

Reading for the Argument: Bilingual Education

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Goals: The purpose of this activity is to encourage a close reading of secondary and primary sources to understand the arguments and evidence presented in each. In addition, it asks students to recognize how historical context shapes points of view and to consider how historians use primary sources to construct their argument. Chapter 5 “[Blood of the Spirit](#)” in *The Language of Blood: The Making of Spanish-American Identity in New Mexico, 1880s-1930s* would be assigned as a pre-reading.

1. Break into 3 groups, select someone who will take notes and report back to the whole group on the points discussed in your group
2. Each group should review the Nieto-Phillips excerpt (“Defenders of the Mother Tongue” pages 197-205) and list key points about why and how Nuevomexicanos argued for bilingual education in order to sustain their culture and identity.
3. Then each group should read the New Mexico editorial along with their assigned editorial/article (Group A – New York Times 1875, Group B – Seattle Times 1996, and Group C – Rethinking Education 2003) and list the key points and supporting evidence made in defense of, or in opposition to bilingual education in each editorial. Also list examples of historical information from the editorial/article that establish the context for their argument. (For example, the 1875 New York Times article notes that one-fifth of the population speaks German.)
4. Within your small group discuss what the position of the editorial/article reveals about that time period and location and how it compares to the arguments made in Aurora Lucero’s speech and the Nieto-Phillips excerpt.
5. Outline several points your group would make in drafting a letter to the editor in response to the article/editorial you read (either in support or opposition).
6. Each group should then share with the whole group the different points of view and evidence presented in their editorial/article. As a whole group discuss how the arguments for and against bilingual education differed in these selections and reflect on how the issues raised by Nieto-Phillips may differ in different time periods and locales.

All Groups

STRONG PLEA FOR THE SPANISH
Las Vegas Normal University Bulletin Contains Eloquent
Argument by Miss Aurora Lucero

“Shall the Spanish language be taught in the schools of New Mexico,” is the title of a most eloquent plea for the perpetuation in New Mexico of the language which next to English is said to be spoken most widely throughout the world. The article by Miss Aurora Lucero of Las Vegas, is the feature of the January number of the Las Vegas Normal University bulletin. The contribution demonstrates the scholarship and culture of its author and it is really a marvel of eloquence. The author’s reasons, however, for wanting Spanish taught coincidentally with English in the public schools are not all sentimental. She calls attention to the great commercial value of the language to the people of America, especially in view of the closer relations which are coming about with the great Latin countries of Central and South America. The following paragraph is worth republishing.

“The Spanish, next to the English, is the language most widely spread throughout the world, and though now the sun sets on the dominions of the actual successor of Charles V, it does not set, nor will it ever, on the dominion of the Spanish language. It is spoken in the far-off Philippines and far along from frozen mountain peaks to blooming valleys it keeps with ever increasing [erbo?] from Mexico and Central America sown to the Straits of Magellan. All the islands cradled in the bosom of the Atlantic rejoice in its grandeur and its majesty. Lastly, it is spoken, written and sung in Spain – romantic Spain – the land of knighthood and the mother of [her?] as the power that saved Europe from the fate of the Roman empire the hand that first unraveled the mystery of the sea, to [give the?] new world to civilization, and to hoist the [???] of Christianity on the Teocalis, on the Incas and the Montezumas.

“Such is the language against which it is proposed to close the doors of the public schools of this territory. A language with such a record, such a history, such traditions and backed as is the Spanish by the moral influence of so many civilized countries, deserves a place not only in the public schools of New Mexico, where it belongs by inheritance and the right which these centuries of permanency therein give it, but in the best colleges of the United States in the proudest seats of learning in the world.

“Therefore, in the name of all that is noble, grand and beautiful in the literature of the world, In the name of the broadening of the fields of our business interests, and in the expansion of trade relations with our immediate neighbors, in the name of the Anglo-Saxon youth of this territory who are everywhere endeavoring with earnestness fully worthy of the excellent cause, to learn the Spanish, in the name of the rights which the people of New Mexico have as citizens in this great republic, in the name of its duty to them as contracted most solemnly before the world at Guadalupe Hidalgo, in the name of honesty and justice let us by all means see to it that the Spanish language is not driven from the public schools of New Mexico.

