

Chapter 13

Learning English in California: Guideposts for the Nation

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Political events in California often have repercussions for the rest of the nation. Recently, California has been the site of intense legal battles over the education of its English learners, and events in the state have already affected a number of other states with large populations of English learners. This chapter offers a history of the politics and policies that have governed the education of English learners in the state over the last several decades. It reviews the effects of the most recent legal skirmish over limited-English-proficient students and predicts short- and longer-term outcomes that may result both for California and for the nation. Finally, the chapter looks to the future of education for English learners and suggests critical areas of research that may aid in constructing more enlightened educational policies for these students.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION POLICY IN CALIFORNIA

California, through its initiative process, has been at the forefront of several national political movements in the last few decades. The passage of Proposition 13¹ in 1978 launched the famous tax revolt that swept the country during the early 1980s. Proposition 209,² passed by California voters in 1996, began a national backlash against affirmative action that continues unabated today. Most recently, Proposition 227, the anti-bilingual initiative that was passed in 1998, has set the stage for a showdown on bilingual education in a number of other states, including Colorado, Arizona, and possibly Massachusetts.

California has, on occasion, also been the site of progressive politics. It was one of the first states in the nation to enact a comprehensive bilingual-education bill: the Chacon-Moscone Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act of 1976, which gave schools detailed instructions about the type of language support that should be provided for English learners. California's legislation was stimulated by the 1974 Supreme Court ruling in *Lau v. Nichols*, which required schools to give limited-English-proficient students access to the same instruction that all other children received. The legislation recognized that limited-English-proficient students do "not have the English language skills necessary to benefit from instruction only in English at a level substantially equivalent to pupils whose primary language is English." Thus, "[t]he Legislature . . . declare[d] that the primary goal of all programs

under this article [was], as effectively and efficiently as possible, to develop in each child fluency in English" (California Education Code, 1976, Section 52161) The preferred means for doing so was through early use of the primary language, with a planned transition into English-only instruction. Although the act did not specify when this transition should occur, the expectation was that students would be mainstreamed into an English-only classroom by the fourth grade.

Although this 1976 legislation was clearly progressive in its time, it also framed the challenge facing English learners as primarily a *language problem*, and it framed the solution to this problem as transitional bilingual education. From a theoretical perspective, there are at least three possible goals of bilingual education: (1) the teaching of language, (2) the fostering of positive intercultural relations, and (3) the enhancing of academic or cognitive development. Each of these goals can also be represented on a continuum. For example, the teaching of language can be conceptualized as simply transitioning an individual from her native language into a second language as efficiently as possible. This represents the far-left end of a continuum. At the other end of the continuum is the possibility of the individual's becoming fully bilingual and biliterate and therefore having the ability to communicate in two languages (See Figure 13.1)

In terms of intercultural relations, the far-left end of the continuum simply represents knowledge of one's own culture in the context of the mainstream culture; this is thought to support higher self-esteem (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). At the other end of the continuum is a fully bicultural or multicultural orientation, in which both members of the mainstream culture and members of the minority culture are taught to value and appreciate each other's culture and language and are encouraged to incorporate features of both into multicultural social identities (Rotherham-Borus 1994; Cazabon, Lambert, and Hall 1993). It has been argued that this orientation can reduce prejudice and ethnic stereotyping and enhance intergroup relations (Lindholm 1994; Freeman 1998; Genesee and Gándara 1999). (See Figure 13.2)

Finally, with respect to academic or cognitive competence, bilingual education can, at the far-left end of the continuum, simply help to prevent learning losses by providing instruction in the primary language in some or all subjects while the individual is transitioning into the second language. At the other end of the continuum, bilingual education can offer true cognitive advantages to students who are fully bilingual and biliterate, resulting in certain types of academic superiority over monolinguals (August and Hakuta 1997; Reynolds, 1991). (See Figure 13.3)

The California legislation, much like legislation in other states, provided for a program that could generally be located at the left end of the continuum in all three goal areas. All transitional bilingual-education programs, no matter how effective they are in helping students to join the

