

HOW CAN BILINGUAL EDUCATION FACILITATE IMMIGRANT STUDENTS' TRANSITION INTO THE SPANISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM? SOME PROPOSALS

Jesús García Laborda¹
Universidad Politécnica de Valencia

Does Spain's Educational system really need bilingual education? How can we help foreign immigrants transition into Spain's daily life? In this article, I shall propose that despite the little interest the national government has shown towards integrative bilingual education, the country should aim to increasing funds and sources towards developing genuine two or more ways bilingual education programs. Not so long ago bilingual education would be well considered as unnecessary and superfluous by many of those who recognize its current value and use. This is so; however, for one-way English bilingual education which is mostly use is bilingual high standard schools and few public institutions awarded by the MEC - British Council programs and funds. But one may easily wonder about those depressed low class immigrants who have been neglected or, even worse, "punished by the new educational law" ("Ley de Calidad", 2002) and given a remedial education (despite the fact that many bring good intelligences and are very articulate in their own language and another one such as French, English or German).

Many of us, who do not believe in things as "compulsory enculturation" or, better say, Spanization and assimilation, which often produce immediate rejection, sense of need of self defense and loss of cultural identity, think that the law will force immigrants to a cultural fight in high and primary schools in a very harsh social and cultural election, and consequently, prospective Spanish cultural rejection.

However, it is quite clear that when students have a secure sense of authenticity in their cultural identity, and a favorable social context in which live and work, they tend to appreciate the educational chances they receive and extensively return all these

¹ Universidad Politécnica de Valencia; E.P.S.G. Gandía. Carretera Nazaret- Oliva, s/n. 46730 Grao de Gandía (Valencia), España. Phone number: 34 666 28 45 57; e-mail: jgarcial@idm.upv.es

positive gifts either by returning to their own country and making it a better place or by staying, and thus, cooperating in the enrichment of their new country.

Even though many instructors, teachers and even professors consistently claim the positive effects of bilingual education and a large number of empirical studies have proved the excellence of bilingual education (Cummins, 1999; August & Hakuta, 1998; Krashen, 1997; Miramontes, Nadeau & Cummins, 1997), when it turns to immigrants, especially Eastern Europeans and Moroccans, all the openness and facilitating efforts tend to deny bilingual education's validity for a number of reasons. In not few cases, these reasons are more related to a subjective evaluation of their capacity (ignoring different individual's potential, and generally assuming that all of the "are the same").

In my opinion, the educational opportunities they receive determine their degree of educational achievement, on one hand, and the stoppage of prejudgments facilitates their academic integration, on the other. It is not quite uncommon to hear one's colleagues stating that if Moroccans made an effort they would get immersed in the educational system in just one year. It is so that I wonder about me with the impossible task of learning all the necessary specific language for math, social sciences and the rest of compulsory school subjects in just one year. Moreover, it is the new Spanish education law ("Ley de Calidad") which emphasizes these ideas by stating issues that immigrants do have problems or may be unable to address and solve. Among these are:

- 1- **The new Evaluation and assessment process.** It seems quite ridiculous to affirm that:

La evaluación, el establecimiento de pruebas, la apertura de oportunidades para todos que suponen las vías formativas, la exigencia y el esfuerzo: ninguno de esos factores de calidad convierte el sistema en un cúmulo de barreras segregadoras.

(Anteproyecto de la Ley de Calidad Enseñanza², 10)

- 2- **Requesting higher educational standards** when, in many instantes, their previous educational background is limited. The prospective law says:

Son precisamente quienes no cuentan con oportunidades fuera del sistema los que más necesitan un sistema de oportunidades de calidad" and maybe we should consider in which way they can achieve so when their previous schooling is quite limited.

(A.L.C.E., 10)

- 3- **By saving money in education** "reforzar el aprendizaje lingüístico" (A.L.C.E., 11) and therefore justifying, in this way, immersion programs (not to say just remedial classes) when the basics for this type of programs are far away from

² I will mention the new law as ALCE from now on.

being met as the law recognizes: “Estos programas se impartirán, en la medida de lo posible, en aulas específicas en centros ordinarios” (A.L.C.E., 31).

- 4- By secluding **immigrant students to programs of professional training** (A.L.C.E., 11) in the expected case of school failure.
- 5- By not making clear that there is **little interest in using these programs as facilitators to get into the school system** mainstream. As the law says:
 En función del nivel y evolución de los aprendizajes, dichos programas discurrirán [or maybe not] en paralelo con su escolarización en los grupos ordinarios.
 (A.L.C.E., 31)
- 6- Finally, by leaving them just **two years to get included in the General education** courses or **sent to second class Professional Training Programs**.

Depending on the context of opportunities and schools their opportunities and possibility of exercising them can be markedly different from one school to another. Apart from institutional issues, many teachers are afraid of bilingual education not being worth due to their own ideological reasons. It seems unnecessary to mention that nationalistic discrepancies have become quite evident in Spain in the last years. Without addressing any of the different tendencies, it is self-evident that language and bilingual education are “bound up with individual and group identity, status, intellect, culture, nationalism, and freedom” (Crawford, 1999), and touches individual’s feelings in issues of heritage, culture, assimilation, and quality of life. However, it can be quite unfair to bias bilingual education for immigrants for reasons of race, faith and political climate instead of addressing issues of better living or freedom to work for a better life. In my opinion bilingual education needs to be implemented to foster better internal and external relations, get to communicate between the different peoples and, most specifically, to improve intercultural communication in foreign languages within the European Union, and consequently favoring trade and economy.

