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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the conflict occurring as a result of two languages and their corresponding cultural bases coming into contact in North America, particularly in the context of bilingual education. Difficulty exists in translating awareness of problems such as language interference, cultural shock, and lowered self-image into attitudinal approaches and instructional strategies. It is felt that the current definition of bilingual education does not consider how children learn and what language they think in. What most teachers identify as linguistic and cultural dysfunction in minority students is seen as cognitive and learning dysfunction in students, and teaching and affective dysfunction in teachers. A better definition of bilingual education would stress languages as tools for thinking, learning, and achieving rather than as mere means of instruction. It is suggested that degrees of bilingualism could be defined, and that bilingual education programs could be established in terms of levels of attainment of the individual learner. Areas that need research to improve bilingual education include cognitive and language development and verbal instruction. Research could determine which skills are best taught through language instruction, and which through other subjects, which skills require language mastery, and what the basis of a curriculum and the criteria of achievement should be. (CLK)

Corrected copy

Needed research in the fields of psycho- and socio-linguistics as they relate to the instruction of minority children in the bilingual education programs of Northamerican schools

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Most language scientists and sociologists and psychologists in the fields of language use and language acquisition have addressed a large amount of their research and publications to the problems that surface when two languages and their corresponding cultural bases come into contact. In the socio-political structure of the host country or societal group one language and culture are classified as "minority," while the other language and culture are considered to be "mainstream" or "dominant." Most often the term used for this human interaction is "coming into contact" and at least two well-known publications in the field of language pedagogy and bilingualism have for title languages (or cultures) in contact. To me, a former student of linguistics and a teacher of languages and language pedagogy, the phenomenon should be deemed conflict rather than contact, since the neglect of the educational needs of the minority groups in Northamerican schools has resulted in a socio-pedagogical pathology that none of us can ignore. The way many classroom teachers and professional educators have interpreted research in the fields of language use and language acquisition has resulted in a very destructive juxtaposition of languages and cultures in bilingual classrooms.

Teachers in bilingual classrooms have become aware at worst, knowledgeable at best ~~in~~ of the issues dealing with language interference, cultural shock, and lowered self-images. They have read, been trained, and become conversant on the symptoms of the problem; yet, incredible as it may seem,

they have been unable to translate their newly acquired knowledge into successful attitudinal approaches and instructional strategies. They have been concentrating on the trees and missed the forest. Their approaches are linguistic or cultural, never instructional and affective. And for much of the failure of classroom teachers, I would like to put the blame on another conflict; that which I have labelled instructional shock and which I would like to suggest may well be the result of cognitive conflict between one framework for learning and a completely different one.

I would like, for the time being, to de-emphasize the role of linguistic interference and cultural shock in the acquisition of bilingualism and stress that of the role of learning styles.

Pertinent at this point is the definition of bilingual education--not of bilingualism, mind you--as presented in the manual for project applicants and grantees issued by the Office of Education as a result of the provisions contained in the Bilingual Education Act:

> "Bilingual education is the use of two languages, one which is English, as mediums of instruction for the same pupil population in a well-organized program which encompasses part or all of the curriculum and includes the study of the history and culture associated with the mother tongue. A complete program develops and maintains the children's self-esteem and a legitimate pride in both cultures."[1]

The definition, or rather, the description of what a bilingual education program should contain does not take into consideration how children learn and in what language they think. In addition, it stresses contents of the curriculum as opposed to ways of teaching which are concurrent with ways of learning, ignoring the fact that the verbal skills of a learner not only determine how he has learned up to now but will also signal how he will

proceed to learn. The roles of the two languages cannot be equalized nor can they be left to administrative whim or teacher selection. Much more needs to be done if a child is to "maintain his self-esteem", a self-esteem not determined by language and cultural identity alone but by his ability to perform successfully in terms of the socio-pedagogical demands of the school first, and of the world of labor next. An old cliche has psychological undertones that bilingual teachers must heed; "nothing succeeds like success" goes far beyond the limits of communication and schooling. Yet, bilingual programs are supposed to be successful if they are "well-organized" in spite of the fact that we are not told around what they are supposed to be organized and even though we are told what the contents should be.

I would like to offer what I consider to be a better definition of bilingual education and one which would stress languages as tools for thinking, learning and achieving rather than as mere means of instruction. This is my definition:

> "Bilingual education is the formalized instruction of children and adults in which one language is identified and used as the means of perception, reasoning and intuition, and another is solely a basis for communication and social interaction."[1]

The true bilingual, if such a human being exists, would be able to use two languages interchangeably for both domains, whereas a true monolingual would have only one language at his command. One could then establish degrees of bilingualism, and therefore, plan for bilingual education programs, in terms of the levels of attainment of the individual learner. It is at this point where the quantitative and qualitative exposure to two languages in terms of the individual's schooling could help to establish the degree to which he is truly bilingual.