Source: *Albuquerque Journal*, page [6], vol. CXXIX, iss. 32, February 1, 1911

Group A

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

FURTHER DISCUSSION ON GERMAN IN THE SCHOOLS – REPETITION OF FORMER ARGUMENTS—A PETITION FROM GERMAN HOUSEHOLDERS

The Board of Education met yesterday at the corner of Grand and Elm streets, William H. Neilson, President, in the Chair. There was a full attendance. A petition from the German Householders of New-York was presented by Mr. Truad, representing the necessity of continuing the teaching of the German language in the public schools, and deprecating the attempts recently made to exclude it. The memorial closed with a series of resolutions demanding as a right, that in the interests of progress, education, and patriotism, the public schools should furnish ample opportunities for instruction in the German language. Mr. Truad urged in support of the petition that the German language was spoken by one fifth of the population of this country, and could not be regarded as a foreign tongue. Of all other countries, the English and German nations were nearest to each other in sympathy and aspiration, and he trusted that the instruction in the German language would not be excluded from the public school system. The subject was referred to the Committee on Course Studies.

Commissioner Baker offered a resolution recommending the introduction of a regular course of instruction in needle-work into the public schools, which was adopted.

Source: New York Times, February 18, 1875

Group B

It's Time For Blunt Talk About Bilingual Education

By Michelle Malkin

"They teach my children in Spanish in school so they can be busboys and waiters. I teach them in English at home so they can be doctors and lawyers."

So says Ernesto Ortiz, a Hispanic rancher in Texas, who became frustrated with so-called bilingual education programs that teach children in their native language before allowing them to make a transition to English.

"Spanish is the language of doormen, dishwashers and fruit-pickers. We should be teaching English, which is the language of doctors, dentists and lawyers."

So says Ron Taber, a white real-estate developer who is running for state schools chief here in Washington. Taber has been echoing Ortiz's frustration from the beginning of his campaign. Few paid attention to the remarks until last week, when rival Chris Vance sent out a press release attacking Taber. The media and the education establishment, roused by Vance's yapping, delivered their own predictable Pavlovian responses: Offensive! Crude! Insensitive! Insulting! Nativist!

Critics painted Taber as a blundering polemicist. But he need not apologize for sympathizing with a growing movement of immigrant parents and teachers who object to "transitional bilingual education (TBE)," the accepted methodology nationwide for teaching limited-English-proficient (LEP) students over the last three decades.

Currently, 75 percent of all federal education dollars spent on bilingual education is allocated to transitional programs in school districts across the country. In Seattle, more than 6,200 students who speak more than 76 different languages require TBE. The ostensible goal of TBE is to "transition" students from their native language (which they must learn to read and write) to English in about three years.

But in practice, TBE is neither transitional nor bilingual nor educational. In Washington, for example, the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, an Olympia-based think tank reports that in 1993, only 10.6 percent of students in bilingual programs successfully exited within three years.

Study after study over the years has failed to find good evidence of TBE's efficacy. In one of the most respected independent reviews, the Congressional Research Service reported that the evidence, at best, was inconclusive.

Christine Rossell, political science professor at Boston University and author of "Bilingual Education in Massachusetts: The Emperor Has No Clothes," reviewed 60 bilingual-ed studies, 78 percent of which showed that TBE was no better or actually worse than doing nothing.

And a recent study by the New York City Board of Education showed that 90 percent of students who enter bilingual education between sixth and ninth grade fail to move on to regular classes within the required three years. Among students who enter between first and third grade, the failure rate is 75 percent.

Supporters of transitional bilingual education deride immersion as "submersion." That is simply not what the research shows. Children's advocates should heed the actions of immigrant parents themselves. They - not the bilingual education cultists - provide the most compelling evidence that TBE is harmful to children.

