

CHAPTER FOUR
BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND THE CALIFORNIA EXPERIENCE
TOWARDS A MULTILINGUAL AMERICA? Perhaps Not yet!

The illiterate of the 21st century
will not be those who cannot read and write,
but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.
Alvin Toffler

We have discussed in the previous chapter that although the term bilingual education is construed as a wide-ranged-absolute-mandated program involving all LEP students, in fact, there are various methods conceived and applied to cater students with the need for language assistance. As a matter of fact, the controversy solely revolves around the “Primary Language Instruction” method, since the other methods heavily rely on English. Under this premise, we will be considering the term bilingual education in regards to this method to discuss the case of California.

California is perhaps, the best example of bilingual education taken to the limits and then completely reversed under an umbrella of political interests.

4.1 A Latino California.

The population of California experimented an extraordinary growth during the second half of the 20th century. A great factor for this increase is attributed to immigration, either from other states of the Union, or from other countries, specifically Mexico.

According to figures from the 2000 census, California counted 33,871,648 inhabitants, making it the most populated state in the Union. Most Californians have

preferred to settle in just three metropolitan areas: Los Angeles-Long Beach, San Francisco-Oakland, and San Diego. The state of California has quite a diversified population where non-Hispanic Whites constitute the largest share of California's inhabitants, reaching 59.5 percent of the people. Asians constitute 10.9 percent, African Americans make up 6.7 percent, Native Americans are 1 percent, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders are 0.3 percent, and those of either mixed heritage or race not reported are 21.5 percent. Hispanics in this state reach a considerable 32.4 percent of the population (Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2004). The numbers indicate, thus, that the Hispanic agenda is an unavoidable predominant issue that must be addressed accordingly.

4.2 Bilingual education in California.

In the 2001-2002 school year, Latinos numbered 2.7 million (44.2%) of the approximately 6.1 million students enrolled in California public elementary and secondary schools, that is the largest segment of the student population (California Department of Education). The contrasting numbers with non-Hispanic Whites 34.8%, Asians 8.1 %, and African Americans 8.3% is quite a relevant phenomenon and certainly leaves no doubt that Latino children represent a pillar in the future of the state.

In the 2001-2002 school year, there were approximately 1.6 million LEP students in California's public schools, representing approximately 25 % of all students in k -12 enrollment. The majority of these students (83.5%) are Spanish speakers (National Council of La Raza).

Due to these considerable numbers of Hispanic children and their needs for assisted language instruction, a belief that bilingual education had overwhelmingly took

over Californian schools created hysteria, largely founded on anti-immigration sentiments and the feeling of loss of the American identity¹. The Bilingual Education program that in fact provided instruction in the primary language was to a large extent blown out of proportion, due to the constant misinterpretation given to the concept, limits and conditions of bilingual education.

In the previous chapter we learned about the approaches or methods taken for LEP students' instruction. Actual "bilingual education", that is primary language instruction curricula, is the only one that can be labeled properly as bilingual education. However, the other two approaches that offer any kind of language assistance are viewed, by most people, as bilingual education as well, and in California it was no exception.

4.2.1 Conditions of Bilingual Education previous to the implementation of Proposition 227.

California has had a long and deep relationship with bilingual education. The Chacon-Moscone Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act of 1976 settled the grounds for what could be considered one of the most comprehensible approaches to LEP students' instruction. The Chacon-Moscone Act defined bilingual-bicultural education as a system of instruction that utilized two languages, and included:

1. Daily instruction in English.
2. Language development in the pupil's primary language.
3. Reading in the pupil's primary language.
4. Selected subjects taught in the pupil's primary language.

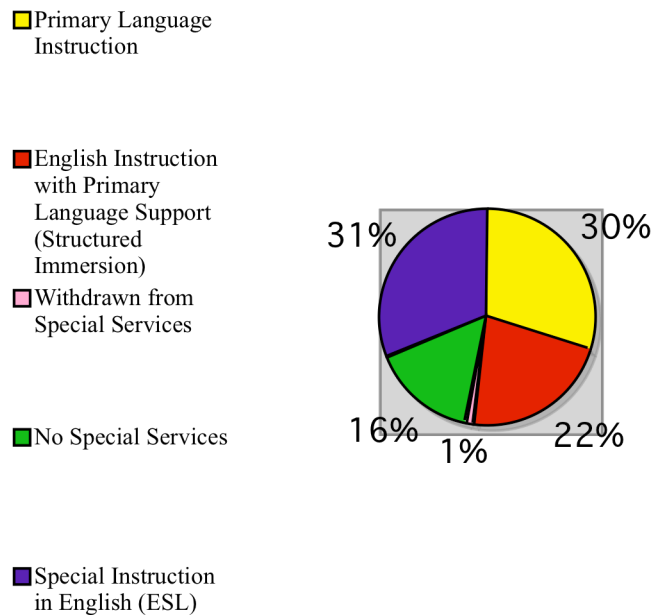
¹ Ron Unz's opposition to bilingual education had traces of a biased opinion on Hispanic immigrants. See: Los Angeles Times Sunday, August 31, 1997 GOP Bid to Mend Rift With Latinos Still Strained.