Language and thought are a dyad but each contributes and requires unique skills in the conceptual and cognitive make-up of the learner. Though convergent in function, they are separate in nature. There are, as stated by John B. Carroll, "basic dimensions in which people vary in language performance"[2] and we would like to assume that these variances are the results of variance in "thinking performance."

Carroll states the domains of variance between one individual and the next as follows:

> ". . .verbal knowledge, abstract thinking ability, ideational fluency, oral speech abilities, and articulation abilities."[3]

Although Carroll classifies all of these terms as "language performances," many of these are products while others are processes. To equate the two categories with the linguist's terminology, I would like to refer to the first, as performance and to the second as competence. Furthermore, I must point out that the analysis of variance in language and thought domains described by Carroll does not address differences in culture and socio-economic status. If we address it from the issues raised and researched by other scientists concerned with language acquisition, we would have to add to this analysis the styles of learning which are culturally determined. And therein lies the crux of what I call instructional shock.

It is clear to me that what most teachers identify as linguistic and cultural dysfunction in minority students is really cognitive and learning dysfunction on the part of the students and teaching and affective dysfunction on the part of their teachers. It will not require much elaboration to surmise that the low scholastic achievement of minority children is not solely the result of language interference or of cultural and social deprivation

but of conflicting modes of learning and teaching triggered by culturally-determined goals and expectations.

In most bilingual classrooms children and adolescents are being taught their native language as a tool for perception; the goals are the products of information. In very few, if any, bilingual classrooms, the learner is guided in using his language as a tool for cognition; in brief, instruction is process-oriented. We can expect the rate of variance in the cognitive skills expressed via language to increase in direct proportion to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the learners and the conflict already mentioned to the degree of variance between these and the linguistic and cultural diversity of their teachers.

My own and direct experience attests to this. I have been engaged in the process of identifying teacher needs, self-expressed as well as observed, in the state of Massachusetts for the last three years. A recent project in which I was involved as principal investigator and director yielded the following results:

1. teachers do not consider themselves prepared to deal with a classroom where student composition is not "homogeneous";

2. they consider homogeneity to be detrimental to optimal scholastic achievement;

3. they have set roles for student and parent behaviours, in and outside the classrooms;

4. they have no skills in individualizing instruction;

5. they are baffled by the problems of organizing subject-matter for instruction in two languages;

6. they equate socio-economic class with culture;

7. they expect students to conform to one set of expected behaviors or as they call them "classroom manners";

8. they expect parents to conform to specific behaviors not only in terms of school-visitation but also in terms of their parental dynamics with the school children

9. they seldom identify problems in the areas of cognitive skills or of the conceptual framework of instruction.

To express teacher perceptions of the problems they face in teaching groups of children best characterized by cultural and linguistic variance from themselves, I would like to quote some of the statements made by teachers in one school system where only a negligible percentage came from the children's linguistic and national origins:

> "Students use words that connote different meanings. In other words, some Spanish words have more than one meaning. I don't know sometimes when a word is vulgar or not."

> "Communication between students in Spanish should be forbidden in class. A non-Spanish speaking teacher cannot tell when foul language is being used."

> "All of the children from poor economic situations are motivated either not at all or differently from our better students. Grades mean nothing to them, and they do no homework. Grading becomes more and more difficult."

> "As a teacher of seventh-grade English, I find Spanish-speaking students unwilling to conform to classroom regulations. They speak out of turn, roam around the room, and expect directions to be repeated."

> "Mr. _____ seemed to be working out well. He only had to raise his voice a little bit and one could feel the silence that pervaded the room. Although he is a native of Puerto Rico, he occasionally spoke English to the children particularly when he disciplined them. Is this an accepted domain usage of English? I know it is associated with prestige and social mobility, but I was not aware of this situational usage."[5]

Whether these statements show ignorance about how language and culture affect classroom behavior and effectiveness or whether they show bias towards a culturally different or socio-economically lower group which also happens to be linguistically different, the truth is that teachers usually identify their problems and concerns in terms of language, cultural behavior, study habits, or levels of motivation, but are unable to conceive instruction in terms of conceptual and cognitive organizations which would better allow for the selection of learning goals, the organization of instruction, the selection of methods and of materials, and finally of the placement, evaluation, promotion or retention of students.

There is evidence in this study of one-hundred forty-one teachers in one school district in Western Massachusetts where more than nine percent of the population is of Puerto Rican origins, that teachers are baffled by the one problem they cannot identify except by its manifestitations:

> "I switched to Spanish when I realized from his apparent guesses that he was not grasping the concepts in English. Unfortunately, he did only a little better after I changed the language medium."