1. Program issues to account for

In my opinion, there are three main factors that bilingual program should consider:

- (a) the learning process (teaching methodology),
- (b) the different roles of the instructional languages in contact, and
- (c) the degree of native culture maintenance.

If bilingual education institutions should be opened in Spain, they should be very respectful to cultural and language heritage (García Laborda, 2001). By doing efforts to change the students' way of thinking or not respecting their ancestral roots we may both endanger the academic goals and the expected immersion benefits by creating a strong group self-image. By being respectful and providing with a Spanish –foreign language students will advance in their academic learning while provoking great interest in assimilating to the new culture but, this is very important, not substituting it.

It seems also relevant to mention that there is a number of important researchers (Chavez & Amselle, 1997; Ravitch, 2001) whose theories support the Spanish new model and, therefore, consider that learning the new language should be their main if not only aim. Thus, their mother tongue should not be used by any means.

One other important consideration should be that bilingual education can eliminate negative effects and feelings of schooling, and facilitate. By introducing two-way bilingual education programs, students get acquainted, first, and integrated, later, in a very flexible and enriching educational paradigm. The new paradigm enhances and opens both Spanish and immigrant students to cultural, political and social understanding. Besides, denying bilingual education gives young immigrants additional argumentation against their new cultural framework by transmitting the idea of an imposed (and usually not desired) education and showing the little local interest for all the values and positive things they bring with them integration (Munns, McFadden Simpson & Faulkner, 1999). Peoples' identities who are drastically changed in this way may never adapt to their new environment as it can be seen in Catalonia and the Vasc country when integration but not denaturalization should be the ideal situation. Besides, García Laborda (2002) and others (Krashen, 1997) have proposed that good literacy in the mother tongue facilitates second language acquisition due to the favoring aspects of positive transfer.

Apart from this, immigrant students in mainline classrooms do not seem to achieve better in any case than their bilingual education counterparts. Indeed, bilingual education students usually get better grades, have lower dropout rates, better self-image and feel better about their school experience.

2. What do we suggest?

Two-way bilingual education (also known as bilingual immersion, two-way immersion, developmental bilingual and dual language programs) represents one of the best options to address most of the capital issues mentioned in previous sections. In fact, this kind of bilingual education seems the most valid in many schools across Spain. In these programs, students could benefit from learning both the integrating and integrated languages by having both Spanish and immigrant students working together. In this case, Spanish students should be receiving instruction in a foreign language (mainly English, German and French) and immigrant students would learn in Spanish. Besides, in autonomous communities all the students would have the local language as a compulsory requirement with a number of hours ranging between 6 and 12. In any case, the number of hours would change or vary according to three main factors: personal interest, school requirements and progress in the foreign language. While Spanish would currently be the most used target language represented in most two-way programs, other programs should support learning through Valenciá, Catalá, and Euskera as the main languages and then support all the others. Two-way programs should guarantee ample exposure to all the in-school languages, academic achievement in all the other subjects and value all the languages in contact.

In this way, multicultural two-ways programs should optimize the language to make better learners, integrate immigrant students and favor Spanish students as well. In this academic, language, and affective approach everybody would benefit from the opportunity to learn from the others, and become one multicultural unit which respected minorities and favored everybody's affective and school needs. It wouldn't be wrong to say that after the school years most of the students would be articulate and fluent in, at least, three international languages plus the local one. In my personal opinion, this fluency would probably carry academic excellence alongside. In relation to personal feelings, students would probably be more enthusiastic about the school experience, open to the world and cross-cultural understanding, more affective and would develop a better self-image and self-esteem.

3. Implementation issues

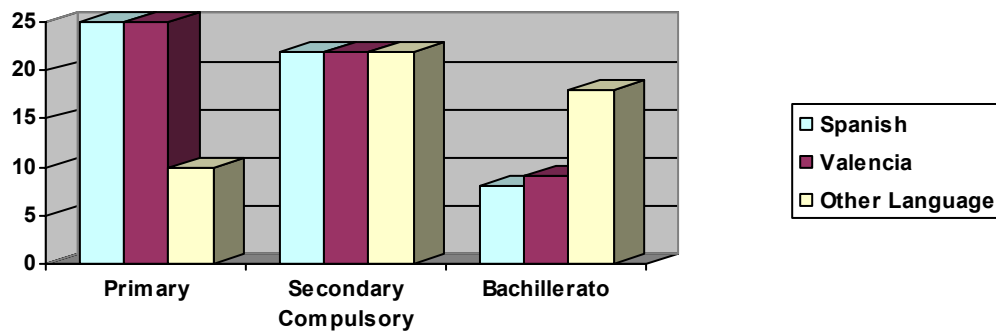
My proposal of the Spanish multicultural two-way curriculum would be based in the current subjects as taught in any other school giving preference to current minimal contents as those imposed by the current national legal system and the Communities' specific regulations and laws. This means that students would learn different subjects in both languages (and new materials should be created or adapted to this situation). Besides, students would not fear to use, learn or manipulate foreign languages. Also, it seems quite reasonable to believe that having had education in three languages positive transfer may also facilitate the learning and development of other modern languages later. The teaching methodology would emphasize task based and cooperative language / subject learning including experiential or hands-on activities, thematic units, peer interaction, and meaningful learning (e.g., learning to read, analyze and perform group projects in three languages as a posters on math questions).