Late last year, 150 immigrant families sued the New York education commissioner, charging that "tens of thousands of immigrant children in New York City have been permitted to languish for up to six years in bilingual classes, learning neither English nor other subjects particularly well." One mother, Maria Perez, complained that "They place children in bilingual programs and keep them there for years and years. They aren't learning English."

In February, 100 parents and their children boycotted the 9th Street School in East Los Angeles for two weeks to protest the lack of adequate English instruction. "We want our children to be taught in English . . . that's why we came to the United States," said Jovita Ruiz, one of the protesting parents. Another mother told Education Week, "I don't want to wait so long for her to be in all-English classes. I want her to be a professional when she grows up, to have more than us." The school eventually relented.

Scientifically valid research does not support TBE. Neither do an increasing numbers of parents and teachers. What, then, is sustaining the bilingual-education bureaucracy? Simple: the power of financial incentives. State and federal funding formulas are based on how many students a district maintains in its bilingual-education classes. As soon as those kids are put into mainstream classes, the dollars stop flowing. This may explain why horror stories of children classified as limited-English proficient based on their surnames are increasingly common. And why 60 percent of LEP students are U.S.-born American citizens. The monster must be fed.

TBE advocates would rather that the parental revolt die away quietly and that people like Ron Taber shut up. They and their friends argue for a more diplomatic, incremental approach. Well, tact be damned. Students are being used as school district funding sources. They are sinking. And the smooth-talkers are getting away with it.

Michelle Malkin's column appears Tuesday on editorial pages of The Times.

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Group C

Bilingual Education Is A Human and Civil Right

A Rethinking Schools editorial

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In 1864, Congress prohibited Native-American children from being taught in their own languages. It took the U.S. government 70 years to overturn that law. Now they're at it again. The federal government and the states have taken steps toward banning bilingual education in several states and weakening it in virtually every state. We hope it won't take another 70 years to restore students' right to learn their own languages in school.

Silicon Valley millionaire Ron Unz has spearheaded four statewide ballot initiatives to ban bilingual education. Three of these have won and resulted in anti-child policies in California (1998), Arizona (2000), and now Massachusetts (2002). In this latest election in Massachusetts, 70 percent of the voters approved the "English for the Children" initiative, which will take bilingual education away from children who need it. (Ironically, Massachusetts was the first state in the nation to legislatively support bilingual education some 31 years ago.) . . .

A HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHT

The current attack on bilingual education denies children a basic human and civil right - the right to learn in their native language. Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of a Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989 (and ratified by all nations except the United States and Somalia) states that "the education of the child should be directed to ... the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values." Article 30 states that "a child belonging to an [ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority] should not be denied the right ... to use his or her own language."

In 1998 the Linguistic Society of America also affirmed this basic human right. It passed a resolution supporting the right of all residents of the United States "to have their children educated in a manner that affirmatively acknowledges their native language abilities as well as ensures their acquisition of English."

Not only is the right to learn in one's native language a human right, it is a civil right as well. In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Lau vs. Nichols* that California schools without special provisions to educate language minority students were violating the students' civil rights. This decision gave impetus to the bilingual education movement.

In our minds, the civil right to an equal opportunity in education is clearly violated when children are denied an education that is comprehensible. If students are placed in "English immersion" classes, large chunks of the curriculum will be incomprehensible. This violates a basic civil right to equal treatment under the law.

We are disturbed by the way voters are manipulated by money and disinformation to vote for policies that harm children, but it's difficult to hold individual voters accountable for their

actions. However, elected officials who voted for the ESEA can and should be held accountable for their actions.

Any hope of overturning the current anti-bilingual policies begins with students, families, and educators. We need to show state and federal legislators how their discriminatory policies affect children and force them to change their positions before the ESEA comes up for reauthorization six years from now.

As educators who believe in social justice we think it is important to fight for everyone's human and civil rights. Ultimately, we believe that all children should have the right to learn at least two languages, including their mother tongue. Throughout the world children become bilingual or multilingual and it is valued. We call upon everyone who believes in bilingual education to testify, organize, and demand that our children's rights be restored and protected.

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http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/bilingual/Bili172.shtml