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# Bilingual Education in New Mexico: Historical Perspective and Current Debate

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# *BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN NEW MEXICO: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND CURRENT DEBATE*

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IN THE LAST TEN YEARS bilingual education has expanded significantly in the United States. In 1969 when bilingual education initially received federal assistance, there were 79 projects for the entire nation. Today there are 425 projects serving the educational needs of an estimated 259,364 pupils.[1] Several factors contributed to the rapid expansion in bilingual education. First, there was incentive provided by the enactment of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. Next, there was a growing awareness on the part of parents and teachers to provide meaningful education to students whose dominant language is not English. Then, there were the federal and state court rulings which upheld the legal right of students of minority languages to have a school program that recognized their linguistic characteristics.[2] Finally, there was the involvement of humanities scholars in bilingual education which broadened the base of understanding.[3]

Even with 425 operational projects for the United States and the island possessions (Guam, American Samoa, The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands), bilingual education merely represents approximately ten percent of the total student population of 2.5 million. The state of New Mexico currently has twenty projects, with learning levels for students ranging from pre-kindergarten to the twelfth grade. The dominant languages also vary. For more than half of the projects, the home language is Spanish, but the native languages of Navajo, Keresan, Towa, and Apache are also served. In terms of the number of participating students, the largest project is administered by the Albuquerque Public Schools, while the smallest project is supervised by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in cooperation with the Northern Pueblo Agency.[4] The issue is not the number of bilingual education projects in New Mexico, or their relative size, or their

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geographic location. The issue is bilingual education itself—specifically its historical perspective and current debate.

In recent years, New Mexico attracted regional attention in the case of *Serna v. Portales*. The district court of New Mexico in 1972, with subsequent memoranda in 1973, ruled that a remedial program for students of limited English-speaking ability was inadequate.[5] In effect, *Serna v. Portales* established the legal basis for bilingual education in New Mexico. The court ruled that the Portales School District had failed to implement a meaningful instructional program that realistically addressed the needs of Spanish-dominant students. In reviewing the case, the Federal 10th Circuit Court of Appeals concluded that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 extended to students of limited English-speaking ability "a right to bilingual education."[6]

The irony of *Serna v. Portales* is that the court decision obscured the historical fact that New Mexico was the region in the borderlands where bilingual education first appeared. The Franciscan friars who accompanied the Oñate expedition established the precedent for bilingual education as early as 1599.[7] With music as a basic teaching method, the friars tapped the interest and skills of the natives, and in the process the teachers learned the language of the students which became the foundation of bilingual education in New Mexico.[8] By the 1630s, as Alonso de Benavides reported, the Franciscans operated schools at every major pueblo in an effort to convert the Indians to the Spanish version of Christianity. The curriculum, obviously of a bilingual nature, emphasized reading, writing, and singing, as well as tailoring, shoemaking, carpentry, and metal craft in the vocational arts.[9]

With varying degrees of success, the Franciscans practiced the rudiments of bilingual education throughout the colonial period. In the eighteenth century, during an inspection of the missionary frontier, Bishop Pedro Tamarón heard occasional complaints that the friars lacked the zeal to study the native languages.[10] No doubt by the 1760s, the Franciscans' teaching methods had produced sufficient change which enabled the Indians to communicate proficiently in Spanish without reverting to dependency on the native dialect. Since a cardinal objective of Hispanic imperial policy was the acculturation of the Indians, it should not be surprising that toward the end of the colonial epoch the friars preferred the use of

Spanish as the dominant language. Whatever shortcomings outside observers detected in the Franciscans' educational system, the order's form of instruction, by comparison, was evidently more stable than secular primary education in Santa Fe which depended for support on the unpredictable generosity of the patrons and on the availability of a qualified teacher.[11]

The achievement of Mexican independence in 1821 deprived the Franciscans in New Mexico of regular government assistance (*sínodos*) with which to maintain the missions. Admittedly, the end of the mission supply service affected the level of education in New Mexico. In 1834, the national government ordered the secularization of the missions. Transferring the missions to the diocesan or secular clergy required several years. By 1840 the Franciscans completed the process and departed from New Mexico. With their emigration, bilingual education came to an end.[12] Pedro Bautista Pino gave cogent testimony of the Franciscans' success in the field of bilingual education: "Many Indians can read and write. All of them have good reasoning power, keen judgment, and a natural, persuasive eloquence. . . . These pueblos have different languages, but all the residents speak Spanish."[13]

