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## **EQUITY STRUGGLES AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM**

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The struggle for improved educational opportunities for language minority children has gone through several changes in emphases and direction since the late 1960s. Language compatibility and cultural respect have been important components but by no means the only ones in the struggle for equity in education. Proponents and advocates of quality schooling for Latino students have always known that a better education would not come about merely by including the Spanish language in the curriculum, no matter how ably this inclusion was planned and executed. This entry sketches some of the changes that have occurred over a period of 40 years in this ongoing quest for quality instruction and equity in American public education.

### **Struggle for Quality Instruction in Recent Decades**

Since the creation of Anglo-oriented public schools and the enactment of laws requiring children to attend them, activists have supported a variety of reforms to make these institutions more responsive to language minority students. One of the most important reforms they have supported has dealt with quality instruction in general and with gaining access to a differentiated curriculum geared toward meeting the diverse academic, linguistic, and cultural needs of those students in particular.

The struggle for quality instruction intensified after the 1960s. Unlike earlier decades, when the majority of educators, scholars, and policymakers were Anglos, in this period, an increasing number of them were Latino. Alongside the community activists and the practitioners in the schools, these scholars and researchers conducted research and provided the knowledge necessary for improving the schools serving Latino children. The work of these activist scholars was generally quiet and behind the scenes but no less effective for it.

In the 1960s, Latino activists involved in the education of Latino children (e.g., José Cárdenas, Frank Angel, Armando M. Rodríguez) and many others struggled for and either promoted, supported, or helped

establish a variety of curricular innovations aimed at improving the low academic achievement of English language learners (ELLs) in the public schools. Among the most popular were early childhood, migrant, bilingual, and adult education programs, but by the following decade, most of them began to concentrate on bilingual education. Bilingual education, as Guadalupe San Miguel has written in *Contested Policy: The Rise and Fall of Federal Bilingual Education Policy in the United States*, is viewed as the best means for bringing about significant changes in the way the schools educated these children and developed their various linguistic, cultural, and academic interests. The emphasis of this curricular innovation was to improve academic achievement by ensuring equal access to the mainstream or standard curriculum by children with limited English proficiency, commonly referred to as “limited English proficient” (LEP) students. They are now known as “English language learners” (ELLs). Bilingual education has affected mostly children enrolled in the elementary schools.

In the mid-1980s, a new crop of Latino scholars, researchers, and practitioners emerged and played important roles in promoting school changes throughout the country. Individuals such as Carlos E. Cortés, Josué M. González, Alfredo Castañeda, Beatrice Arias, and many others worked in alliance with both older activists and a variety of minority and majority group members to improve educational opportunities for Latinos. These activist scholars expanded the discourse on Latino education and went beyond both language and bilingual education to other concerns and reforms.

For more than a decade following the passage of the federal bilingual education act of 1968, scholars had focused on language issues in the education of Latino students and on the establishment and strengthening of bilingual education throughout the country. In the 1980s, they began to systematically explore factors other than language that impacted the education of these children and to consider a variety of other curricular and institutional reforms that would benefit their learning in the schools. The publication of *Beyond Language: Social and Cultural Factors in the Schooling of Language Minority Children*, by the Evaluation, Dissemination, and Assessment Center at the California State University at Los Angeles in 1986, was indicative of this trend. In this publication,

scholars and activists argued that Latino underachievement was due to a host of social and cultural factors in addition to language. Among some of the most important social and cultural factors identified as impacting the education of Latinos were teacher attitudes toward minority groups, cultural values, parental involvement, group attitudes toward education, historical experiences, language use patterns, and self-identity. Educational programs, in order to positively impact the academic achievement of these students, the authors asserted, had to address these concerns in a systematic fashion. Effective school reform, in other words, needed to go beyond language and beyond bilingual education.

Educators and scholars not only expanded the discourse on underachievement, they also shifted the emphasis of their concerns away from ELLs in the elementary grades to secondary-school-aged students who were relatively proficient in English but still underachieving. Most of these students, as noted in the National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics report *Make Something Happen: Hispanics and Urban High School Reform* (published in 1984), attended segregated and overcrowded inner-city schools, had poor school achievement levels, were disproportionately tracked into vocational and general education programs, dropped out of school in large numbers, and had low college enrollment. They attended large, impersonal urban schools, and their needs were different from those of ELLs in the elementary grades. These students then required different types of curricular and instructional programs and more personal attention and support from adults and from school officials.

