs (containing The Bilingual Education Act) found that “*less than one-third of the students in Title VII classrooms were there because of their need for English instruction as judged by their classroom teacher.* Only 16 percent were monolingual Spanish speakers. When asked what happens to the Spanish-dominant child after he or she is able to function in English, 86 percent of the project directors reported that the child remained in the bilingual project. [Emphasis added.]”⁷⁹

Teacher judgment

Standardized tests for LEP students were intended to replace teacher judgment. Many studies have been conducted comparing teacher ratings with achievement and proficiency test data. They show the inaccuracy of the latter and the accuracy of teacher judgment in predicting both language proficiency and academic achievement. Indeed, a survey conducted in 1979 by the Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development found the experience of users of these tests to be less than satisfying:

They expressed little confidence in the tests. Generally users felt that teacher judgment was more likely to be a valid measure of both language proficiency and capability of succeeding in an all-English-medium classroom than any test that they had been using. However, project staff had continued to employ the tests in the entry/exit process in order to satisfy state or federal regulations or to give the appearance of objectivity in project decision making.⁸⁰

A 1989 study by Nancy Russell and Alba Ortiz specifically analyzed the Language Assessment Scales (LAS). They found that the LAS predicted language competence neither in spontaneous conversations nor in reading achievement. Rather, the best predictor of reading achievement was the teacher’s rating of language proficiency.

They concluded: “the LAS and the Pre-LAS...are of limited value in making placement decisions or planning educational programs for LEP students.”⁸¹

Washington state law allows teachers to assess students for TBE eligibility by first conducting an interview with the child, an excellent step toward eliminating misclassification—if the interview is conducted by a trained and experienced ESL or bilingual teacher. However, based on Washington’s philosophy of transitional bilingual education, students who speak English most commonly but are classified as LEP may be taught to read in Spanish (or any other language) on the basis that this will help them learn English.⁸²

Neither standardized achievement tests nor proficiency tests can tell the difference between a student who does not know English and a student who does not know the answer.

Literacy

Opponents of transitional bilingual education contend that it relegates students to years of classroom instruction that is below grade level and that it inhibits LEP students from participating in school life with their English-speaking peers.

One must ask the question: If Rosa learns to read first in Spanish, when does she switch to English? Once she learns to read in English, when does she stop attending classes taught in Spanish and instead attends classes with the rest of the student body? At some point along the continuum of her educational career, English instruction must replace Spanish instruction. But delaying such a switch makes it more difficult as concepts and vocabulary become increasingly complicated in each grade level.

Early literacy development is extremely important because, as research shows, a child’s reading level in first grade is a surprisingly accurate predictor of reading achievement into high school.⁸⁴ In “When Older Students Can’t Read,” Louisa Moats describes the common characteristics of poor readers and effective, intensive research-based instruction that will overcome—within one to two years—the gap between poor readers and their grade-level peers. Moats asserts that “reading failure begins early, takes root quickly, and affects students for life.” Over time, the effects of poor reading skills

spread like a cancer affecting comprehension, spelling, writing, and even speaking skills.⁸⁵

It's a fallacy that children cannot speak or write in English by the time that they leave kindergarten. We are living proof. When they leave, they have the foundation necessary to begin the first grade. Some make the transition to an English-speaking class. It all depends on the child.

—Mrs. Urove-Martinez, teacher at P.S. 83 in New York City, speaking about students who enter kindergarten unable to speak English.⁸³

grade level.⁸⁸ Herein lies the magic to this program's success: it caters to no culture but instead focuses on effectively challenging students in a way that enables them to succeed. Children from low-literacy homes can learn to read in a second language when given quality instruction.

