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“Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Bilingual Education in Our Schools”

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Editor's Preview: *Characterizing bilingual education as a “well-intentioned experiment” gone wrong, U.S. ENGLISH founder Gerda Bikales charges that bilingual programs have become tools of segregation, alienation and one-world political doctrines. This lecture was delivered during last month's Detroit Shavano seminar, “Choice in Public Education.” Our thanks to the Laurel Foundation for making the publication of this issue possible.*

A Conflict of Visions

At the core of the bilingual education controversy lies a fundamental misunderstanding by this nation's influential policy makers about the nature of the linguistic and cultural market place.

Judging by their actions over the last quarter-century, government decision makers at every level are convinced that languages operate in a free market, subject to the vagaries of supply and demand, in which the appropriate policy is one of *laissez-faire*. No affirmative government intervention is required to guarantee the continued role of English as the unrivaled public language of the nation, no responsibility in culture-making and nation-building is envisioned. Apparently confident that market forces will always sustain English, even as they temporarily bring forth demands for government services in other languages, they interpret pressures for native language instruction in our schools as merely a call for a short-term remedial program to help children not yet proficient in English.

To the passionate advocates of bilingual education, this teaching method is neither temporary nor remedial. Students of



language planning—an academic interdisciplinary specialty in linguistics that investigates the forces that affect language usage and development—they know how to take advantage of the prevailing *laissez-faire* market philosophy to push for a radical cultural repositioning within American society. They understand what our public officials do not, that even strongly established national cultures and languages need tending and at times defending, and that the failure to do so at propitious times opens up opportunities for competing languages that can be effectively exploited through careful planning.

In the hands of skilled language planners and other militant advocates, bilingual education became a powerful tool for reshaping long-held cultural understandings. Cultural pluralism was deftly redefined to include government subsidy of immigrant languages, diversity was

aggressively pursued as the highest goal of American society, and toleration of diversity became the only civic virtue demanded of all Americans.

A Historic Overview

Bilingual education did not start out that way, of course. The use of native languages in the schools was promoted and sold to the American public at every step of its early evolution as a temporary remedial program of short duration that promised to ease the pain of cultural shock for the immigrant child. It was explained that this was necessary because a large backlog had formed of people not yet integrated in the American mainstream—a backlog that bilingual education would help to dissolve.

In the sixties, as part of our serious societal commitment to equality and greater opportunity for minorities that had historically suffered discrimination and neglect, we were touched by the plight of Mexican-Americans and other Hispanic-Americans. The nation pinned its highest hopes for improving the lives of minority citizens on equal education for the young, and the schools quickly became laboratories for large scale experimentation. Bilingual education started as one such experiment.

When federal assistance for bilingual education was initially brought up by Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas, it was conceived as a remedy for Mexican-American children, descendants of generations of U.S. citizens, living in poverty in an area remote from the center of national life, often in homes in which English had remained a foreign tongue. Their claim to a fairer share of the American dream was compelling.

The introduction of government-subsidized native-language instruction in the public schools, despite some misgivings about departing from educational practices that had successfully acculturated millions of immigrants, was propelled by a new set of theoretical assumptions about language learning. Reports from Sweden told of remarkable studies of newly arrived Finnish immigrants living in Sweden. The Finnish children who had attended school in Finland were learning the Swedish language better than their younger siblings. This somewhat counter-intuitive finding was presumed to derive from the older students' greater academic mastery of Finnish language and literacy skills, which the students easily transferred to the new language. The younger Finnish-speaking children, who had not attended school in Finland, found it harder to cope in the unfamiliar Swedish classroom. It was theorized that establishing literacy first in the mother tongue benefits the child in a number of important ways: it cushions the cultural shock of a new language and makes school a more pleasant experience; it teaches literacy skills that can be transferred to the second language; it keeps the student from falling behind in learning non-language subjects, such as arithmetic and geography; finally, it instills pride in the child's home culture and improves his self-image.