The shift and expansion of attention to underachievement in secondary schools and broader-based inequities was slow. It occurred in the context of an acrimonious debate over bilingual education and a new national concern with the quality of public education. Beginning in 1983 with a national report that noted that the nation was “at risk” because of declining academic competitiveness, this movement soon overwhelmed the equity struggles of the Latino community. The 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, sponsored by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, urged immediate improvement in the nation’s schools and led to the emphasis on excellence or quality education, including improved standards, a more rigorous curriculum, and accountability.

Although this report called for excellence or quality education, many Latino activists and their allies raised questions about its relationship to equity concerns and sought to blend both of these movements. Peter Roos, a strong advocate of quality instruction for Latinos, for instance, analyzed the tensions between traditional views of equality and the proposed concepts of quality in an article called "Equity and Excellence," which he wrote for the National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics in 1984. In this article, Roos called not only for quality education, but for equity as well.

Working within this context of a national call to action, Latino and non-Latino activists pressured or compelled federal and state officials to form special committees or enact legislation to investigate and address the issue of improving the quality of education for Latino youth. Emphasis in most cases, as noted in *Make Something Happen*, was on emphasizing the devastating impact that high drop-out rates and low school achievement levels of Latino high school students were having on minority communities and on American society. Scholars and researchers also conducted investigations and research on the status and drop-out rates of Latino students in the schools, proposed recommendations to address these concerns, and encouraged local and state leaders to promote significant reforms, including curricular changes, to ensure academic success.

The nature of the struggle during the latter decades of the 20th century thus changed, without great fanfare, from one demanding access to a differentiated curriculum to one aimed at getting access to a rigorous curriculum. At the elementary level, activists and scholars interpreted this shift to mean getting access to a rigorous curriculum through quality bilingual education. At the secondary level, they focused on getting access to both a college preparatory and an accelerated curriculum made up of magnet, gifted and talented programs, and Advanced Placement classes.

### **Struggle for Quality Education Through Bilingual Education**

Despite the multifaceted nature of these curricular struggles, the dominant theme continued to be high-quality bilingual education. This specific curricular innovation, as noted earlier, was supported for various reasons. Foremost, it continued to be viewed as the

most important means for bringing about significant change in the education of linguistically and culturally distinct children, and it united all educators around a central theme in the education of Latinos: language and culture. In addition, it addressed the linguistic, cultural, and academic concerns of these children. For these and other reasons, the quest for access to a rigorous curriculum through quality bilingual education continued unabated, although the results in terms of policy change were minimal.

This struggle, although difficult and contentious, was waged on multiple fronts—in Congress, the courts, the executive branch, the streets, the schools, and the universities—and involved both Latino and non-Latino individuals and organizations working together or in coalitions. It encountered many obstacles, especially national desegregation mandates, a diversity of approaches, a declining activist federal bureaucracy, and political opposition to it by educators, Anglo parents, and conservative organizations.

The struggle for bilingual education, as noted earlier, originated in the 1960s. In the early part of the decade, Latino activists and their allies took advantage of the new social and political climate in the society to reject subtractive and ineffective schooling and to articulate oppositional ideologies, structures, and policies aimed at supporting Latino student success through significant educational reform. Most of these educators and activists focused on language as the linchpin of significant school reform. Bilingualism and bilingual education came to be viewed by many educators and activists as a viable tool for promoting comprehensive curricular, administrative, and political reforms aimed at improving Latino academic success and minority empowerment. Among the changes sought by those in support of bilingual education were the repeal of English-only laws, the use of Spanish in interactions between community groups and their schools, the hiring of minority language administrators and teachers, and the election of Latinos to local boards of education. All of these changes were needed, it was felt, to address the total linguistic, cultural, political, and academic needs of these students. These hopes served as the inspiration for the passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. Once enacted, this bill became Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1968.

Title VII, as the Bilingual Education Act came to be known, did not promote comprehensive reforms to improve the education of Latino children as many

activists involved in its passage had hoped for. This bill was, in reality, a minor albeit important piece of federal legislation. It was programmatically small and both categorical in nature and compensatory in intent. Also, the policy's purpose and the program's goals were vague or undefined. During the next several decades, however, as San Miguel has noted in *Contested Policy*, Latino activists and their allies helped transform this minor voluntary piece of legislation aimed at low-income, "limited English speaking" students into a major programmatic effort reinforced by state legislation in some 15 states. Despite pervasive passive resistance or nonsupport for bilingual education, the proponents made several important changes to this policy by the late 1970s. With the support of the federal government, they transformed the voluntary character of federal bilingual education policy, established a federal preference for using native-language instructional approaches, delineated and expanded the goals of this policy, increased the bill's funding, and expanded its scope to include capacity-building activities. A decade after the enactment of Title VII, ESEA, bilingual education was mandatory throughout the country and was supported by a variety of state and local measures and funding streams.