During the Mexican period, the emphasis in education shifted from the missions schools to the instruction of Spanish-dominant children in the civil settlements. In this endeavor the diocesan priests performed an active role. Father Antonio José Martínez of Taos administered a primary school, part of which also served as a seminary for the training of future priests. Other clergymen involved in education were José F. Leyva of Bado and Juan Rafael Rascón of Santa Fe. Of necessity they limited the curriculum to the teaching of catechism, reading, and writing.[14] Notwithstanding these laudable efforts, one obstacle blocking the advancement of education in New Mexico was the unavailability of textbooks and other learning materials. In 1834 Father Martínez of Taos obtained a printing press with which he published prayer books and primers, such as his famous *Cuaderno de Ortografía*.[15] Even so, the need for books remained greater than the supply.

The Mexican War of 1846-1848 altered the course of history in New Mexico. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, as amended by the United States Senate, pledged that the successor government would respect the cultural integrity of the inhabitants in the Mex-

ican Cession.[16] In theory the pledge implied acceptance of Spanish as a medium of expression. The reality of military occupation, however, produced a modification. For example, sometime between 1854 and 1860, an inspection of the territory disclosed that eight students, ranging in age from five to six years, attended school at Pecos where they studied *primeras letras*. Altogether the enrollment for Pecos, San José, and Las Ruedas totaled fifty-three students who had mastered basic skills in reading, writing, geography, arithmetic, and English as a second language. Of these students, only six *jovenes* had become bilingual, with a facility for translating English into Spanish. The curriculum at San José did not include English as a foreign language because the teacher was a Spanish monolingual.[17]

An important change in the direction of education in New Mexico occurred with the arrival at mid-century of Jean Baptiste Lamy as Bishop of Santa Fe (later elevated to Archbishop). Lamy's presence in New Mexico placed him on a collision course with the oldline Spanish-speaking clergy who respected the leadership of Father Martínez of Taos. The result was a pathetic, prolonged power struggle for the allegiance of the faithful by two strong-willed personalities.[18] In matters of education, Bishop Lamy subscribed to the notion that ignorance, allegedly Mexico's national vice, dominated the population of the territory. After three decades of toil in the vineyard of New Mexico, Lamy succeeded in attaining a mark of material progress—two colleges and eight schools, not counting the parish and Indian schools—but he never abandoned an attitude of cultural superiority. In a spiritual sense, Lamy was a visible symbol of the Roman Catholic Church; in a pragmatic sense he was a non-military extension of the Anglo-American conquest of the Southwest. Toward the end of his tenure as archbishop, Lamy still could not appreciate the inherent intelligence of the New Mexicans as indicated in this statement:

> Our Mexican population [he wrote to the Vatican] has quite a sad future. Very few of them will be able to follow modern progress. They cannot be compared to the Americans in the way of intellectual liveliness, ordinary skills, and industry; they will thus be scorned and considered an inferior race. If the bishop who will

> follow me has not lived among the Mexicans for a long time . . . [he] will become disheartened.[19]

During Lamy's episcopacy, Italian Jesuits, many of whom had served in Spain, accepted an invitation to work in New Mexico. Beginning in 1867, the ministry of the Jesuits, generally along the Rio Grande Valley, moderated the impact of Lamy's French clergy among the Spanish-speaking people. The Black Robes directed their energy toward education and journalism. In 1872 they established a boys' school in Albuquerque; in 1875 they began publication of *Revista Católica* in Las Vegas; and in 1877 they conducted primary and secondary classes in Don Manuel Romero's *Casa Redonda* (renamed Las Vegas College). The inauguration of *Revista Católica* reflected a broader issue in New Mexico—the controversy over the separation of church and state in public education. In the 1870s the sizeable influx of English-speaking "migrants" accentuated the need, long recognized by civic-minded individuals, for adequate school facilities. As a result of pressure, the number of public schools increased impressively from none in 1870 to 138 by 1875. The controversy centered on the fact that some Catholic clergymen served as trustees on county school boards. One Jesuit in Albuquerque, for instance, officiated as Superintendent of Schools in Bernalillo County.[20]

In the final decade of the nineteenth century, newspaper editors, more so than educators, demonstrated an awareness of Spanish as a cultural resource. Despite reduced journalistic enterprise in the territory due to intense competition, in the 1890s thirty-five Spanish-language and eleven bilingual newspapers were printed and distributed. Illustrative of well-edited Spanish-language newspapers were *El Tiempo* (Las Cruces), *El Boletín Popular*, and *El Nuevo Mexicano* (Santa Fe), *El Nuevo Mundo* and *La Bandera Americana* (Albuquerque), and *La Voz del Pueblo* and *El Independiente* (Las Vegas). The publication and circulation of these papers signified literacy and proficiency in Spanish, undoubtedly due to the influence of Catholic education which fostered language development in the curriculum.[21] In the midst of emotion for New Mexico to gain statehood, educators missed an opportunity to use Spanish as a foundation upon which to build bilingual instruction.