With all these inferred advantages, bilingual education seemed worth trying. The Bilingual Education Act, passed by Congress in 1968, for the first time awarded federal money to school districts wishing to implement bilingual programs. The first year's appropriation was a modest \$7.5 million, a figure that has risen, sharply at first and then more gradually, to \$152 million in 1989. However, the Bilingual Education Act is no longer the only source of

About the Author

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She is a founder and former executive director of U.S. ENGLISH, the national organization calling for legal protection of English as the official language of the United States. A Holocaust survivor, she learned English after coming to this country at sixteen and graduated from New York City's Julia Richman High School at seventeen. She holds degrees from Upsala College and Rutgers University.

funding for helping children deficient in English. If one were to add all the money going into the program from various federal, state and local sources—a politically sensitive addition that has not been attempted so far—one would likely come up with a current annual expenditure close to a billion dollars.

The arrival of bilingual education coincided with the beginning of vastly increased immigration, in numbers that rivaled the massive movement of people into the United States in the early years of this century. As most of the migrants came from Latin America, Spanish retained and solidified its position as the most frequent first language in bilingual programs. From the beginning, about 80 percent of the children receiving native-language instruction have been Spanish-speakers, and though efforts have been made to develop teachers and materials for children speaking various Asian languages, the dominance of Spanish has scarcely diminished. According to the 1988 Department of Education report on "The Condition of Bilingual Education in the Nation," 95 percent of all bilingual program teachers taught in Spanish-English classrooms in 1985.

Not all children entering school without knowing English were placed in bilingual classrooms, of course. Given the shortage of qualified bilingual teachers in a nation that had long enjoyed unquestioned acceptance of English as the language of the public schools, as well as higher program costs, lingering uneasiness about the method, and the steadily rising influx of immigrant children into the schools, it was impossible to accommodate all English-deficient students in native-language classes. Bilingual education was to be *one* strategy for helping those who came to be called LEP—Limited English Proficient—students.

Supplemental English lessons within the standard classroom, the use of other English-based methods such as English as a Second Language, structured English immersion, and "sheltered English"—and combinations of all these approaches—were and remain the norm in educating LEP youngsters. After all, the goal of bilingual education, as stated in legislation and understood by the taxpayer, was *not* the teaching of the mother tongue. Rather, the goal was help to the child in learning English, to enable him to function in a regular classroom with American peers.

A 1974 landmark Supreme Court ruling, known as *Lau v. Nichols*, originated in a

complaint by the parents of a Chinese-speaking boy in San Francisco, who wanted extra help for him in learning English. The Court was sympathetic to Kinney Lau's plight, noting that "there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum."

The justices were careful to refrain from prescribing any particular teaching method. In Justice William O. Douglas' words:

No specific remedy is urged upon us. Teaching English to the students of Chinese ancestry is one choice. Giving instructions to this group in Chinese is another. There may be others.

Congress took up the justices' concern in the 1974 Equal Educational Opportunities Act. It directs educational authorities to "take appropriate action to overcome language barriers." Court decisions in cases testing the interpretation of "appropriate action" have always stopped short of *mandating* native-language instruction.

A Turning Point

In the annals of American education, the *Lau* decision and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act clearly mark the end of the "sink-or-swim" era of teaching immigrant children. Those of us—this writer included—who had arrived as immigrants without English-language skills, and had learned our new language and culture under the "sink-or-swim" system, had found it highly effective but initially quite brutal. Few of us who have lived through this experience would argue against additional help for the newcomer to smooth the transition, even if such help tends to slow the adaptation process somewhat. The decision to provide special help to LEP students was both wise and humane.

Though it failed to give the militant language planners the judicial fiat they sought, the *Lau* decision boosted their cause by acknowledging the *legality* of native-language instruction in the schools. Shortly after the ruling, Dr. Josue Gonzalez, a visionary who was to become President Carter's director of the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Affairs, was emboldened to commend to Congress the wonders of Canada's official bilingualism laws:

Perhaps it is a bit too early to think seriously about a comparable bill in this country. But if the present rate

of growth of Spanish-speakers continues, it is not unlikely that we shall have to consider that as a very definite possibility.