### Obstacles to Bilingual Education

Although successful in transforming bilingual education from a vague concept to implemented reality, proponents of this curricular policy experienced challenges beyond political opposition or program misunderstanding. One of the most important challenges during the 1970s was another federal mandate: desegregation policy. This policy, embodied in judicial mandates, federal legislation, and executive actions issued between 1954 and the 1970s, required the dispersal of minority students, including Latinos. Bilingual education, on the other hand, often required the concentration of ELLs in order to bring together a critical mass of teaching resources. Different Supreme Court decisions and policy statements supported both of these potentially clashing positions. The judicial basis for desegregation was the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, which prohibited racial segregation in education. The judicial support for bilingual education was the *Lau v. Nichols* decision of 1974, which ruled that local school districts had to take affirmative steps to overcome the language "deficiency" experienced by language minority students. Latino

activists, however, did not perceive the requirement to provide special language programs to ELLs as clashing with the requirement to desegregate the public schools. They believed that bilingual education could be effectively incorporated into desegregated settings. However, a federal court in the Denver desegregation case in 1973, *Keyes v. Denver School District No.1, Denver*, shattered this illusion. It found that bilingual education was not a substitute for desegregation and had to be subordinate to a plan of school desegregation. Gradually, unimpressive results led to diminished support for desegregation among Latinos, and support for bilingual education flagged in the face of organized opposition to the concept. Fragile coalitions that had fought together for both programs weakened once there was no longer a common programmatic goal.

Although bilingual education suffered setbacks during this period, those setbacks were not always obvious to the casual observer. The prevalence and growth of bilingual education, in addition to other social, economic, and political factors, created fears and anxieties among Americans of all colors, classes, and genders and sparked a vigorous opposition. In the latter part of the 1970s, this opposition was highly disorganized and limited primarily to journalists and researchers. In the 1980s and 1990s, Republicans in the executive and legislative branches of the federal government and special interest groups, especially English-only organizations, conservative authors, and parent groups, began an open battle against bilingual education.

Two early critics of bilingual education were Keith Baker and Adriana A. de Kanter, who, in 1981, wrote *Effectiveness of Bilingual Education: A Review of the Literature*. Other notable publications were Tom Bethel's 1979 article "Why Johnny Can't Speak English"; John R. Edwards's "Critics and Criticism of Bilingual Education"; the address in 1985 by William J. Bennett, U.S. Secretary of Education, to the Association for a Better New York; and Rosalie Pedalino Porter's book *Forked Tongue: The Politics of Bilingual Education*. In "Conservative Groups Take Aim at Federal Bilingual Programs," James Crawford gives an overview of three organizations opposed to bilingual education: Save Our Schools (SOS), the Council for Inter-American Security, and U.S. English. More general studies attacking bilingualism and diversity in American life include Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Disuniting of America* and William J. Bennett's

*The Devaluing of America: The Fight for Our Culture and Our Children.*

The opponents pursued two major strategies, one aimed at attacking the empirical basis of bilingual education and the other at repealing or modifying federal bilingual education policy. Both of these were highly contested by the proponents.

The first major strategy raised questions about the goals, effectiveness, and consequences of federal bilingual education. Opponents within and outside the federal government argued, among other things, that bilingual education was ineffective in teaching English and that English-only methods were available to accomplish this goal. They also argued that bilingual education failed to assimilate immigrant children as fast as it could, promoted Hispanic separatism and cultural apartheid, created an affirmative action program for Latinos, contributed to social divisions based on language, and led to the federal imposition of curricula at the local level by mandating one single approach to educating ELLs.

Proponents of bilingual education vigorously countered all these charges. A few of them, as in Ann Willig's report "A Meta-Analysis of Selected Studies on the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education," published in the *Review of Educational Research* in 1995, criticized the methodological flaws and conclusions of studies indicating that bilingual education programs were not effectively teaching ELLs. Some proponents argued that no significant research showing the success of English-only methods existed and concluded that findings showing the success of well-designed bilingual programs were distorted or suppressed. Many of these arguments were reflected in the U.S. General Accounting Office's report of 1987, titled *Bilingual Education: A New Look at the Research Evidence*. Still others noted that the attack against this policy was ideologically inspired or that the arguments against bilingual education were, as Stephen D. Krashen noted in 1999, in *Condemned Without a Trial*, "bogus."