Other programs are reporting success in teaching elementary-aged LEP students to read in English. Oceanside School District's LEP student test scores increased tremendously after eliminating bilingual education and implementing a phonics-based reading program instead of a whole language approach.⁸⁹ When working with LEP students, phonics works better than whole language. "Direct instruction in phonics and other 'processing' skills is more important for these children than it is for middle-class English monolingual children."⁹⁰

Still other research further negates the belief that students must be taught first in the native language. Three pertinent conclusions regarding the education of LEP students can be drawn from a 1997 National

Research Council (NRC) study.⁹¹ The fact that these findings come from pro-bilingual authors makes them all the more remarkable:

1. There is no positive or negative effect from teaching in the native language
2. Teaching to read English first is not damaging
3. Emphasizing cultural and ethnic differences is not helpful

Opinion surveys: what parents want

Educators, parents, and researchers across this nation testify that an invaluable element of a child's education is the involvement of his or her parents. With that in mind, a look at what language minority parents desire for the education of their children is fitting. A review of opinion surveys conducted since the 1980's was compiled by Rossell and Baker.⁹² Their conclusions are insightful and intriguing.

First, it must be said that support for native language instruction varies among minority groups. Asian parents tend to be less supportive of native language instruction than are Hispanic parents. Also, most parents often support both continued native language instruction *and* all-English instruction at the same time—two mutually exclusive options.

One survey of great importance was contracted by the U.S. Department of Education to the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in 1988.⁹³ The survey elicited language minority parents' opinions of bilingual education programs. What is apparent from the results is that favoritism toward bilingual education varies depending on the question asked, from over 80 percent to less than 1 percent. For example, 70 percent of parents said they wanted the school to teach literacy in both languages. But only 12 percent of Mexican-American parents wanted Spanish taught in school *if* it meant less time for teaching English. No more than 22 percent were willing to give up art or music to have their child taught the native language. Rossell and Baker assert that "at a minimum, 42 to 52 percent of Mexican-American parents wanted no reduction in English or any other subject in order to include Spanish, *and* they wanted the schools to teach literacy in both languages!"

Trade-off

What many parents don't automatically consider is that there is a trade-off. Adding a second language to the curriculum means that the use of English at school will decline. Parents forget that adding another subject

to the school day usually means that something else must be subtracted. When parents are not specifically asked if they are willing to give up English language instruction or subjects taught in English to have their child learn a native language, survey results change dramatically.

Rossell and Baker show that polls about bilingual education “overestimate support for native tongue instruction” because “when the trade-off question is asked support plummets about 60 points.” When it is not asked, parents often support mutually exclusive alternatives.⁹⁴

It may very well be, according to Rossell and Baker’s review of the surveys, that bilingual education is not an issue of importance to language minority parents. This is inferred from responses to a non-directive⁹⁵ question from the ETS survey, asking parents to rank the three most important things they wanted their child to learn at school. Teaching the non-English language came to the minds of only 4 to 10 percent of the parents, and almost no one mentioned teaching ethnic heritage.

In answer to another question, almost 98 percent of language minority parents said that learning English was very important, and fewer than half the parents thought that the school had the primary responsibility to teach literacy in the native language.

Rossell and Baker conclude:

Some of the support shown for bilingual education reflects general support for any special program for language minority children . . . although more parents surveyed support English language programs for LEP students than support native language programs for LEP students, the differences in support are not large. Support for bilingual education programs is undoubtedly inflated by the fact that parents do not completely understand what they are beyond the fact that they are special help programs for LEP children.⁹⁶

CEO Survey

The Center for Equal Opportunity commissioned a national survey in 1996⁹⁷ to discern what Hispanic parents want their LEP children to learn. For part of the survey participants were asked to rank a list of five educational goals according to which was most important, second most important, etc. The results can be seen in *Figure BL-12*, showing that parents label as most important English and academic subjects. Learning Spanish is

ranked as second most important with 25.5 percent of the votes, behind learning academic subjects (30.7 percent).