Bilingual Education in New Mexico for Fiscal Year 1976

| Location and Agency | Previous Years in Force | Number of Years Negotiated | Estimated Pupil Participation (5,634) | Grades Being Served | Languages Served |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Albuquerque<br>Central New Mexico<br>Bilingual Program Consortium | 1 | 2 | — | K-8 | Indian-<br>Various |
| Albuquerque<br>Albuquerque Public Schools | 1 | 3 | 920 | K-8 | Spanish |
| Bernalillo<br>Bernalillo Public Schools | 1 | 2 | 301 | 2-4 | Spanish |
| Clovis<br>Clovis Municipal Schools | 1 | 2 | 286 | K-3 | Spanish |
| Crownpoint<br>BIA-Eastern Navajo Agency | 1 | 3 | 75 | K-4 | Navajo |
| Española<br>Española Public Schools | 0 | 5 | 155 | K-4 | Spanish |
| Grants<br>Grants Municipal Schools | 1 | 2 | 462 | 4-6 | Keresan<br>& Spanish |
| Jemez Pueblo<br>Jemez Springs Municipal Schools | 0 | 5 | 180 | 1-6 | Keresan,<br>Spanish,<br>& Towa |
| Las Cruces<br>Las Cruces School District #2 | 1 | 3 | 217 | 6-10 | Spanish |
| Las Vegas<br>West Las Vegas Schools | 1 | 3 | 421 | 6-7 | Spanish |
| Mora<br>Mora Independent School<br>District #1 | 0 | 5 | 244 | PK-2 | Spanish |
| Ramah<br>Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc. | 1 | 3 | 449 | K-12 | Navajo |
| San Fidel<br>BIA-Sky City Community School | 1 | 3 | 190 | K-4 | Keresan |
| Santa Fe<br>BIA-Northern Pueblos Agency | 1 | 2 | 60 | K-3 | Tewa |
| Santa Fe<br>Santa Fe Public Schools | 1 | 2 | 75 | 6 | Spanish |
| Sanostee<br>Sanostee School-BIA Navajo Area | 0 | 5 | 412 | K-2 | Navajo |
| Socorro<br>Socorro Consolidated Schools | 1 | 2 | 220 | K-2 | Spanish |
| Taos<br>Taos Municipal Schools | 1 | 3 | 340 | 5-6 | Spanish |
| Tierra Amarilla<br>Chama Valley Ind. School<br>District #1 | 0 | 5 | 277 | K-3 | Spanish |
| Tularosa<br>Tularosa School District | 0 | 3 | 350 | K-6 | Apache |

Source: ESEA Title VII Project Summary (January 14, 1977).

Politicians, editors, and educators strongly advocated the learning of English as a symbol of good-faith in the quest for statehood. Only *El Independiente* of Las Vegas recommended moderation in maintaining Spanish as part of the cultural heritage while learning English as the language of business, law, and politics.[22]

The journalistic campaign for the "Americanization" of New Mexico, through free, public, non-sectarian education, gradually succeeded at the national level in reconciling the apprehension and suspicion of policy makers toward the religion, language, and ethnicity of the native New Mexicans. At the local level, particularly after 1906, the campaign aroused bitter animosities between oldline families and the newly arrived Anglo Americans. It required compromise, flexibility, and accommodation among individuals of good will to ensure that the constitution and laws of the new state protected and respected the rights and interests of both ethnic groups.[23]