5. Development of an understanding of customs and values of the cultures associated with the language being taught as well as an understanding of the history and culture of California and the United States. (Alexander, David and Alfonso Nava 99-100)

As much as the Chacon-Moscone Act included several referrals to the usage of LEP's primary language, Patricia Gandara points out that "its main purpose was always simply to transition students into English" (Learning English in California 343). However, in 1986 this legislation was not reauthorized and the programs kept on functioning under the authority of the regulations of Department of Education -which overwhelmingly conformed to federal requirements-. Bilingual Education remained in its course.

In reality, the numbers of LEP students enrolled in primary language instruction, or "Bilingual Education", were not as high as people had imagined. Christine Rossell has deeply researched bilingual education in California and reveals interesting data on its conditions. Rossell indicates that the figures released by the California Department of Education for 1997-1998 -before Proposition 227 was implemented- there were only 410,000 students registered in bilingual education statewide, whereas 1.14 million LEP students were enrolled in other programs (Near End of Bilingual Education).

Figure 4.1 LEP students enrolled in California schools: 1998.



Source: Edsource on line. With data from the California Department of Education.

Rossell concluded that the numbers in California had been inflated by both, advocates and opponents, to support their own agenda.

“Even if the only children enrolled in programs labeled bilingual education were Spanish speakers, at most only 36 percent of Hispanic English Learners could have been enrolled in such programs. Thus critics of bilingual education most likely have exaggerated its aggregate harm and supporters most likely have exaggerated its aggregate benefits, since only a minority of English Learners was enrolled in programs that were even nominally bilingual. Moreover, the impact of bilingual education was concentrated almost exclusively on Hispanics (Near End of B.E.)”.

As Gandara points out, bilingual education programs for LEP students in California were much needed. But not all students were receiving proper bilingual education or any kind of language assistance –mainly due to the great shortage of bilingual teachers- (343).

In 1998, the majority of LEP students in California were Spanish-speakers constituting a 79.4%, followed by mere 3.6 % of Vietnamese speakers. Los Angeles counted with more than 40% of the state’s LEP population, ranking thus, as the district with the highest number of LEP students in the entire country (Hakuta, LEP Statistics). But this large numbers of LEP students were still lacking suitable trained Bilingual teachers, most of them well-intentioned but improvised.

Although, the focus of bilingual education was to provide language assistance to all students with limited proficient English skills, in California, Spanish speakers were virtually the only English Learners receiving authentic bilingual education since they were typically the only ones who fulfilled all the conditions for providing it efficiently² (Rossell, Near End of B.E.).

Large numbers of new arrival Hispanic immigrants and a misconception of bilingual education unsurprisingly created a climate of suspicion towards Latinos’ assimilation. California is undoubtedly a trendsetter entity and the cradle for many

² Christine Rossell considers that in order to provide authentic bilingual education, schools must have fluent bilingual teachers and enough English Learners from the same language group to conform a class without having to mix students from more than two grade levels in one classroom. Moreover, the students must all speak the same dialect – Spanish dialects posing no substantial conflict- and the native tongue must be a phonetic language with a Roman alphabet (otherwise no significant skills learned in the native tongue can be transferred to English). Ultimately, there must be a reasonable amount of published textbook materials in the native language that conform to the national curriculum (Ibid).

inspiring social movements. Sometimes, however, it is also an arena for putting ideas to the test, notwithstanding the risk of failure.

The constant censure over bilingual education in California ultimately brought the issue to the polls and Proposition 227 was introduced.

4.2.2 Proposition 227

A Silicon Valley entrepreneur and a former candidate for governor, Ron Unz, had long been a strong opponent to bilingual education programs. Unz not only masterminded the war against bilingual education in California but also financed a major campaign to bring an initiative to the polls.

Proposition 227, known as "English for the Children," sought to reestablish English-only language programs for LEP students. Besides, the implicit search to eliminate bilingual education programs, Proposition 227 required that the state would spend \$50 million USD per year for a period of ten years to teach English to adults. In November 1997, some 700,000 signatures were submitted to put the petition on the California ballot for June 1998. It was on June 2nd that Proposition 227 became approved by 61% of California voters.