Despite the clarity of the court ruling, a burgeoning bureaucracy entirely in the hands of passionate advocates found ways to interpret *Lau* as a virtual mandate for bilingual education. The availability of federal and state money for bilingual programs nourished a multitude of emerging bilingual education special interests—textbook publishers, college education departments, bilingual teachers, aides and other school personnel, ethnic politicians and the recipients of their patronage, government bureaucrats, and language planning enthusiasts offended by the unilingual character of American society, all had acquired reasons of their own for championing reliance on bilingual education and opposing every alternative.

Bilingual education had suddenly opened the door to good and prestigious jobs for people previously unqualified to teach in the nation's classrooms, because their deficits in English and formal education had been a barrier to employment. Thus, a lobby coalesced, known as the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE), to reap the full rewards of these new opportunities: jobs, money, prestige and power.

The organization quickly became the most committed (and most directly affected) promoter of the program. Its membership has always been small, and even today it claims a membership of around three thousand. Yet lack of membership hasn't inhibited its activities and visibility. As sponsors of yearly conferences that attract hundreds of devotees and industry exhibitors, it can command appearances by influential people from the world of politics and education. Barbara Bush, then the nation's Second Lady, spoke at such a conference, and so have a number of cabinet level policy makers. Few of the conference registrants had to dip deeply into their own pockets to attend these gala events, always held in fine hotels in attractive cities. Money from various government programs was used freely to subsidize the attendance of teachers, administrators, consultants, and even activist parents who agreed to register for a seminar on lobbying techniques. Commercial interests contributed handsomely to make these gatherings a success.

The presentations at NABE conferences were not limited to lectures on pedagogy. The conferences were designed to be fer-

tile meeting grounds between classroom practitioners and politically engaged language planners committed to the institutionalization of a parallel educational system running in another language. These encounters provided ideal opportunities for networking, lobbying, and morale-building.

Conference planners and presenters felt quite free to speak up about their larger agenda, at seminars with titles that pulled no punches. "A Case Study: Institutionalizing Bilingual Education" is certainly forthright enough, and so are "New Directions in Legal Strategies for the Promotion of Bilingualism" and "Mexican-American Political Participation and Ideology: The Emergency of Bilingual Education as a Non-Negotiable Demand." Reporting on the 1984 conference, a Department of Education consultant summarized: "Most speakers expounded at length on the need for, and the eventuality of, a multilingual, multicultural United States of America with a national language policy, citing English and Spanish as the two legal languages."

The Effectiveness of Bilingual Education

As bilingual education spread through the country, questions about its efficiency were asked with greater urgency. The first large scale study commissioned by the Department of Education, conducted by the American Institute for Research (AIR), was released in 1978. It sent shock waves through the bilingual education lobby, for it showed that most children in bilingual classes handled English well enough to function in regular classes. It also found no significant difference between the academic performance of students in bilingual education and those taught in English. Furthermore, it found no support for the popular belief that children taught in their native language develop a more positive self-image than those who are not.

The AIR study was immediately attacked on technical grounds, and a campaign of personal vilification and ridicule was launched against its principal researcher, Malcolm Danoff. The experience was painful enough for Danoff to discourage him from further research on bilingual education.

Poor data collection and faculty research design have greatly impeded progress in research and evaluation in this field. But, a critical mass of acceptable studies has developed over time, allowing for some

overall conclusions. In 1981, Keith Baker and Adriana DeKanter, two Department of Education researchers, concluded upon evaluation of all the usable empirical data available, that there was no difference in achievement between students in bilingual and English-based classes, and therefore no reason to base federal policy on the bilingual approach. In 1982, Iris C. Rotberg, writing in the *Harvard Educational Review*, reached the same conclusion. The National Advisory and Coordinating Council on Bilingual Education stated in its 1986 report:

Research in bilingual education has been contradictory . . . there is simply no evidence that bilingual education should be the preferred approach to instruction for all language minority students.