Another question on the survey provided evidence about the educational priorities of parents not by asking which is most important, but by asking which should come first. “In your opinion, should children of Hispanic background, living in the United States, be taught to read and write Spanish before they are taught English, or should they be taught English as soon as possible?” Over 60 percent favored teaching English first. *Figure BL-13*.

It is interesting to note that a higher percentage of parents interviewed in English (81.4 percent) favor teaching English as soon as possible compared to a smaller majority (59.2 percent) of those interviewed in Spanish. As the survey reports, “Intensity on this issue varies directly with educational level. The higher the educational level of the respondent, the more likely it is that he or she will prefer that English be taught as soon as possible. A similar pattern prevails with respect to the length of time respondents have lived in the United States.” The longer immigrants have lived here, the more likely they are to favor English being taught as soon as possible, especially among Cuban-Hispanics who favor English first by 70 percent.

A final question dealt with the trade-off issue of preserving Spanish versus less time learning English:

In general, which of the following comes closest to your opinion?

1. My child should be taught his/her academic courses in Spanish, even if it means he/she

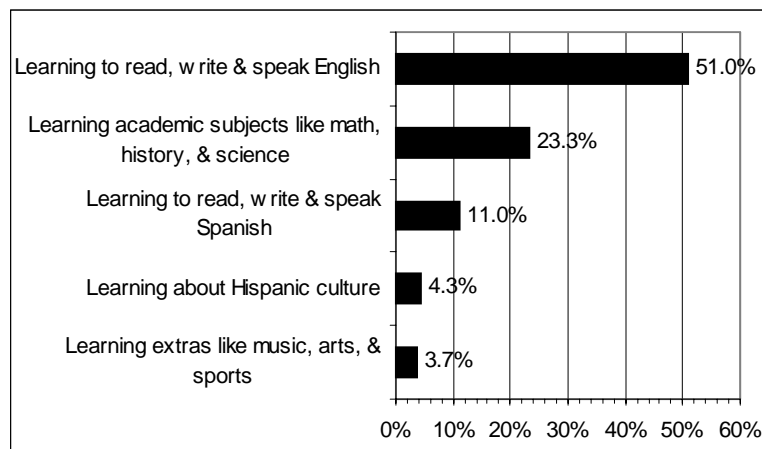


Figure BL-12 Hispanic parents ranking each goal “Most Important.”
 Source: The Importance of Learning English, A National Survey of Hispanic Parents, commissioned by Center for Equal Opportunity

will spend less time learning English (12.2 percent)

2. My child should be taught his/her academic courses in English, because he/she will spend more time learning English (81.3 percent)
3. Unsure (6.5 percent)

The implications of this and other surveys clearly demonstrate that parents may want their children to learn native language skills, but not usually at the expense of learning to read, write, and speak English or before students learn these skills in English.

Program evaluation

Washington's Superintendent of Public Instruction has come to some general conclusions about the state of the current TBE program. A bilingual advisory committee is exploring the possibility of:

- Selecting one English proficiency test to determine program eligibility
- Developing English language achievement standards to monitor student progress toward English fluency [now required by HB 2025]
- Designing a data collection system that would enable ongoing assessment and monitoring of program effectiveness⁹⁸

Of these three projects, the latter is the most critical for determining future direction of the program. The current data collection system allows for almost no comparisons to be made that would quantitatively determine how effective the program is for certain language groups, districts, socioeconomic groups, etc. According to Helen Malagon, state supervisor of bilingual

education, for the past two years, the Bilingual Education Office has been working on creating a new method of collecting data. In addition, the state auditor is examining a sample of districts to determine if students are being transitioned out of the TBE program properly.⁹⁹

For LEP students in Washington, results speak louder than good intentions, and the results don't show that TBE is working: 40 percent of LEP students stagnate in the program for more than three years. Transitional bilingual instruction is an unnecessary waste of money in a state where 159 languages are represented. Nationally, transitional bilingual education most usually means "transitional Spanish to English education."