A powerful strike to those schools that had worked in and with bilingual education programs for so many years, were now compelled to provide LEP students (renamed English Language Learners ELL) with instruction in English. The law read:

All children in California public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English. In particular, this shall require that all children be placed in English-language classrooms. Children who are English learners shall be educated through sheltered English immersion during a temporary transition period not normally intended to exceed one year.

Hence, the official teaching strategy was to place English learners for a period of one year in Structured English Immersion classes so they could be transferred to mainstream classes. There was an exception to the English-only mandate. Parents could seek a specific waiver to the Sheltered English Immersion program on the basis of a child's previous knowledge of English, the child being over 10 years of age, or that the school staff determined that a child had special needs. Proposition 227 was serious about its implementation and left no room for disobedience since it provided that any educator who refused to implement the law could be personally sued in court (Gandara, Learning English in California 344).

Most school districts had to quickly figure out by themselves the new approaches permitted to provide instruction to ELL students for the 1998-1999 school year that was right at the front door. Implementation of Proposition 227 had three major categories: Districts that largely maintained Bilingual Education through "Choice" that is, requests for waivers³, Districts that eliminated completely Bilingual Education, and Districts implementing the law with structured English Immersion. Eugene Garcia and Julia Curry-Rodriguez, researchers at the University of California-Berkeley, observed the immediate implementation of Proposition 227 and found that most Districts (66%) on their study were inclined to implement the strategy by maintaining or allowing "Choice" (The Education of LEP students in California Schools).

Clearly, bilingual education was not completely eliminated with Proposition 227, but the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) or English Language Learner (ELL)

³ Immediate action taken after the binding of Proposition 227 was the large demands of waivers requested from parents to retain children in a bilingual education program, thus, permitting the continuation of this program with no time limit.

students enrolled in bilingual education declined substantially from year school 1997-1998 to 2000-2001. (Rossell, Dismantling Bilingual Education).

Table 4.1 Number of English Language Learners enrolled in Bilingual Education Programs in California.

School year	Number of English Language Learners (ELL) enrolled in Bilingual Education.
1997-1998	409,879
1998-1999	169,440
1990-2000	169,929
2000-2001	167,163

Source: (Ibid)

With 42% of the LEP students nationwide, California is inevitably an innovative force in bilingual education, both pedagogically and politically. Proposition 227 not only terminated some outstanding programs, but also a fountain of continuing innovations. In addition, it encouraged other anti-bilingual movements across the country laments James Crawford (What now for Bilingual Education?).

4.2.3 After Proposition 227, are California's ELL students better off? The Oceanside evidence.

The idea behind Proposition 227 was, in the words of Ron Unz, to “shift the state of California away from so-called bilingual education programs towards a simple and effective system of intensive English immersion” (Tongue Tied).

Notwithstanding, the impact of Proposition 227 on the academic achievement of ELL students is still under much debate; some numbers seem to indicate that after a lustrum no significant change has been recorded. For example, California's “redesignation rate⁴” had just a minor increase from 7.0% in 1997 to 7.7% in 2003 (Crawford, Failure of Prop. 227). However, other version of the outcome is the irrefutable success with the implementation of the English-only regulation claimed by one School District, Oceanside.

The Unified School District of Oceanside was brought up to the spotlight by its superintendent Ken Noonan who enthusiastically proclaimed the benefits Proposition 227 carried to the district. Noonan had been an advocate for bilingual education for quite sometime, when reluctantly went along with the dismantling of bilingual education following the passage of Proposition 227. The Oceanside district claimed that their outstanding results in the SAT-9 scores⁵ in 2000 were just the proof for the equivocal path of bilingual education. However, the remarkable gains for Oceanside in 1999 were

⁴ “Redesignation rate” shows the number of LEP students that are re-designated as Fluent English Proficient FEP.

⁵ The Stanford Achievement Test, version 9 (SAT9) is a national, norm-referenced, English-only achievement test used as the primary means to assess the academic achievement of California's students for years 1998-2002.

accountable due to a statistical artifact argues professor Hakuta (Silence from Oceanside) and not to the proven success of Proposition 227.

Professor Catherine Snow points out that it is not the sole case of Oceanside claiming higher SAT-9 scores, as a matter of fact “*everybody's* test scores” in California increased, but she points out that there were many other factors influencing the results (Tongue tied).