At the constitutional convention of 1910, the issues of "race and language" generated ample discussion. In the end, Spanish-American delegates won significant concessions in their demands for "protection of their equality before the law," as well as "retention of their ancient rights and privileges." These concessions, in practical terms, translated into the prerogative of using Spanish as a medium of communication and expression.[24] Such gains, important as they seemed at the time, remained limited to the arena of politics. In the euphoria of early statehood, educators overlooked the opportunity to replicate the bilingualism of politics into a persuasive rationale for bilingual education in the classroom. One generation later, American patriotism to the contrary, Spanish American teachers in many northern rural communities conducted "practically all of the instruction" in the native dominant language of the students.[25] In the 1940s, George I. Sánchez, an eminent educator, chastised the state and national governments for failing to recognize the "special nature" of teaching the Spanish-speaking cultural minority saying:

> Educational practices in New Mexico have been patterned after those developed in the Middle West and in the East for peoples and conditions vastly different from those obtaining here. The selection of educational officials by popular election is a practice that is

> particularly incongruous in this situation. . . . The use of standard curricula, books, and materials among these children is a ridiculous procedure.[26]

Although Sánchez did not identify bilingual education *per se*, he was among the first educators to suggest national financial assistance for "intensive study" of the problems and for innovative programs of educational reform. Realizing that the traditional approach was inadequate to meet the needs of students of limited English ability, he recommended a multi-faceted curriculum that capitalized upon the pupils' literacy and proficiency in the Spanish language.[27] Reform progressed slowly, and it required another generation before bilingual education became an integral part of public instruction in New Mexico and in other states of the nation.

Before the close of the Johnson White House years, bilingual education emerged as a reality with the enactment of the Title VII amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. After the initial experiments succeeded in Florida (Miami) and Texas (San Antonio and Laredo), Congress appropriated funds for pilot projects in the Southwest and other states.[28]

Without reference to source of funding, bilingual education essentially is an instructional process that utilizes the dominant language of the pupils to teach the foundations of conceptual development, while English is gradually introduced as a parallel language in the curriculum. There are, to be sure, various options for implementing curricular models of bilingual education. An innovative model, in addition to the use of two languages in a structured curriculum, would include recognition and appreciation of the students' historical and cultural heritage in the social studies component of instruction.[29] Josué González, a Texas educator, designed a typology to distinguish formal differences between bilingual and bicultural programs. A simplified classification identified the differences as expressed in the main objectives:

| TYPE | OBJECTIVE |
|---|---|
| English as a Second Language (ESL or Transitional) | Proficiency in English and gradual phasing out of first language |

| | |
|---|---|
| Bilingual Maintenance | Development of bilingual skills progressively without decreasing the use of the first language |
| Bilingual Bicultural Maintenance | Continued language development while respecting and preserving the pupils' cultural heritage[30] |

Since its inception in 1968, the Bilingual Education Act, Title VII, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, has aroused awareness, curiosity, praise, and criticism. Within the last decade, the level of federal funding for bilingual education has increased from five million to nearly one hundred million dollars. Moreover, thirty state legislatures, including New Mexico, have enacted provisions for bilingual education of which at least eleven demonstrated good-faith commitment in the form of appropriations to support ongoing or new programs.[31] Aside from financial considerations, there are four issues which need articulation and clarification by scholars in the humanities:

1) the apparent segregating of bilingual education;
2) the assigning of priority to staff development (teacher training);
3) the reconciling of the misunderstanding between appreciation of cultural heritage and American patriotism; and
4) the avoiding of the temptation to enshrine bilingual education in unintelligible vocabulary.

The paradox of apparent segregation of bilingual education occurs when school personnel arbitrarily group students in an all-English learning environment which denies to a non-English speaker "equality of educational opportunity." Conversely, the process of teaching all students in Spanish creates a learning barrier for non-Spanish speakers and denies to them equitable educational opportunity. To extend the analogy even further, in New Mexico the Indian languages are interchangeable with Spanish *vis-à-vis* English. Heterogeneous grouping is based on the fallacious assumption that all students are equally prepared for identical instructional activities.

A well-planned bilingual education program can meet the types and degrees of language dominance by diversifying the learning

activities to reflect the characteristics of the students. Intra-classroom grouping on the basis of language dominance can be arranged for selected learning activities (reading, mathematics, social studies, science, and health education). As the teacher meets with one small group, the other groups of students can be involved in self-directed activities. Another approach is to group among different classrooms for varying activities during the school day. Hence, students of limited-English abilities can be grouped for bilingual instruction during certain hours of the day and regrouped heterogeneously for activities in which language dominance is not as crucial—activities such as physical education, creative art, music appreciation, and penmanship. It is the grouping and the exchange in bilingual education that conveys the appearance of segregation, but which in reality is a methodology for overcoming language barriers in learning among non-English speakers.[32]