Given these parameters, the ministry, the community and the local schools would set and implement the main academic aims through the minimal content regulations and the school curricula. I have also addressed some of my own suggestions for teaching but any instructor should complement, change and adapt his teaching to the school's specific and unique situation and local and cultural context such as social class, population and some other needs. For example, a program may allocate the following pattern for the 4th year of ESO.

Subject	Spanish	Community Language	Other language
Spanish language and literature	5 hours		
Natural Sciences (Biology / geology) or Latin		3 hours	3 hours
Physical Education		2 / 3 hours	
Social Sciences			3 hours
Music and Technology		3 hours	
Math	5 hours		
Foreign Languages (different from those used in general teaching)			3 hours
Electives	3 hours	3 hours	3 hours

My recommendation is the “33/33/33” model, in which the students receive instruction for equal amounts of time in three or four languages, being more L1 oriented in the early educational stages (up to 60% in L1) and almost second / third language oriented by the end of the school period.

In this progressive model most students get integrated according to their age. Additionally, some remedial classes should be given to new comers who may well still be instructed in a language familiar to them. However, as Christian (1994) points out, cross-group interaction helps students realize the full benefits of the two-way approach, since the presence of native speakers of both language groups makes the environment of two-way programs more conducive to second language learning.



4. Future directions and concerns

As mentioned, the Spanish new Educational Law offers negative educational perspectives to foreign immigrants. Institutional programs of two way-bilingual education would represent a tremendous advance in foreign language and academics to minority groups. Although there are a number of alternatives, it seems quite reasonable to believe that students involved increasing bilingual education would finish up by having fluency in three languages. These schools should be large, independent, and, whenever possible, cover all the school period (K-2° Bachillerato).

Bilingual education would benefit positively from new ways of thinking, and the students' self-esteem and self-image. But it would not only be a valuable asset for immigrants but also for Spanish students. It is, therefore, the Spanish national and Community responsibility to provide funds, facilitate the creation and create new policies to offer bilingual education programs to all those who may benefit from them instead of misusing their funds in bilingual funds in one way programs who only benefit

a few children. Only in this way, it will be likely to help and assimilate immigrant people who will, in the end, support the human needs that the Spanish society (with the lowest birth rate in Europe) requires. To conclude, let us use bilingual education to give them and us an opportunity to create a better place and favor universal understanding.

Bibliographical references

- August, D. & K. Hakuta (1998). *Educating language-minority children*. New York: Basic Books.
<also available in <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309064147/html/index.html>>
- Chavez, L. & J. Amselle (1997). "Bilingual education theory and practice: Its effectiveness and parental opinions". *NASSP Bulletin* 81(586), 101-06.
- Christian, D. (1994). *Two-way bilingual education: Students learning through two languages*. Educational Practice Report: 12. East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Learning (ERIC Document Reproduction Service N° ED377705).
- Crawford, J. (1999). *Bilingual education: History, politics, theory, and practice*. Los Angeles: Bilingual Educational Services, Inc. (4th. ed.). Also available in:
<<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/JWCRAWFORD/BECh1.htm>>
- Cummins, J. (1999). "Alternative paradigms in *bilingual education* research: Does theory have a place?". *Educational Researcher* 28(7), 26-34.
- García Laborda, J. (2001). "Big gaps, difficult solutions: Teaching English to high schools immigrants". *Quaderns Digitals* 25.
<<http://www.quadernsdigitals.net/articuloquaderns.asp?IdArticle=4263>>
- García Laborda, J. (2002). *¿Cómo queremos que nos enseñen inglés?* Albacete: Liberlibro.com. Also available in:
<<http://www.dipualba.es/publicaciones/Libros/19.002/libro.pdf>>
- Krashen, S. (1997) *Why bilingual education?* ERIC Digest.
<it is available in http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed403101.html>
- Miramontes, O., A. Nadem & N. Cummins (1997). *Restructuring schools for linguistic diversity*. Columbia: Teacher's College Press.
- Munns, G., M. McFadden, L. Simpson & K. Faulkner (1999). "Do I Beat 'Em or Join 'Em?". Individual and collective adaptations leading to school success among minority group students in Australia". ERIC document number ED441643.
- Proyecto de Ley orgánica de la Educación* (2002). Ministerio de Educación y Deportes. España.
<available in <http://www.mec.es/leycalidad/proyleycal.pdf>>
- Ravitch, D. (2001). "Ex uno plures". *Education Next* 1(3), 27-29.