Late last year, California U.S. District Court Judge D. Lowell Jensen presided over *Teresa P. v. Berkeley Unified School District*, a case that challenged the legality of programs other than bilingual education for LEP students. After hearing extensive testimony presented by all sides, the judge pronounced himself satisfied that the alternative methods offered by the Berkeley School District "are manifestly as sound as any theory identified by plaintiffs."

Professor Christine Rossell, an expert on social science research and a witness for the defense in the Berkeley trial, recently declared in another court case:

. . . transitional bilingual education is not the most effective method of teaching LEP students English or helping them with academic achievement. In fact, there is no consistent research support for transitional bilingual education as a superior instructional practice for improving the English language achievement of LEP children.

Even passionate defenders of bilingual education reluctantly allow that empirical data doesn't support reliance on bilingual education. Kenji Hakuta, whose book *Mirror of Language* bolstered the spirits of the language planners by ascribing more "mental flexibility" to bilingual students, confesses that:

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 suc-

cess of bilingual education programs.

Bad news has also been piling up for the bilingual education lobby from the experiences of other countries. In Canada, a country officially bilingual since 1969, the national push to teach French to the English majority has conclusively demonstrated the effectiveness of immersion: numerous experiments confirmed that the earlier the English-speaking child was immersed in French, the faster and more profound was his mastery of that language. And from Sweden has come news of revisionist interpretations of the research on Finnish immigrants that had so influenced the early thinking on the need for bilingual education in America.

Defending Bilingual Education

And yet, there is a vast outpouring of literature by language activists claiming great success for the bilingual method. Faced with increasingly strong evidence that LEP children in bilingual classes are learning English at a much slower pace than their peers in English-based programs—and the learning of English is, after all, the acknowledged goal of all instructional strategies—defenders of bilingual education have sidestepped the issue by concentrating instead on tangential arguments.

One such argument transforms bilingual education into something akin to a civil right, though no court has ever declared it such. It claims that the abstract ideals of educational “equal access” and “equity” can only be realized by placing the LEP child in the exact same situation as the native English-speaker, that is, in a class with a teacher, classmates and materials he can understand.

Another argument redefines the agreed-upon measures of academic success. It allows that the students may indeed not perform as well in English and mathematics as control groups in English-based classes, but since the bilingual education students have also learned to read and write in the native tongue, the cumulative achievement is said to be comparable.

Still another defense relies on the American people’s growing appreciation of the importance of foreign languages to win approval. It skillfully fuses support for teaching foreign languages to Americans with native-language instruction for children who don’t know English. Any criticism of the bilingual method is thus

deflected by interpreting it as an attack upon foreign language teaching.

Another argument seeks to diminish the importance of English and the United States in a world that has become an interdependent global village. The United States is presented as a nation in decline, a weak player among many other competing economies. In this view, English is primarily a useful skill, not unlike FORTRAN or LOTUS 1-2-3, of no special cultural significance to us, a language destined to become just one among many others in the global market place. Thus, the goal of bilingual education must include the maintenance of the child’s native tongue, even if that means much slower English acquisition, for the two languages are equally important to the future of the child and of the nation.

A World Without Time

The most oft-repeated argument to counter disillusionment with bilingual education attributes its academic failures to the premature exit of students from native-language to English-based instruction. With bilingual education well rooted in the schools, language planning activists have felt safe to insist that the transition to the regular classroom should be *slowed down*, rather than speeded up. Thus, Dr. Josue Gonzalez, erstwhile director of the federal Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Affairs and former NABE president, felt free in 1977 to write that “To a degree, the same legislation (Bilingual Education Act) which created bilingual education is now handicapping its continued growth and maturation by assigning it a most restrictive goal: to move children into English-only instruction.”

Professor Rudolph C. Troike, a well-known bilingual education theorist, writing some years later (after organized opposition had surfaced), was more cautious in his advocacy brief in a propaganda tract published by the House Education and Labor Committee in 1986, entitled “Compendium of Papers on Bilingual Education.” He deplored the tendency to define success “in terms of the rate at which students are exited from bilingual classes and placed in regular all-English classes, usually within one to three years.

