

Educational Alternatives for Elementary School Students in Spanish-Speaking Communities

Daphne Katranides

Katranides considers four educational programs available to elementary aged school children of Spanish-English speaking communities in the United States in this paper which is intended as exploratory and informational rather than as evaluative or advocative. She draws on work by Delgado-Gaitan, Garcia and Otheguy, Hornberger, and Kjolseth, among others to investigate the fit of the varied cultural characteristics of three major Hispanic groups with the English language learning programs available to them.

Introduction

This paper will consider some of the educational programs serving elementary school children of Spanish-English speaking communities in the United States. This is not intended to judge the most effective educational model for Hispanics, but instead, is an exploration of four different programs, how they fit into Hornberger's (1990a) typology of bilingual education, and, to some degree, how successful they are.

Bilingual Education literature distinguishes between assimilationist or transitional, maintenance, and enrichment models and between the various programs that can carry out the models. These models define, among other things, program goals and structure, including the degree to which program goals are carried out by the structure. Note that stated goals are not the same as practices or outcomes (Kjolseth, 1973). As Hornberger says,

[t]his typological confusion has both contributed to the inconsistent results of bilingual education evaluation research and to some extent disguised the fact that U.S. bilingual education funds have gradually been redirected away from enrichment and maintenance (i.e.

developmental) bilingual education and toward transitional and even not-bilingual education programs (Hornberger, 1990a: 21).

In the consideration of program structures, a variety of elements are examined: 1) the use of languages in the curriculum, whether as the medium of instruction or as the subject of instruction, the sequencing of introduction to each language, both written and oral, and the degree of oral and literate development; 2) the use of languages in the classroom, whether they are used in alternate or mixed patterns and their functions (Hornberger, 1990a: 10); 3) the view of language held by the school and the students; 4) the view of culture by the school and the resulting use or non-use of cultural knowledge; 5) the program's place within the school; 6) and whether language education is one-way or two-way (Hornberger, 1990a:9).

In each setting, this paper looks at the contextual factors, both in the school and in the wider community. Among the contextual factors are items (1) through (6) above. Knowledge of these factors contribute to an understanding about the use of languages at home and in the wider community, the economic integration of the linguistic minority into the mainstream, sociolinguistic and socioeconomic factors, whether participation in a program is voluntary or mandatory, and the degree of parental and community involvement (Hornberger, 1990a: 9) contributes to the understanding of the program.

Lastly, where possible, this paper looks at the program's success, as measured by the degree of bilingualism and/or biliteracy that students achieve as a result of participation in the particular program. This is not always feasible, either because of the nature of the published information, or because the programs are still in the experimental stage and have not produced a large enough sample of graduates to consider. This could be an area for further research.

It must be noted that the programs included here are not representative of all the program types available to any one of the three Hispanic groups considered here, let alone to all Spanish-speaking children. There are innumerable programs, and these are only a few of those that have been published.

Separate Groups

Bilingual education programs cannot be looked at without consideration of contextual factors. Looking only at stated goals and program structures ignores the influence of socioeconomic and sociolinguistic aspects of a given educational environment. Solé notes that, while "language-minority persons who usually speak

languages other than English have lower educational attainment and higher dropout rates than minority persons who usually speak English" (1980: 139), the situation is even worse for Spanish speakers. In fact, even those Hispanics who are English dominant have higher dropout rates and higher "school retardation" than other English-dominant language minorities (1980: 139). Consideration of programs by language groupings seems logical, but holds its own pitfalls.

Although Spanish-English bilingual programs are the most common in the U.S., any examination of these programs as a group is dangerous if accompanied by a view of Spanish speakers as a homogeneous group. While statistics about low educational attainment among Hispanics suggest that Spanish speakers are "at risk" and should receive some sort of remedial attention, the "Hispanic" group is not quite so homogeneous as might be assumed, and "treatment" of this group needs to take into account these differences.

Of the three main groups of Spanish speakers in the U.S., Mexicans¹, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans, Cubans seem to be the exception to the rule, as laid out by Solé. The Cuban population, smallest of the three groups, consists of older people relative to the Mexican and Puerto Rican populations of the United States. Cubans are also not as poor and hold a higher position in the job market. For the most part, this group is made up of political, and not economic, refugees. Cubans coming to this country have generally been well educated, and the children have followed their parent's example.