Staff development, an important component of bilingual education, frequently confounds instructional administrators. If improperly planned, it even alienates experienced teachers. With clearly defined goals and objectives, and with varied approaches and techniques, staff development can be sensibly implemented through workshops, institutes, seminars, informal study groups, field trips, and observations of effective teaching. Each approach can be modified to accommodate the specific needs of staff development. In all cases the fundamental guidelines are thorough planning and prompt assessment.[33]

An awareness of the contributions of non-English-speaking pioneers to the development of North America is an integral part of a balanced curriculum in bilingual education. In programs for Spanish-dominant Mexican American students in the Southwest, critics of bilingual bicultural education often equate this acknowledgement with lack of patriotism. Repeatedly the charge is made that preservation of cultural values tends to demote allegiance to the United States of America.[34] The accusation is groundless because it is inconceivable that Congress would continue to appropriate funds for educational programs that advocated disloyalty. In the transition of the 1960s, culminating in

the Bicentennial, a comprehensive many-peoples-one-nation concept superceded the once pervasive "melting pot" theory in American education. This realignment of values was long overdue. The goal is that, through the social studies phase of the curriculum, students will appreciate their cultural heritage in the perspective of the wider North American experience.[35]

Edwin R. Newman, in his best-selling book, *Strictly Speaking*, accused social scientists of obscuring ideas that are extraordinarily clear with "an appropriate vocabulary."[36] In bilingual education there is a trend to achieve a similar goal of muddled terminology. Clarity of thought is not served by a proliferation of ambiguous phrases, such as *weighted pupil approach, hierarchical communication, total cultural integration, skills continuum, educational costing*, and *language matching.*[37] Given the rapid expansion in bilingual education, it does not seem likely that the trend of "appropriate vocabulary" will lose momentum. Admittedly, if the art of teaching is to attract learners and patrons, there must be change and readjustment. In the last decade bilingual education has produced changes in methodology and in philosophy, part of which explains the creation of a new and nebulous vocabulary. Humanities scholars have manifested a tendency to view with disdain the problems of professional education. Such attitudes have sustained the breach between education and the humanities. Bilingual education offers to humanities scholars an opportunity of participation by contributing suggestions for the improvement of teaching methods or by sharing the results of research in the writing of instructional materials. One pragmatic outcome of a confluence of the humanities and bilingual education might be a rational vocabulary.

Notwithstanding the amount of federal and state financial assistance, bilingual education is still too recent to assess its effects upon the students who have received instruction in that medium. Standardized testing, to be sure, will provide an index of progress in formal education, but it will be another ten years before students can testify how bilingual education prepared them for the world of work. Humanistic scholars should look with pride upon

New Mexico, rich in historical tradition, as the region where Franciscan frontiersmen nearly four centuries ago planted the roots of bilingual education. The debate which surrounds bilingual education today is a reflection of the continuing human experience.

*NOTES*

1. Table I, ESEA, Title VII, Bilingual Education Program Estimated Pupil Participation and Amount Awarded by State, Region, Project City, Name of LEA (Local Education Agency), Grant Number, Previous Years in Force, Number of Years Negotiated, Grades Being Served and Languages Served for Fiscal Year 1976. (Washington, 1977). Hereinafter cited as Table I, ESEA Title VII Project Summary.

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13. Carroll and Haggard, *Three New Mexico Chronicles*, p. 32.

14. Arnold L. Rodríguez, "New Mexico in Transition," *NMHR* 24 (1949): 267-69.

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18. Paul Horgan, *Lamy of Santa Fe: His Life and Times* (New York, 1975), pp. 127-31.

19. Horgan, *Lamy*, p. 407.

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21. Porter A. Stratton, *The Territorial Press of New Mexico, 1834-1912* (Albuquerque, 1969), pp. 36-37.

22. Stratton, *The Territorial Press*, pp. 144-45.

23. Stratton, *The Territorial Press*, p. 145.

24. *Santa Fe New Mexican*, November 21, 1910; Oliver La Farge, ed., *Santa Fe: The Autobiography of a Southwestern Town* (Norman, 1959), p. 201.

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35. Félix D. Almaráz, Jr. and María O. Almaráz, *Reading Exercises on Mexican Americans* (Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, 1977), p. 1; *Teacher's Manual, Many Peoples, One Nation* (New York, 1973), p. 4.

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