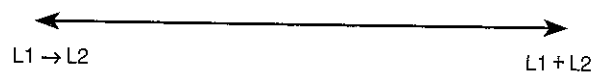


Fig. 13.1 Language goals



Fig. 13.2 Intercultural goals

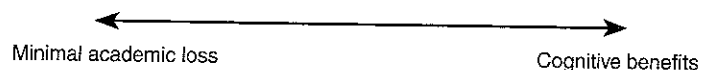


Fig. 13.3 Cognitive and academic goals

academic mainstream, implicitly foster prejudice against non-English languages because transitional programs are based on the "language as problem" model (Ruiz 1984). The children's non-English language is something to be dispensed with, and transitioned out of, as quickly as possible. Alternative conceptualizations of language difference include "languages as a resource" (Ruiz 1984) models that build on students' native languages as an avenue to enhanced academic competencies. Dual-language programs, for example, adopt the position that non-English languages are a resource for English learners and an enrichment for English speakers. By valuing the non-English language in the curriculum, such programs give that language—and its speakers—greater prestige, thus simultaneously addressing issues of intergroup relations.

California's legislation, like most legislation nationwide, was largely silent on issues of intercultural relations and academic development. Included were specific provisions for instruction in the "development of an understanding of the history and culture of California and the United States, as well as an understanding of customs and values of the cultures associated with the languages being taught" (California Education Code, 1976, Section 52163). However, nowhere in the legislation were there specific provisions for the cultural components of instruction, nor did the act provide any objectives for such cross-cultural instruction. Certainly there was no mention of a goal to reduce intercultural conflict through these programs, although it might be inferred from the program's inclusion of instruction in both the U.S. culture and the culture of the students. Nonetheless, because the program targeted the instruction of English learners, it appears that cross-cultural understanding was meant to apply, for the most part, to English learners, not to English speakers.

The act also specified that, to the greatest extent possible, no less than one-third of the students in a bilingual-education classroom should be fluent English-speaking students (California Education Code 1976, Section 52167). The law did *not* specify that these children should be of the dominant cultural group, although this was clearly inferred by many school personnel. It was thought that the presence of such students would provide important English models for the English learners. Unlike the Canadian experiments with immersion education, to which U.S. bilingual education is often compared, California's program did not have a goal of furthering more positive attitudes toward minority-language speakers (Genesee and Gándara 1999). In fact, the law did not specify any benefits that should accrue to the English speakers in these classrooms; and in the absence of any intent to provide for the *development* of the primary language (in this case nearly always Spanish), there was little reason for the parents of English speakers to want their children to be in such a classroom. In most cases, English speakers would not be exposed to sufficient Spanish to develop any true facility in the language, and Spanish speakers were encouraged to transition to English as quickly as possible. In this context, many parents of English speakers complained that learning was slowed down to accommodate the children who did not speak English and that their children derived no benefit from being in these classes. It became difficult to find sufficient numbers of English-speaking students to fulfill the one-third rule. For this reason, and, because resources were usually inadequate to meet even the needs of the English-learner population, most programs simply did not adhere to that rule. Thus, not only did these programs, as they were conceived, offer no clear means of enhancing intercultural communication, but in some cases they actually contributed to intercultural strife, pitting the needs of English speakers against those of English learners. Moreover, they sometimes increased tensions between African Americans and Latinos because of the perception that bilingual education, by clustering English learners into separate programs, undermined desegregation efforts (Donato 1997).

The focus on language as *the* problem that needed to be remedied, with the goal of transitioning students to English "as efficiently as possible," also meant that academic achievement was not articulated as an important goal for these programs. Therefore, a minimum threshold of academic competence was established for students to exit from the programs. This was often far below the

median academic performance of all students in the district or state.³ Although the arguments for incorporating the primary language into students' instruction were predicated on a belief that doing so made access to the standard curriculum possible during the time students were learning English, bilingual education, as conceived of in California law and regulations, was not designed to focus on academic achievement. Its main purpose was always simply to transition students into English.

Not surprisingly, this instructional policy was never without controversy. Bilingual advocates believed the program did too little to promote either academic competence or dual-language facility, and English-only proponents decried any use of the primary language, believing that it delayed students' entry into the mainstream of schooling. By 1986 the existing California bilingual-education legislation had "sunsetted" (was not reauthorized), so these programs continued under the authority of Department of Education regulations, which were shaped largely by federal requirements. Over the years there were numerous attempts to modify the law and to abandon the practice of primary-language instruction, but none of these attempts was ultimately successful.