Socioeconomic status influences and in many ways determines parental aspirations for the child's education, interest in and social pressure for academic achievement, standards for reward for achievement, knowledge of the child's educational process, preparation for attainment of educational goals, and the availability and quality of guidance on matters related to school work (Solé, 1980: 142).

Thus immigrants of high socioeconomic status from Cuba are more educated, have higher status jobs, earn more money, and ensure that their children succeed in school, thus ensuring in turn that they will also hold high-status positions and live at the higher end of the financial scale.

Another notable characteristic is that the use of Spanish is stronger among Cubans than among other Hispanics. Because language use correlates strongly with place of birth (Brown et al., 1980:4) this could be seen as a result of the fact that the Cuban group is still predominantly made up of first-generation members (García and Otheguy, 1986:5). Regardless of the cause of this Spanish dominance, it should be

considered when planning educational programs for children from Cuban communities.

Although Cubans are notably different from other members of the "Hispanic" group, this is not to say that Puerto Ricans and Mexicans are identical. Puerto Ricans generally live in more urban areas and there is also a great deal of contact between Island and Mainland populations. This cyclical pattern that characterizes Puerto Rican immigration results in linguistic continuity unlike that found in most immigrant groups (Hornberger, 1990b: 214).

When educational attainment of Mexicans is compared to the larger Hispanic category, Mexicans have a considerably lower percentage of high school graduates and a lower median number of years of school completed (García and Maldonado, 1982: 14-15). Additionally while advances have been made over time, the progress of Mexicans has not been as great as that of non-Mexican Hispanics, and considerably less for Mexican women. Similar disparities exist in level of employment. While the overall income of Mexicans was not lower in comparison to other Hispanics, Mexican women earned considerably less than their non-Mexican counterparts.

Mexicans, according to García and Maldonado (1982), need further delineation because of continuing immigration. That is, Mexicans, who make up 60% of the larger Hispanic group should also be divided into American-born and foreign-born categories (García and Maldonado, 1982:9). Most Mexican immigration is economically driven, and American-born Mexicans are generally of a higher socio-economic status than more recent immigrants (García and Maldonado, 1982: 12). In fact, "[c]ontrasts between the native and Mexican-born subgroups on employment-related characteristics, in many cases, produce indexes of dissimilarity which are greater than those produced from similar comparisons of Mexicans and other Hispanic origin" (García and Maldonado, 1982: 21). The utility of this distinction in the consideration of education for bilingual populations is doubtful; rather, the statistics on degree of educational and economic success need to account for this factor.

The Programs

Mexicans

California's Spanish speaking population is overwhelmingly of Mexican descent. In "Portillo," which is Delgado-Gaitan's pseudonym for a small town close to Santa Barbara, 31% of the population is Mexican, and most of these Mexicans have

been there for at least three generations. Yet, immigration from and contact with Mexico continues. As a result, linguistically, the Mexican community ranges from monolingual speakers of English to monolingual speakers of Spanish with every degree of bilingualism in between. Economically speaking, most Mexicans in Portillo have agricultural or other unskilled work, and this seasonal work does not provide a steady income (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990: 15).

The Portillo school district provides Spanish-speaking preschool students Spanish English bilingual and Spanish-only programs (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990: 15). For Spanish-speaking children in elementary school there is both a bilingual program and a Spanish-only program, which is still in the developmental stages. Delgado-Gaitan does not make it clear how children are selected to participate in these programs, or whether they and their parents have a choice.

In her study of home-based and school-based literacy, Delgado-Gaitan observes twenty Mexican second- and third-graders from this program both at school and at home. All spoke Spanish at home. Both parents usually worked; however, because much of their work was seasonal work, the income was not always steady. The median income was less than \$13,000. Parental educational experience is limited, as many of the Portillo parents had left school through the need to work after the fourth grade.

This Spanish-only program provides initial literacy instruction in Spanish for Spanish-speaking children. Although the program is restricted to one or two classes, children from the Spanish-only reading classrooms join children from English-only classrooms for ESL instruction (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990: 17-18). Until students move on to English in fourth grade, all reading work, vocabulary, reading, discussion, and homework assignments is conducted in Spanish. In observations of low and high level reading groups in second-third and third-grade classrooms, Delgado-Gaitan found lots of drilling of vocabulary for what she called "novice" readers (1990: 31-32) and little tolerance on the part of the teachers for interpretive thinking from either novice or more experienced readers. "This search for answers in the text emphasized that the textbook and the teacher were the primary authorities" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990: 68). The social context of reading lessons that Delgado-Gaitan observed were not conducive to the development of such higher level thinking skills as analysis and interpretation. In fact, both the formulaic nature of the interaction and the reliance on the text for information deterred this kind of development (Delgado-Gaitan, 1989: 292).