In addition to attacking various aspects of bilingual education policy, opponents also sought changes in federal bilingual education funding and in the federal compliance enforcement in order to water down the programs funded with those resources. Opposition within the federal government came primarily from elected officials in the executive and legislative branches of government. The former will be referred to as *executive opponents*, the latter as *congressional opponents*.

Executive opponents, led by the president of the United States, sought to weaken federal support for bilingual education. President Ronald Reagan initiated the campaign against bilingual education in 1980. In his first term, he tried to halt the growth of bilingual education by seeking rescissions and decreased funding. During his second term, he developed a new initiative to undermine bilingual education. Reagan appointed William J. Bennett, an outspoken opponent of bilingual education, to head the Department of Education and to lead the campaign against it. Once in office, Bennett developed and implemented a coherent plan to redirect the program toward more English instruction. First, he eliminated the mandatory provisions of bilingual education by dismantling its civil rights component. Second, he downgraded the primary instrument for enforcing the *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) Supreme Court decision, the Office for Civil Rights, by reducing its enforcement budget and staff. Finally, he weakened the administration of bilingual education and tried to undo existing *Lau* agreements.

Proponents of bilingual education, especially Latino groups, opposed these changes and criticized Bennett for his shortsightedness and the negative implications his strategy could have for language minority children. Their opposition, however, had no significant impact on Bennett's efforts to undermine bilingual education.

Congressional opponents also took a variety of actions against bilingual education. Between 1980 and 2001, they introduced numerous pieces of legislation aimed at repealing the federal bilingual education law. In 1993, for instance, two bills were introduced to repeal the Bilingual Education Act, but no action, as the *Congressional Quarterly Researcher* noted in that same year, was taken on them. One of the most publicized bills aimed at eliminating the federal bilingual education bill was submitted by House Majority Whip Tom Delay (R-Tex.) in April 1998. Known as the "English for Children Act," this bill would have effectively ended federal funding for about 750 bilingual programs nationwide. This bill's provisions, as well as opposition to it by the League of United Latin American Citizens and both Gene Green and Sheila Jackson, U.S. Congressional Representatives from the Houston area, were summarized in an article written by Greg McDonald for the *Houston Chronicle* in April 1998. In many cases, opponents of bilingual education also introduced English-only bills in an effort to eliminate bilingual education policies. None of them, as San Miguel noted in *Contested Policy*, became law.

Unable to repeal bilingual education, congressional opponents sought changes in federal policy. Two key changes were made over the years and were reflected in the reauthorization of the Bilingual Education Act of 1994. One of these placed limits on the number of years ELLs could participate in bilingual programs, on the number of English-speaking children eligible to participate, and on the amount of non-English languages one could use in bilingual education. The other major change focused on redefining bilingual education policy to allow for the inclusion of non-English-language approaches.

In the first half of the 1990s, the election of President Clinton, a supporter of bilingual education, to the White House temporarily halted the opposition's efforts. His election led to the strengthening of bilingual education legislation in 1994. During the second half of the decade, following the assumption of control by Republicans of both chambers of Congress, the election of Republican George W. Bush to the White House in 2000, and the successful dismantling of bilingual education in California and Arizona, opponents in Congress renewed their attempts to change bilingual education policy. In 2001, a new bill was enacted that included most of the provisions that had been promoted by bilingual education opponents. This legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, amended and reauthorized the ESEA for the next 6 years. Among its many changes, this law reauthorized the Bilingual Education Act of 1994. It became Title III of the overall bill. This title, a major overhaul of federal programs for the education of ELLs and recent immigrant students, provided more funds for their education, but it also officially repealed bilingual education and replaced it with English-only legislation. The term *bilingual education* was removed from all programs of the Department of Education, including the office that once managed Title VII. Taken together, these actions signaled an escalating lack of support for bilingual education at the federal level. Although proponents lost this particular battle, the war over bilingualism in American life was far from over. Before long, the primary arena for the continuing struggle shifted to the states, notably, those states that allow voter initiatives and referenda.

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**See also** Bennett, William J.; English for the Children Campaign; Improving America's Schools Act of 1994; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Title III; Paradox of Bilingualism; Porter, Rosalie Pedalino; Program

Effectiveness Research; Roos, Peter D.; Views of Language Difference

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