In part because of the controversy generated by bilingual education, no policy was ever adopted to provide certified bilingual teachers for all English learners. Moreover, although a few school districts provided small financial bonuses for teachers with bilingual credentials, no statewide incentive policy was ever adopted to recruit sufficient numbers of bilingual teachers. Thus, by the time the Chacon-Moscone Act sunsetted, only about one-third of the students who were eligible for a bilingual program were able to be placed with a bilingual teacher.

CALIFORNIA'S PROPOSITION 227

It was in this context that Proposition 227 came onto the California political scene. Proponents of Proposition 227 contended that bilingual education had failed and therefore should be abandoned as a pedagogical strategy. As evidence for its failure, they cited the continuing underachievement of English learners and the failure of programs to reclassify more than 5 percent of limited-English-proficient students to fluent-English-proficient status annually. Bilingual-education advocates countered that, in addition to being inaccurate, the 5 percent figure was calculated from an ever-growing base of students, because the population of English learners in California had been mushrooming for two decades. More important, however, they noted that because of the lack of sufficient numbers of qualified teachers, most English learners were not enrolled in bilingual programs, so their academic underachievement could not be attributed to any failure of these programs. Nonetheless, Proposition 227 was passed by the voters of California in June 1998. It became law immediately, requiring that schools implement its provisions in the 1998–1999 school year.

Proposition 227 required that "all children in California public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English." The mandated pedagogical strategy was to place English learners for a period not normally to exceed one year in "sheltered English-immersion" classes. These are defined in the law as multi-age classrooms with students at the same level of English proficiency in which the focus of instruction is the development of English-language skills. The only exception to the English-only mandate was to be in cases in which parents sought a specific waiver of the English-only program for their children. According to Proposition 227, waivers could be allowed on the basis of one of three conditions: (1) the child already knew English; (2) the child was over ten years of age, and school staff believed that another approach might be better suited to the student; or (3) school staff determined that the child had special needs that could be better met in an alternative program.

Proposition 227 took a unique approach to ensuring implementation, an approach that had serious implications for schools and teachers. It provided that any educator who willfully and

repeatedly refused to implement the law could be personally sued in court. Thus, in order to avoid legal liability, it was critical that teachers and administrators understand completely the provisions and restrictions of the law. However, the language of Proposition 227 left much to interpretation. For example, it was not clear what the course of action should be if students needed more than one year of specialized instruction (which virtually all of the research on language acquisition contends would be the case⁴); how much primary language might be acceptable under the law in the “sheltered English-immersion” classroom; or how much discretion schools or districts had in granting or denying parental-exception waivers. The State Board of Education issued regulations clarifying some of these matters in October 1998. However, because schools had to implement the law in September, when most began the new school year, these clarifications came too late to provide guidance in the early stages of implementation.

The context of Proposition 227: Reform run amok

A major theme in the implementation of Proposition 227 is the extent to which it has been affected by other school reform efforts. Proposition 227 was enacted in what has been the most active period of education reform in California in recent times. During the same period, class-size reduction, which began in 1996 with two grades, was expanded to include all of the primary grades (thus creating an enormous demand for new teachers); new curricular standards were introduced into the schools; a high-stakes testing program was implemented; and new restrictions against social promotion were enacted that could result in the retention of large numbers of students who do not meet grade-level standards. Teachers have had to respond to all of these mandates, often without adequate training themselves to address the needs of English learners.

The plethora of reforms has the potential to work at cross-purposes, for children in general, but especially for English learners. For example, imposing strict new curricular standards at the same time that statewide testing is implemented, without devoting any attention to the curriculum provided for English learners, has left many teachers wondering how best to prepare these students to meet the challenges that the testing imposes. Expanding class-size reduction to more grades increased the demand for teachers and required school districts to hire many new, untrained, and inexperienced teachers who were often assigned to classrooms serving English learners. Trying without any specific training to juggle new standards, a high-stakes test, and a roomful of students who do not speak English has proved to be a daunting—and sometimes demoralizing—task for many teachers.

How Proposition 227 has affected California schools

The extent to which Proposition 227 has influenced the schooling of English learners, who constitute one-fourth of all the state’s public school children, is difficult to measure precisely because school and classroom practices have been affected by so many recent mandates. Some facts, however, are indisputable. Fewer children are receiving instruction from bilingual teachers than before the enactment of Proposition 227, and fewer are assigned to classrooms in which the primary language is used for academic instruction (see Figure 13.4).