Although it is difficult to ascertain exactly from the district data collected, it appears that a majority of LEP students are educated in an ESL program. Something is wrong, however, when 40 percent of those students remain in the program for more than three years. Of course, there is no telling what kind of special assistance the students are receiving—if they are mainstreamed with pull-in or pull-out programs, if they really can't speak English at all or if they are simply receiving minimal help, such as tutoring outside of school or within the classroom.

Culture war: Priorities

The Washington OSPI declares that, "Schools need to provide LEP students with cognitively complex academic instruction through their first language for as long as possible."¹⁰⁰ Instruction in English would then be provided for part of the school day in increasing amounts as fluency increases.

The claim that LEP students *need* to be taught in their native language *as long as possible* is unproven by accurate research and demonstrates a stubborn adherence to theories that were created to support the bilingual education laws decades ago. One could say that we are involved in a cultural war, as many bilingual educators are more concerned with cultural and linguistic maintenance than with the educational achievement of language learners.

The great tragedy is that the casualties of such a war are the futures of LEP students who are left sitting in native language classes. A line has been drawn in the sand, and the ideology of each side could be defined as believing either that native language instruction is *necessary* to guard language fluency at any cost, or that native language should be used only as a support while English is prioritized to achieve complete participation

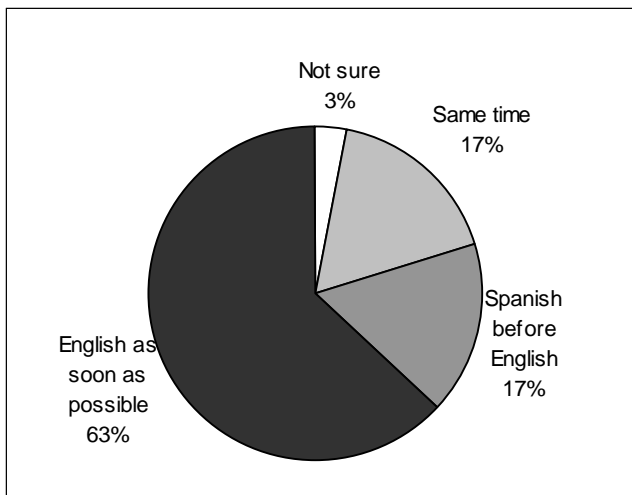


Figure BL-13 How soon should Hispanic children be taught English?
Source: The Importance of Learning English, A National Survey of Hispanic Parents, commissioned by Center for Equal Opportunity

in an English speaking education system and society. From opinion surveys of parents, it is obvious that their educational desires for their children line up with the second set of priorities.

Elements of successful programs

As the OSPI report recommends, focusing on program labels (since programs with the same name, such as TBE, vary widely in practice) is less helpful than identifying effective methods of educating LEP students at the school, district, state, and classroom levels. That is precisely what we hoped would have occurred by now, given the decades that the TBE program has existed in Washington state. Washington does not differ much from the national scene where bilingual education has provided little accurate research, much failure for those it was intended to help, and a stubborn ignorance of the need for change. Thankfully, to create successful programs we need not start from scratch, since researchers have identified common characteristics of successful bilingual and immersion programs.¹⁰¹ They include:

- 1) Some native-language instruction, especially initially when a student knows no English.
- 2) English instruction is phased in relatively early and the native language is then used only to clarify instructions.¹⁰²
- 3) Content areas such as math, social studies, and science are taught in English.
- 4) 80 percent of class time is used for academic learning tasks.
- 5) Specially trained teachers to instruct English language learners.
- 6) High expectations of LEP students' ability to achieve the same high standards that are expected from native English speakers.