Whatever the results for SAT-9 in Oceanside or anywhere else in California, many researchers agree that those tests are NOT an appropriate method to assess English development and academic achievement for LEP students. The SAT-9 was developed to distinguish academic achievement among native speakers of English; it is not an evaluation of the English language development for LEP students (Butler et al. 2000, Gandara et al. 2003).

Interestingly, says Patricia Gandara, Oceanside has been singled out by the state as a district that did not comply fully with Proposition 227. The California Department of Education reported in 2000 that Oceanside was guilty of 10 violations of state law (Dismantling 19). However, Gandara does not believe that the violations constituted anything different than what other districts had failed to comply as well, due to the vagueness of the regulations.

But the most important question for Oceanside, or any other school district for that matters, is, did Proposition 227 proved bilingual education wrong in regards of language acquisition? Christine Rossell acknowledges that “there is no unequivocal research demonstrating that bilingual education is the educational disaster that some of its critics claim” (Dismantling, ii). Certainly, bilingual education was flawed, but the system

has many leaks that do not permit to accurately conform a mistake-proof method. Highly reputed scholars still sustain that bilingual education is the most appropriate approach for the education of ELL students and that radical measures taken to solve the “problem” of children unable to speak English leave many things on the road.

“If students were clustered into these classrooms in order to provide core academic instruction in the primary language and mainstreamed for part of the day to receive instruction in English (preferably in highly interactive and non-high stakes settings like arts, music, physical education), the segregation of EL students would not be defensible. But would constitute a valid educational treatment. However, in the wake of proposition 227, most English learners are simply segregated into classrooms populated disproportionately by other English learners where the opportunity to learn both English and academic content is compromised by the lack of appropriate models and instruction targeted to their linguistic strengths (Gandara et al. 36)

4.3 Is this the end for multilingualism?

Bilingual Education was viewed by some as a political standing more than a sensible educational approach to teach English to minority language children while promoting the development of one’s mother tongue, and consequently bilingualism. The California experience only proved that a fast-track remedy to substitute bilingual education with English-only instruction cannot serve the new generations as a whole. The circumstances under which young learners live are much more meaningful than a set of regulations created to quiet the uneasy tempers of immigration-nervous voters.

4.3.1 Bilingualism encouraged by society.

Most people would agree that a formal education goes far beyond learning to read and write. It must encourage social values, promote understanding of things that are alien to us, incite to discovery, and above all self-recognition.

Language is a vital element of people's identity, but it is also the key to open doors.

Imagine if you could have more than one key? It is still very awkward to realize that in the United States bilingual ability is seen, in most cases, as a hindrance and not asset (Barbara Zurer Pearson cit. in Suarez-Orozco 309). Joshua Fishman actually deepens the idea pointing out that:

"many Americans have long been of the opinion that bilingualism is 'a good thing' if it was acquired via travel (preferably to Paris) or via formal education (preferably at Harvard) but that it is a 'bad thing' if it was acquired from one's immigrant parents or grandparents" (cit. in Hakuta, Keypolicy Milestones).

To be fair, the United States does recognize the importance of multilingualism at the international economic and political arenas. In fact, the school system spends millions of dollars in trying to teach a second language to high school students -the same school system that suppresses second language abilities in preschool and elementary school children in the name of hastening their acquisition of English (Zurer Pearson *ibid*)- but in the case of letting Spanish take its course, things are different. There are 29 million Spanish speakers in the United States according to the 2000 census, but the bias against the language is deeply rooted in prejudice⁶. Is it because Latinos are yet to be considered sophisticated enough to be trendsetters?

Unrelenting, Hispanic immigration is causing uneasiness among the population, principally to those who want to find out what everybody else's conversation is on the subway but cannot figure out the strange sounds coming out of their mouths. Latinos intend to keep their language alive and the media is making it easier for them with

⁶ See Dame Edna's opinion on the futility of the Spanish language, Vanity Fair Columnist. February 2003.

television, music and newspapers in Spanish at easy access; thus, increasing the paranoia over their presence in the United States.

Table 4.2 Percent of adults who say it's very or somewhat important to help students from immigrant families maintain their native tongue.

Latinos (overall)	88%
Foreign-born Latinos	93
Native-born Latinos	81
African-Americans	79
Whites	57

Source: Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation. National Survey of Latinos: Education 2004.

Bruce Gaarder offers an alternative to the idea of cohabiting with Spanish. To achieve a successful relation between languages Gaarder posits the concept of disgllossia, which recognizes, approves and protects the use of two languages at the societal level (rather than the individual level), each for a set of compartmentalized complementary functions or domains of use. Gaarder considers that disgllossia provides a stable relationship in contrast to that of bilingualism, in which the languages actually compete with each other since their functions are not well defined (158). But this idea go far beyond the actual standing of Spanish –or any other minority language- in the United States.