It is notable that the percentage of students assigned to bilingual classrooms dropped by more than half—from 29 to just 12 percent. However, the percentage of students receiving only English instruction grew from 33 to 39 percent. Thus the category that expanded the most to accommodate the change in policy was that of English-language development (ELD) with primary-language support.⁵ In other words, many classrooms utilize some primary language with students, although the manner in which this happens and its extent vary greatly from classroom to classroom. It is sometimes difficult to interpret the change in the numbers of students officially assigned to one program

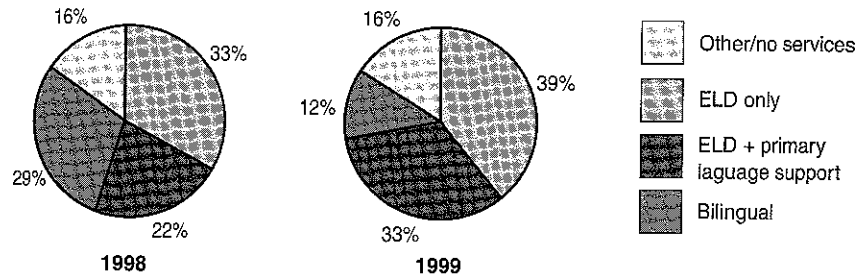


Fig. 13.4 Instructional services for English-language learners before and after Proposition 227
Source: Rumberger and Gándara 2000

or another, because those numbers may obscure more than they reveal. For example, some schools and districts complied with Proposition 227 by creating their own interpretations of phrases such as *overwhelmingly in English*. Thus they might have been provided students “in structured English-immersion” classrooms with 52 percent of their instruction in English, meeting their own definition of *overwhelming*. Another strategy was to provide “preinstructional activities” and “review sessions” in the primary language, reserving the actual instructional time for English only. An administrator in one large district described the challenge of defining *overwhelmingly in English* in a way that met legal, though not necessarily instructional, objectives:

[T]he state board of education has allowed districts in California to interpret that based on their own criteria as long as it's overwhelmingly in English. And so the district has determined that 60 percent of the time you have to teach in English, and 40 percent in Spanish or whatever it is 60:40, 70:30, 80:20, 90:10, I've heard it all. And it all adds up to the point now that districts in California are forced to come up with a working definition based on the legal interpretations, not based on the instructional needs of the child. (Gándara et al. 2000)

A second change that we have noted is the pervasive concern about helping children to get ready for English testing no matter what type of classroom they are in. In separate studies in California schools that have been coordinated by the Linguistic Minority Research Institute,⁶ we found a consistent pattern of erosion of strong literacy practices in favor of “bottom line” instruction aimed at yielding short-term gains on statewide tests in English. Often teachers commented that they did not feel good about what they were doing: leapfrogging much of the normal literacy instruction to go directly to English word recognition or phonics bereft of meaning or context. However, they worried greatly that if they spent time orienting the children to broader literacy activities, they risked jeopardizing students' English test scores. One teacher described her situation in the following words:

I feel like the children are forced into silence. Really . . . they're really not getting the opportunity to express themselves as they normally would were they in a bilingual classroom. And I, I feel sorry for them . . . I really do. I think that it's very unfair. I don't think they're receiving an equal opportunity, equal education in the sense that they're really not learning to read . . . They're learning to decode. [And] their decoding skills are coming along nicely, but the problem is that second-language acquisition, it takes time. And you know the district expects us to move these children from ELD level 1 to ELD level 4 in a matter of one year; with ELD level 4 then you can begin to present instruction of all the subjects in English (Gándara et al. 2000).

The impact of Proposition 227 that will probably have the longest-term policy consequences is its effect on utilization of the teaching force. Figure 13.5 shows the number of teachers serving as bilingual teachers and the numbers of those in training for bilingual positions, prior to Proposition 227 and in its aftermath.

In 1998, before the passage of Proposition 227, almost sixteen thousand certificated bilingual teachers were providing instruction to English learners. After the passage of Proposition 227, this number was reduced by one-third, to 10,690. Perhaps even more important, there were 10,894 teachers in the pipeline for bilingual credentials working in California schools in 1998, whereas in 1999, after the passage of Proposition 227, that number was reduced by nearly half to 5,670. Some portion of those teachers may still be pursuing their bilingual credentials, but without the perception that there is a demand for their services, it is not clear what incentive they have to continue to devote the additional time and effort necessary to acquire these specialized credentials.