Integration and Communication

Two more elements could be added to the list: (1) early and consistent integration with native English speakers.¹⁰³ (2) Constant communication between teachers about LEP students. ESL/TBE teachers need to know of problem areas in the regular classroom to provide the best assistance to LEP students, and to tackle areas of confusion or misunderstanding before they become major hindrances to comprehension.¹⁰⁴

Plan for Newcomers

Washington state's LEP students tend to be a migratory population, as evidenced by the monthly average of LEP students (55,651) compared to the total LEP students served (66,281). 19.7 percent (13,058) are

federally funded by the Title I Migrant Education program. To better deal with this, school districts should plan for the needs of newcomers and design strategies to meet their needs so new students don't hold back the class. The European model of one-year reception classes for newcomers is a recommended example of effective integration of immigrant students.

Teacher training

Returning to the previously listed characteristics of successful programs, number four is: teachers who are appropriately trained to teach LEP students. Washington state has much room to improve as far as training is concerned. Of teachers providing instruction to LEP students in school year 1999-2000, 45 percent had an ESL endorsement and 17 percent had a bilingual endorsement. Only fifty-two percent of the 185 school districts with LEP students provided in-service training for teachers on ESL and bilingual education, and 64 percent of the districts provided such training to instructional aides.¹⁰⁵ No information is presented in the SPI's report that identifies the number of instructional aides trained to work in ESL or bilingual programs.

An important distinction to be made is that teacher and instructional aide training does not mean that instructors are bilingual. Various studies have shown that the bilingual ability of a teacher, or lack thereof, does not affect student achievement.¹⁰⁶ Others show that having a bilingual teacher has a *negative* effect on English achievement, but having a teacher who is merely familiar with the child's native language has a *positive* effect.¹⁰⁷ Some native language ability is helpful, but too much can actually be detrimental (*if* the goal is English language proficiency) unless the bilingual teacher is able to minimize the amount of time spent instructing in the native language of the students. (In other words, when the Facilitation Theory is subverted, students benefit).

Recommendations

- *Mandate the results, not the means.* Districts should be allowed to implement whatever educational programs they think best target LEP students. Education programs for LEP students that fail to achieve their stated goals within the time allowed should not be maintained (at peril of lost funding). Accountability is essential in such an approach, which is why this shift in policy must go hand-in-hand with the next recommendation.

- *Change the three-year transitioning goal to one year.* Early results in California indicate LEP students have nothing to lose by making this change and may have a great deal to gain. This would also allow funds to be shifted to teacher training and assistance. After transitioning, LEP students should participate fully in mainstream classes while receiving, as necessary, extra services such as after-school programs, tutoring, and pull-out ESL assistance. To avoid unnecessary segregation, prior to transitioning, ESL students should be integrated into as many activities with their English-speaking peers as possible.
- *Do not place students in a separate program without parental consent.* In Washington, the burden is placed on language minority parents to request the removal of their child from special classes. Current law must be amended to require the district to obtain parental consent to enroll a student in a special program.
- *Base entrance and exit criteria principally on teacher judgment, not test scores,* until a valid and reliable test is developed or adopted. Research shows that (1) teachers are a more accurate predictor of LEP student success than standardized tests, and (2) that standardized tests are invalid and unreliable predictors of achievement and proficiency.
- *“Improve the instruction of the growing number of LEP students while operating under staff-related constraints.”*— SPI 2000 report. While acknowledging the constraints Washington faces (“The sheer number of languages spoken in many districts and a shortage of well-trained staff who can provide bilingual or ESL instruction potentially makes LEP students more at risk of failing...”), the state superintendent continues to recommend an impossible and extremely costly shift to native language instruction for as long as possible. This is not sensible.
- *Provide better research and district data about program variations.* School districts should be required to keep data that will enable state researchers to explore program variations and their effects on LEP students. In addition, an entity outside the state should also analyze the data collected. Washington state TBE program administrators have been designing a more detailed data collection system for the past two

years. Only with heightened analysis and quality research will we know exactly which areas of LEP education require improvement, and which are successful.

Endnotes

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17. Porter, "Case Against Bilingual Education."
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