> "I have tried many different ways to present a new concept, but a few children are still having trouble because they do not understand enough English. About the only thing left for me to do is to let other children explain the concept in Spanish."

> "Things that work: All manner of games work very well. Highly structured spelling and grammar drills seems (sic) effective. Reading in turn and specific questioning gives (sic) good results."

> "In an English reading group, some pupils are having trouble following instructions."

> "The Spanish-speaking children show little or no initiative in learning any of the basic skills intrinsic to obtaining any type of employment. . ."

> "It is difficult for me to decide where to place a child during promotion time. . . in a bilingual or regular classroom. Even if the child does well in conversation, can be complete readily with those who have spoken English all their life?"[6]

Teachers are groping for answers. Sometimes they search for them in motivational patterns, at others, in terms of teaching styles, sometimes in terms of peer vs. teacher interactions, others in terms of social patterns of competition or collaboration, but I still have to see these baffling questions couched in terms of "how do these students learn best and what are the cognitive and affective determinants of success that I can identify in setting up my strategies for teaching them to learn?"

Some of the answers have been already suggested in the research we alluded to at the beginning: patterns of socializing and relating; values and mores of the societal group; attitudes towards education, schooling, schools, and teachers; the domains of linguistic uses in one language as opposed to another; perceptions of self and of what constitutes success in an alien school setting; but others await resolution before bilingual education and the teacher preparation programs in bilingual education fall into the limbo that has characterized language programs--FLES, TESOL, and FL in secondary and postsecondary schools--for the last three decades.

Therefore, I would like to suggest some of the areas in need of immediate answers which language researchers can provide if they were to ask the proper questions but which also signal the need for integrating research already done and of translating their findings in terms of strategies for instruction. Those areas are best highlighted through the following questions:

What are the cognitive skills which do not depend on full language mastery? What are the stages of development in the psychomotor and mental domains of every child that can be utilized in teaching them on a nonverbal means? What are the subject-matter fields that can best profit from the various stages of motor and mental development? Who can best teach the child at each of these stages: a peer, an immediately older child, a parent, an aide, a teacher? In what languages should (verbal) instruction take place: in the home language? in the community language? in the school's languages? in the tutor/aide/parent/teacher's native language? In what cultural contexts-themes, materials, styles of teaching and learning--will these skills be taught? To what purposes will they immediately respond that will be eventually related to the goals of education as perceived by parents/teachers/learners and the societies where they will be used? What skills require language mastery as opposed to non-language mastery, i.e., association vs. transfer; classification vs. discrimination? comprehension vs. production? communication vs. expression? What language best helps to develop these skills: listening? speaking? reading? writing? What classroom activities are most conducive to lead to their mastery: dictation? copying? controlled oral and written texts? reading for meaning? for effect? What skills are best taught through language instruction? through science? through math? through music? through art? through handcrafts? What should the basis of curriculum organization be: information and basic skills, knowledge and cognitive skills? What should the criteria of achievement be: correctness, degree of subject-matter knowledge, product-oriented scholarship or creativity, or command of fundamental processes, process-mastery behaviors?

If it is true that "it is generally accepted that the processes of schooling must be congruent with the total cultural experience of the child",[7] then a teacher's question, "How do you provide a classroom suitable to the cultural background (of the minority students)"[8] can only be answered this way: "By changing the whole outlook of what bilingual education is and by stressing what learning is about."[9]

As the research conducted by Manuel Ramirez and his associates show,[10] every culture has unique ways of educating its young and thus of perceiving, processing and utilizing knowledge. Mainstreaming children whose styles and contexts in learning differ from Northamerican school styles and contexts of teaching will not do the trick, whether it is done in the children's language or against a background of their cultural and historical settings.

The essence of the processes of learning and teaching lies in the conceptual and cognitive frameworks of the learners and on how teachers learn to use them within contexts of communicative experiences and in an atmosphere of acceptance of the results of those experiences.

NOTES

1. Senate Bill No. 7, Chapter 5.76 called Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act of 1976 of California.

2. Language and Thought.

3. Ibid.

4. A Framework for the Training of Bilingual/ESL Teachers in the Schools of Massachusetts. Amherst, Mass.: Bilingual/Bicultural Education Professions Program, School of Education, The University of Massachusetts.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. "A Proposed Approach to Implement Bilingual Education Programs." New York, New York: National Puerto Rican Development and Training Institute, Inc.

8. A Framework for the Training of Bilingual/ESL Teachers in the Schools of Massachusetts.

9. Ibid.

10. Manuel Ramirez et al. Learning Systems. California: Riverside.