Both the October 1998 memorandum from the state board of education and a fact sheet released by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing in the same month restated the importance of maintaining bilingual teachers in classrooms serving English learners. And this same commission reported that in a survey of districts after the passage of Proposition 227, all intended to continue hiring "as many as they can find."⁷ Nonetheless, this is not the message articulated in some of the districts that chose to abandon primary-language instruction. One rural administrator explained the position of his district as follows:

One thing I didn't mention earlier, and this may apply to several different questions, I'll just tell what it is: We no longer have to worry about that B-CLAD [bilingual credential]. That, you know, writing that annual staffing plan was just, it was futile! Because there's just no way you're going to get people to get their B-CLAD and that's what the law requires, that these people, if they have any students, which, in our district, is all over the place, they gotta be working towards their B-CLAD. It's not going to happen! And so, what's nice is, we don't have to play with that anymore (Gándara et al. 2000).

We think it quite possible that administrators in school districts that were not supportive of primary-language instruction before Proposition 227, and who used passage of the initiative as a reason to dismantle their programs immediately, may respond to official surveys with what they consider to be a bureaucratically correct answer. However, what they do and what they say may differ considerably.

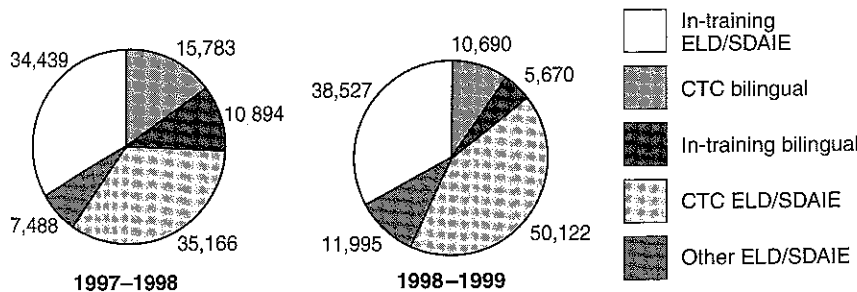


Fig 13.5 Number of teachers providing instructional services for English learners, by certification, before and after Proposition 227
Source: Gándara et al. 2000

Proposition 227 in the context of the California teacher crisis

Two major reports have recently called attention to the crisis that California faces in providing a qualified teacher for every student in the state, largely as a result of the class-size-reduction initiatives (Shields et al 1999; Betts, Rueben, and Danenberg 2000). Current estimates are that 10 percent of teachers in California are teaching without proper authorization—they are not credentialed to teach. However, the distribution of these teachers is far from even. In fact, schools in high-income areas are likely to have no teachers in the classroom who lack teaching credentials, whereas in schools in low-income and minority areas, as many as 25 or 30 percent of the teachers may be without credentials. Not only are these teachers uncredentialed, but most are without any experience in the classroom. The students most likely to be taught by uncredentialed teachers are English learners. Figure 13.6 shows the distribution of uncredentialed teachers in the year prior to the onset of class-size reduction and in the year after, by percentage of English learners in the school.

Before the passage of Proposition 227, major inequities were noted in different students' access to credentialed teachers in California. English learners were then, and are now, the most likely to be taught by a teacher without any credentials. The difference now, however, is that much more is being asked of teachers, including the implementation of a new law that mandates a type of instruction about which there is considerable confusion, few related resource materials, and little help in interpretation.

Initial academic outcomes

More than two years after the passage of Proposition 227, the pundits and the policymakers made anxious pronouncements about its effects on California's English learners. Ron Unz, the author of the initiative, and his colleagues have declared it a success on the basis that the redesignation rates from limited-English-proficient (LEP) to fluent-English-proficiency (FEP) increased from 7 to 7.6 percent in the year following implementation. They have also noted that standardized test scores