4.3.2 The No Child Left Behind policy.

All these beliefs on multilingualism will certainly not find an echo in the near future. Bilingual education has been overwhelmingly dismantled throughout the country, regardless of the uninterrupted flow of immigrants from all over the globe.

George W. Bush's administration presented the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) inspired by the voters' demands in California, and Arizona. Approved by Congress in 2002, the NCLB Act took the place of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. The new regulation presents three main statutes regarding ELL students:

1. Streamlines ESEA Bilingual Education Programs. These programs will be streamlined into performance-based grants to states and local districts.
Sets Performance Objectives for Improving English Fluency. As part of their application for funds, states will set performance objectives to ensure LEP children achieve English fluency within three years. States would also ensure that LEP students meet standards in core content areas that are at least as rigorous as those in classes taught in English.
2. Imposes Sanctions for Poor Performance. States that do not meet their performance objectives for LEP students could lose up to ten percent of the administrative portion of their funding for all ESEA state administered formula grant programs.
3. Frees School Districts to Select a Teaching Approach That Meets the Needs of Students. Regulations on the funds mandating a particular

method of instruction to educate LEP students will be prohibited
(www.ed.gov).

Bilingual education, thus, has no place on the federal vocabulary. Even the Office for Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA) was transformed into the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA). Does this mean that Bilingual Education is finished? Perhaps not, but the essence has undisputedly vanished.

When speaking about the original intentions of Bilingual Education, the idea of giving immigrant students a fair start at school seems to have lost its core. The experience of Latinos with bilingual education had been born from the political emergence of a new ethnic group that had taken America by storm. Certainly, everyone's susceptibilities got on the table. Latinos –Mexicans, Colombians, Guatemalans- arrived in the United States searching for better life opportunities, American on the other hand intend to keep the levels of well-being that they are accustomed to. Jacinta Ma, an associate of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, believes that the “debates over bilingual education are contentious because they have turned into arguments over what type of society America should be, rather than simply, over what is the best way to help children learn” (What works for the children? 3).

Bilingual Education might not survive the new regulations set by the federal administration since schools are led again into a new version of the old sink-and-swim approach to learning. To many people Bilingual education definitely worked -that is, well-implemented, adequately funded, appropriately material stacked bilingual education-.

“Bilingual education programs and their evaluation techniques differ radically from situation to situation. That they are effective in some situations and not in others says more about the specific program than about the general idea of providing aid to students who are making a transition from one language to the another. The important point is that effective programs *do* make a difference in the English and math proficiency students, while poorly conceived and executed programs do not (Fligstein, Neil and Roberto M. Fernandez cit. in Bean and Tienda 256)”.

Since there is an absence of unquestionable evidence over the functionality of Bilingual Education, why has school-sponsored bilingualism created such antagonism? Stephen Krashen believes that the problem principally resides in a general aspect: The media has made bilingual education seem like a disastrous mistake. The information presented by newspapers and magazines tends to deliver a negative view or a distorted reality on bilingual education programs and its characteristics. People, thus, have been receiving inaccurate, incomplete and partial information each time they read about ballot initiatives and the consequences of years of bilingual education in American schools. Krashen stresses that the media delivers one-sided stories due to the lack of a serious campaign to defend and explain bilingual education supported by advocates, scholars, and sympathizers in general. Opponents of Bilingual education are seriously organized and have made the establishment of English-only instruction their main goal. Opponents of bilingual education maintain a constant flow of articles and papers attacking bilingual education. Krashen regrets that not much has been made to counterbalance opinions. “There appears to be only modest interest within the profession of dealing with these attacks and presenting new evidence. For many writers and scholars, it appears to be business as usual” (Evidence Suggesting That Public Opinion Is Becoming More

Negative). James Crawford shares the views expressed by Krashen, however he goes further in his attempts to explain the unpopularity of bilingual education among the population of the United States –Prejudice- (Hold your tongue).

Crawford suggests that the efforts of the organization “US English” not only search to have English proclaimed as the official language of the United States, but the ulterior agenda is the result of the combination of desired controlled-immigration and selected ethnicity’s birth control –as defended by John Tanton, cofounder of U.S. English-.

The debate on bilingual education has touched the sensitive nerves of cultural identity. The continuous struggle of the Americans to recognize themselves is now being tested when this forceful wave of Spanish-speaking immigrants have decided that they also want the American dream. But, are Latinos really a threat to the American identity? Are there any real grounds for concern?