Troike recommended a minimum of five years in bilingual classes, “and preferably more.” His observations led him to believe that “*the best bilingual education program*

might well be one in which no English at all was used for the first two years” (emphasis added). His survey of successful bilingual education programs showed that:

they all continued through the sixth grade (and some further), and gave ample attention to the development of native-language skills, usually devoting at least 40 percent of the time in the upper grades to instruction in and through the native language.

Today, this is the guiding theory that animates bilingual education. Language assessment tests to determine student placement cast a wide net and draw into bilingual classes large numbers of children—including numerous Spanish-surnamed youngsters from English-speaking homes whose shyness is interpreted as “proof” of deficient English skills. On the other hand, the tests to exit the program give little weight to oral communications skills and require an unrealistic mastery of English reading and writing, at a level that many monolingual English-speaking students can’t achieve. Between overly broad entrance criteria and unreasonably narrow exit criteria, the child spends a major portion of his school career in classrooms segregated by language, in which twenty to forty-five minutes a day are conceded to learning English as a foreign language.

The dominant theory of bilingual education has freed itself of the tyranny of time. It appears to assume that students enter a magic tunnel in which time stands still. “Research indicates that a child needs six to seven years in a bilingual program to function in the mainstream” explains Adnelly Marichal, the bilingual education coordinator of Hartford, Connecticut. This is actually an unduly optimistic estimate, considering that in her schools only about six percent of the students are judged ready every year to move into the English-language classroom. At that rate, fewer than half the students will ever make it out of bilingual education in the twelve years between first grade and high school graduation!

Professor Herbert J. Walberg, who has studied the comparative academic achievements of many nations, reports that the amount of time spent purposefully on learning tasks is the most reliable universal predictor of scholastic outcomes.

From a curriculum standpoint, time or amount of instruction is the

central irreducible ingredient among the alterable factors in learning . . . Students may have the ability and motivation to acquire all basic human knowledge and to master dozens of languages. In principle, we may also be able to teach all this. What is lacking is time—a finite resource. Educators must choose a very limited part of all human knowledge and world languages to convey.

Dr. Rosalie Pedalino Porter, an experienced bilingual education practitioner, has come up against the reality of time running out:

I was ordered by my department head, when I was a bilingual teacher, not to begin reading instruction in English with my students until they could read at grade level in Spanish. As I was teaching fifth and sixth grade children from disadvantaged backgrounds, most of them were actually reading a few years below grade level in Spanish. It seemed irrational to me to keep delaying the reading in English if indeed that is the target language . . . there was not much time left for the magical “transfer of skills” to take place for these 11-14 year old students who, for the most part, had been in the bilingual program since kindergarten.

New York Follies

New policy guidelines on bilingual education adopted by the New York Board of Regents illustrate a synthesis of both the commitment to stretch out the duration of the program and the fashionable global village perspective. The preparation of this document was entrusted to a coalition of passionate language planning and advocacy groups, whose contribution is gratefully acknowledged in various published versions of the guidelines.

These far-reaching policies were unanimously approved late last year, at a secret (and possibly illegal) meeting of the Regents. The guidelines redefine the criteria for mandatory placement and retention in bilingual classes, thus increasing the universe of students in the program by more than half. They extend the concept of a slower approach to English language acquisition to its ultimate logical conclusion by providing native-language instruction from pre-kindergarten through college. High school graduation requirements can be met in native-languages—an obvious necessity

as many students will not have had enough time to acquire English proficiency in their years at a New York school. It is intimated, though not spelled out, that this extension holds equally for college graduation requirements.

As the world is a polyglot global village and one can't make discriminating judgments between languages, the effort to maintain the student's first language will apply not only to standard languages, but also to patois, creole, and various dialects. An English speaking child from Jamaica, for example, will be eligible for bilingual instruction in English/Jamaican English. All students in the state will be encouraged to become fully bilingual, and will be enrolled in a curriculum of multicultural education.