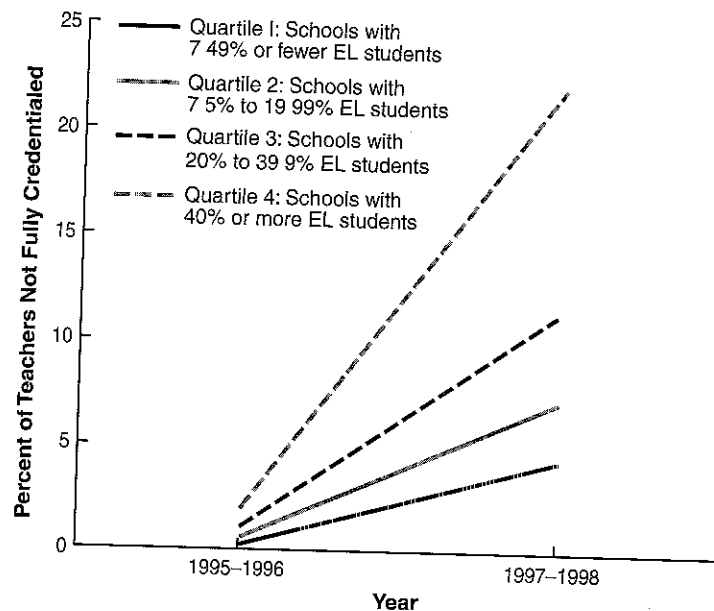


Fig. 13.6 Percentage of teachers without credentials by percent EL, before and after class-size reduction
Source: Rumberger and Gándara 2000

are up for IEP students across the state. However, this is scant evidence on which to claim success. Proposition 227 was based on its author's contention that IEP students normally should need no more than one year of English instruction in order to join the mainstream, which claim suggests that all but a few students would be redesignated to FEP status at the end of one year. An increase of less than one percentage point would appear to fall far short of this goal. Moreover, although test scores did indeed increase for IEP students, they increased for students in bilingual classrooms as well as for those in English-only classrooms, and there was no consistently discernible difference between the two (Orr et al. 2000). Moreover, they also increased for English-only speakers. An increase in test scores for all students was predictable under any circumstances; simple familiarity with the standardized test normally confers small year-to-year gains (Hakuta 1999). And given the large increases in expenditures on education and the multiple reform efforts, a failure to raise test scores would have been very difficult to explain.

In spite of the test-score gains, however, gaps between the scores of English speakers and English learners remain very large: English speakers score three times as high as English learners in reading and more than twice as high in mathematics, averaged across all grades. And, in mathematics, where the test is least language-dependent, the *gains* for English-speaking students outstrip the gains for English learners, a result that raises the prospect that the test-score gap will only become wider with time (Gándara 2000).

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

It could be argued that California's present situation was highly predictable, given the decisions that it made more than two decades ago. It built a bilingual program founded on the notion that for English learners, language is *the problem*. The bilingual program, therefore, was constructed to solve that problem by transitioning these students "as efficiently as possible" into an English-only curriculum. The famed Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, who studied the cognitive development of children, characterized American psychology as being obsessed with one question: *Can it (development) be speeded up?* He dubbed this "the American question." It is not surprising, then, that once there was consensus that language was the problem, the logical next question would be how quickly the problem could be resolved.

Every major evaluation of bilingual education has been asked to answer the same question: Which program most efficiently moves English learners into the mainstream of English instruction? Achievement has been measured only in the context of the amount of time it was presumed that children should take to complete the transition to English. Thus the most carefully conducted and comprehensive study of bilingual education was given only four years to establish whether there were achievement differences among children in different program types. Although Ramirez, Yuen, and Ramey (1991) found that the learning slope was steeper for the children in primary-language instruction, it was never possible to test the long-term effects of the instruction, in good part because the underlying assumption was that there should be no "long term" for bilingual instruction. Achievement was of interest only within the framework of an "efficient" program that produced English-only speakers.

Because the commitment to instruction in two languages has been weak, and because the mark of program success has been the rapidity with which programs are able to dispense with primary-language instruction, development of a corps of teachers with strong skills in the science and methods of learning and using two languages has never been a truly serious objective in California. Bilingual teachers have been viewed as expedient—useful up to a point, but not essential. Millions of dollars have been spent on evaluating the effectiveness of *programs* rather than the effectiveness of *teaching strategies* (August and Hakuta 1997). The assumption has been that teacher competencies are not

critical if we can just identify the silver-bullet program. Of course, decades of research on classroom learning have pointed to one conclusion: Nothing matters more in school than the quality of the teacher (Shields et al. 1999; Haycock 1998). One wonders why it is not obvious that the same would hold true in a bilingual classroom.