While having reading instruction in Spanish may suggest that this program fits under a maintenance model, both the bilingual and Spanish-only programs in Portillo

are transitional. After students learn to read in Spanish, they move on to reading in English and move into classrooms where lessons are conducted in English. Teacher attitudes contributed to this image of Spanish as a pit stop. One teacher, for instance, expressed deep concern for her Spanish-speaking third-graders because they would have to learn to read in Spanish before moving on to English; she felt that they were behind and that she needed to be strict with these students in order to insure their progress (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990: 74). At home the parents of these children speak in Spanish and try to ensure that the children continue to speak Spanish to each other, but there is a shift to the use of English among children after second or third grade (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990: 84-86).

Although the teachers were Spanish speakers, they seemed to have little contact with or real understanding of their students' parents. The teachers perceived the Mexican parents as not valuing education, not assisting their children with homework, and being generally uncooperative and uninterested (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990: 121-122). Parents, on the other hand, consistently reported an interest in and were seen to care about educational performance and to encourage their children to do well (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990: 88, 94). Because of their lack of educational experience and limited proficiency in English, all parents expressed concern that they did not know how best to assist their children with homework. Additionally, because they were not familiar with the American school system, many parents did not know how to ask for help from the schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990).

All this is consistent with Lareau's findings on working class white parents' relationships to their children's schools (1987): these majority language parents "rarely initiated contact with teachers," knew little about the school's curriculum, were uninformed about "the specific educational problems of their children," and the parents level of educational attainment influenced their confidence in their ability to help their children (Lareau, 1987: 78-79). Nevertheless, as with Delgado-Gaitan's Mexican parents, these working class Anglos claimed to value success and saw themselves as helping (Lareau, 1987: 81).

Thus the Portillo Spanish-only program is not school-wide but isolated, yet children in this program do have contact with other children during the course of the academic day. Spanish is used in the curriculum as a medium of instruction, and English is the subject of instruction in ESL classes. Spanish comes first in the language and literacy learning sequence, yet the development of Spanish literacy is limited since Spanish is not used after third grade. Additional restrictions are put on the development of Spanish literacy by the materials used for teaching reading in

Spanish in the Portillo district, which are quite limited, particularly when compared to those used in the literature-based reading classrooms for English speaking students in the same district (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990: 18). Spanish was obviously the only language used in the classroom in the Spanish-only program; therefore it covered all functions. (The use of Spanish and English in the ESL classes is not covered in Delgado-Gaitan's work.) The bilingual teachers seem to interact little with the Mexican community. They rarely bring Mexican culture into the classroom and make little use of their students' cultural knowledge. Additionally, the teachers view learning to read in Spanish as something that must be hurried so that students can get to the really important task of learning English.

According to Hornberger's (1990a) revised framework, the Portillo program in isolation might be seen, in terms of sequencing (i.e.: Spanish first, then gradual change to English by third grade) as a maintenance program. If, however, the lack of continued instruction in Spanish and the teacher attitudes are considered, then the Portillo program must be seen as coming from the assimilationist tradition.

In contrast to the Portillo classroom, where "the teacher's approach to literacy instruction emphasized automaticity of vocabulary recognition and text recall comprehension" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1989: 295), Edelsky (1986) describes a very different situation. While this will not be discussed in detail here, it is important to remember that the Portillo program is not representative of all programs available to Mexican children in the United States. In fact, the Spanish-only program is not even the only educational option for the Spanish-speaking Mexicans of Portillo.

Puerto Ricans

Philadelphia is the fifth largest city in the United States, and it offers only one bilingual education program that falls under the enrichment model. The Potter Thomas School, which houses this unique program, is in the middle of North Philadelphia's Puerto Rican community. This Puerto Rican community is now quite large and includes a considerable number of second and third generation families (Hornberger, 1990a: 13). This, combined with the continuing cycle of immigration so common to Puerto Rican communities (Hornberger, 1990b: 214; 1990a: 13-14), results in a Puerto Rican population of mixed linguistic skills and varying degrees of bilingualism. The Puerto Rican community from which Potter Thomas draws many of its students is on the lower end of the economic scale. Hornberger cites School District statistics showing "that 67.7% of the children at Potter Thomas School come from families of low income" (1990a: 14). Linguistically and economically

Philadelphia's Puerto Rican community is quite similar to the Mexican community of Portillo.