The Regents' adoption of the plan, which may have to wait for flusher days to be fully funded by the legislature, is a major victory for the radical champions of a multilingual America who know how to use our schools to reach their end.

Chaos in the Schools

Bilingual education has long attracted a good deal of press coverage, much of it superficial and uncritical.

Lately, however, followers of the literature have noticed the emergence in the popular press of more serious writing, on new themes. In March, for example, both the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* carried extensive analysis of major problems in the education of newcomers. The *Journal's* piece on the Los Angeles schools, entitled “Failing in 81 Languages,” describes an educational system increasingly unable to cope with a steady stream of older children who have never been schooled in any language, hours of classroom time wasted in translating back and forth in various languages, and a sense of pervasive chaos that has led to the creation of special “newcomer schools”—the ultimate form of segregation that keeps students who don't know English entirely away from those who do.

The picture of the Miami schools painted in the *Times* is no brighter. Dade County, which has extensive experience in accommodating large numbers of Spanish-speaking students, is collapsing under the demands for more space and money created by the greatly accelerated pace of arrivals. Some 500 new students, most from Central America, enter the school system every month, enough to fill a new school every other month. A \$980 million school-

building project is under way, financed by a bond issue passed last year, but even before the first buildings are up they are already overcrowded. “There is no end to the new ones” concludes the principal of the Sweetwater Elementary School.

There is also a new genre of first-person writing about the actual experiences of teachers in the classroom. Sally Peterson, a California teacher who presides over a fledgling teachers union known as LEAD (Learning English Advocates Drive) delivered a paper of unusual immediacy and power at a recent conference on bilingual education, in which she answers one of the puzzles of native-language teaching: what about the parents? Wouldn't many parents choose to have their children educated in English?

Peterson sheds much light on this issue. The law allows parents to decide whether to place the child in a bilingual program, but in practice, parental consent is almost rendered meaningless. The parents speak little English, they come from authoritarian societies in which teachers are not questioned. The permission slips describe transitional bilingual education (TBE) as the method of choice, the one that promises mastery of both the mother tongue and English, without loss of content learning. Few parents object.

Still, some do. Objection is a signal for the school's district office to intervene, to dispatch central staff to convince doubting parents that TBE is better for their child. A propaganda film is shown in which a happy, well-dressed youngster is enthusiastically studying in his home language, and a sad, downtrodden child is trying to learn in English. The film repeatedly asserts that alternative programs are harmful, and that is usually enough to change the parents' minds. Those who persist continue to be lectured about the error of their ways.

The placement of children in TBE is aggressively pursued. Permission slips mistakenly checked both the “yes” and the “no” by struggling parents are manipulated to read “yes.” It's not unusual for permission slips to disappear altogether, an occurrence which, when noted, requires parents to return to school to sign another and to be subjected to another round of hectoring.

Parents who want to take their child out of TBE must arrange a personal meeting with the school's bilingual education coordinator, who makes herself unavailable for meetings of this sort. When an ap-

pointment is finally arranged, it becomes another opportunity for high-pressure salesmanship.

Actually, the whole question of parental choice in the placement of LEP children has become moot in Peterson's school. All the classrooms are now bilingual. Inflexible interpretations of capricious laws dictate that children from English-speaking homes must be placed there too. The rationalization is that they are needed to desegregate the classroom and convince the language minority students that their heritage is valued by the majority. It is also argued that the native English-speakers will benefit by learning another language, presumably through the much maligned immersion process deemed harmful to LEP students. Parents who object are out-of-luck—their children must remain in the bilingual classroom, though they can choose to have the children participate only in the English portion of the program. Thus, day after day, most of these students' precious time is spent with an aide, or killed with busy-work.

There are many other illuminating slices of school life in Peterson's paper—about the out-of-school transfer of a teacher who doesn't know Spanish, but not before she is asked to train her successor, a teacher recruited abroad who knows no English; about the nature and administration of tests to maximize the number of pupils deemed in need of bilingual education; about threats to teachers who make waves, about plummeting morale and rising divisiveness in the schools.