Nine percent of the students in the Philadelphia School District are Hispanic, and of the 1,000 children at the Potter Thomas School, 78% fall into that category (Hornberger, 1990b: 212). Note that although the percentage of Hispanic students remains high, throughout the year there is a high turn over in the student body because of the cyclical immigration pattern found in the community (Hornberger, 1990a: 14).

As mentioned above, the bilingual program at the Potter Thomas School is the only one of its kind in Philadelphia. The K-5, school-wide program is two-way in that "Spanish speaking children learn English while maintaining their Spanish, and English speaking children learn Spanish while maintaining their English" (Hornberger, 1990a: 16). At Potter Thomas "both languages and literacies are used for subject matter instruction" (Hornberger, 1990a: 17), and introduction to reading in both languages is not sequenced, but simultaneous. Placement into reading groups is based on reading and second language skills (Hornberger, 1990a: 14), although placement in streams is based on parental reports of home language use (Hornberger, 1990a: 16).

Some teachers are bilingual but not trained in bilingual education, others monolingual in either English or Spanish, and some fully bilingual and trained as bilingual teachers, Spanish monolingual speakers are all either Cuban or Puerto Rican (Hornberger, 1990a: 15).

Language use as allocated in the curriculum is moving progressively towards all instruction in English, with only an hour and a quarter for reading instruction in Spanish by third grade (Hornberger, 1990a: 17). Both Spanish and English speakers begin with L2 instruction (ESL or SSL, as is appropriate) and move to L2 reading classes when proficient in the L2. These reading classes are made up of children from both the Anglo and Latino streams, so that there is no isolation of the two groups (Hornberger, 1990a: 18). Though this implies that Spanish is restricted to reading classes after third grade, in fact, Spanish is often used to give meaning to lessons, "especially, for example, during social studies, science, and mathematics lessons" (Hornberger, 1990a: 19). Observations revealed at least one teacher at Potter Thomas who leaves the choice of language up to the children. In the same teacher's class the use of Spanish in the classroom is only restricted when the task or activity is focused on English, not because Spanish is considered a negative influence on use of English (Hornberger, 1990b: 218-219).

In summary, the Potter Thomas School supplies bi-directional and bilingual education for both Puerto Rican and Anglo children. Spanish-speaking children receive ESL instruction until they can handle English reading classes, and their content classes are given in Spanish until the third grade, when Spanish continues to give meaning to English medium content classes. At the same time, English-dominant children are prepared for Spanish reading through SSL classes. According to Hornberger's (1990a) typology, this program can be seen as an example of the enrichment model of bilingual education.

Cubans

Within Dade County, Florida, several types of schools serve Cuban and Cuban-American children. A range of private institutions joins the public school system, including church affiliated schools, elite private schools, and, what García and Otheguy (1987) call, private "ethnic" schools. The following is a look at two of the educational alternatives available to Cuban-Americans: private, ethnic schools and public schools.

In the 1960s a substantial number of bi-directional bilingual programs for Cuban and Anglo elite sprang. These lost support as it became evident that the Cubans would be staying permanently and not just a short time as originally expected by both the refugees and their Anglo hosts (García and Otheguy, 1986: 6). Just as local support for bilingual education was waning, Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act (BEA); however, the bilingual education mandated by the BEA and the Lau vs. Nichols case "was indeed different from the full, permanent and literate bilingualism for the Anglo and Cuban elites previously promoted by the Dade County public schools" (García and Otheguy, 1986: 7). The federal government required that the minority language, in this case Spanish, be used in the process of making the transition to English, not that it be developed or maintained. While scaled back, the Dade County public school programs go considerably farther than the law demands.

The programs offered for Spanish speakers in the Dade County public schools are quite successful when compared with those of other areas serving other Hispanic populations. Here, students' content classes are taught by monolingual speakers of English. Pull-out instruction in ESOL is provided by another Anglo monolingual English speaker, and Hispanic teachers, usually Cuban, teach content material in Spanish and Spanish Language Arts (García and Otheguy, 1986:7). These Cuban teachers are considered by García and Otheguy an important asset to the public school program. Because most of these teachers received their education in Cuba,