The Price of Bilingual Education

At this juncture, we must ask ourselves: what price are we paying, literally and figuratively, for the institutionalization of bilingual education in our schools?

Bilingual education is considerably more expensive than English-based programs, with costs often running \$1000 more per child, every year. The cities of Berkeley and Oakland both cited high program costs in their court-contested attempts to arrange alternative educational assistance for their LEP students.

But it is the social and cultural costs that should be of greater concern to us.

Our public schools are, after all, the prime instrument for the formal transmission of our common language and unique culture. For the sake of bilingual education, we have allowed them to be turned upside-down, topsy-turvy. We have

engaged in an authoritarian exercise of wholesale dismantling of the cultural consensus, without the approval of the American people.

By promoting native-language instruction above all possible approaches, we have created an artificial teacher shortage. In our attempts to cope with this "shortage", we have brought into the classroom unqualified teachers operating under "emergency certification" for lack of a college degree or other professional requirements. We have gone on a mad binge of hiring teachers recruited in another country, such as Spain or Mexico, or in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, where New York City has opened a permanent mission to lure teachers to its schools. To these foreigners, ignorant of our country's values and traditions, we have delegated the job of leading immigrant children out of their alienage and into the family of American citizens. How better could one possibly plan for the permanent alienation of these youngsters from the mainstream than to lock them up all day with strangers? How better could one arrange to permanently implant another language and culture into the heart of America?

For the sake of bilingual education, some thirty-five years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, we have re-segregated the classroom along ethnic and linguistic lines. Worse yet, we are acquiescing to the creation of entire schools in which the separation between those who know English and those who don't will be complete.

For the sake of bilingual education, we have played fast and loose with the cherished tradition of local school control, heavy-handedly imposing dogmatic federal and state mandates to override local school boards on what is best and realistic for their students.

For the sake of bilingual education, we have ignored the fundamental right of parents to choose the language of their child's education, and callously sacrificed the needs of children for whom English is the mother-tongue. We have become hosts within the schools to a multitude of special language interests that have set teacher against teacher, administrator against administrator, parent against parent.

For the sake of bilingual education, we have permitted our children to be held hostage by manipulative fanatics pursuing political ends repugnant to the vast majority of Americans who still believe in the integration of immigrants into the larger society.

A well-intentioned experiment has been twisted into a blunt cultural repositioning that threatens our future as a cohesive and harmonious nation.

The Limits of Cultural Carrying Capacity

The chaos and tensions in our schools should give us pause to consider that we may well have stressed the cultural carrying capacity of our schools to the breaking point, and perhaps beyond. We are caught in a vise by an inescapable arithmetic—even more new immigrant students are piling up every day on top of others still to be absorbed in the regular classroom. This record influx comes at a time when Americans have opted for much smaller families, while immigrant families continue to be large. Thus, the impact of immigration is felt more intensely in the schools than in other social institutions.

The insertion of small numbers of language minority children into classrooms in which English-speakers are the majority remains the ideal, but in many school systems language minority children greatly outnumber English-speakers. To achieve even a semblance of integration, it is often the English-speaking children that are placed in bilingual classes. When we must resort to the practice of forcibly submerging American-born English-speaking students in bilingual classes, when our own teacher-training facilities can not supply us with the teachers we need, it is clear that we have exceeded our cultural carrying capacity.

The cultural marketplace, which determines the fate of languages, is not "free", as our policy makers and political leaders naively believe—or cunningly pretend to believe. In America today, the cultural marketplace is constantly manipulated by savvy language planners and passionate ideologists, for whom the children of limited English proficiency are merely pawns in a much larger game.

We are engaged in a critical conflict, in which only one of the participants has the right weapons, and the other still hasn't grasped that there is a battle going on.

If we do not wish to permanently turn our educational system into an engine for churning out members of a new multinational state who share neither language nor values, we must markedly slow down immigration. We need a chance to put our schools in order, and time to concentrate on the successful education and integration of immigrants who are already on their way to becoming our fellow citizens.

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