The present circumstances can also be traced to the fact that most bilingual programs were not designed to focus on intercultural relations or academic achievement. California's bilingual-education law indicated that English learners were to learn something of their own culture, ostensibly to enhance their self-concept, but nothing in the law suggested that native-English speakers should know anything about the English-learners' culture. It is difficult to feel proud of one's cultural heritage when everyone else is ignorant of it. A primary reason for Canada's success with French-immersion programs is that they are geared toward helping the children of the dominant culture appreciate the language and culture of *the minority group* (Genesee and Gándara 1999).

It is telling as well that while the country wrung its hands over the low academic achievement of America's students, little was said about the much lower achievement of English learners. In fact, most testing programs have been reluctant even to measure it. The assumption has been that because the problem is language, once that is "fixed," the students' achievement will rise to meet that of their English-speaking peers. In fact, this does not happen. A recent study examined the influence of language background and other factors on the 1998 SAT-9 test performance of 26,126 second-, third-, and fourth-grade California students.⁸ The study first examined the independent effects of language background and poverty on student achievement (see Figure 13.7, left panel).

The researchers found that poverty affects the achievement of all students, regardless of their language background, but because the majority of English learners are poor, they are at a particular disadvantage in school. The study next examined the impact of language background and ethnicity on student achievement (see Figure 13.7, right panel). Even Hispanic students from English-speaking backgrounds had significantly lower test scores than white students from English-speaking backgrounds. This suggests that because something other than English proficiency must be

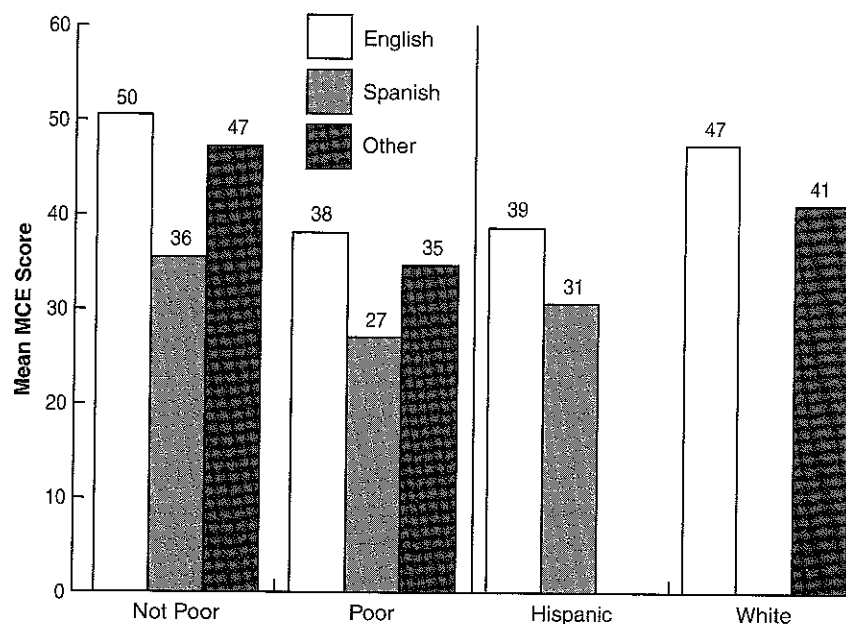


Fig. 13.7 1999 SAT-9 reading scores by language background and poverty, Hispanics and whites.

Source: Mitchell and Mitchell 1999

accounting for the differences, merely improving students' English proficiency is unlikely to raise their achievement to the levels of white, native-English speakers. Similarly, in a review of studies of high-quality programs of various types, we could identify none that showed that English learners ever achieved the same level of English-reading proficiency as their more advantaged native-English-speaking peers (Gándara 1997)

WHERE WE ARE GOING

California's social policy has been, for good or for ill, a harbinger of things to come in other states. Arizona, Colorado, and Massachusetts, in particular, are now poised to reexamine their instructional policies for English learners. California's bilingual programs have not differed greatly from the programs offered in these states, and it is probably safe to assume that similar political issues will be visited by these other states as well. It may therefore be instructive to assess the policy dimensions of recent events in California as a means of initiating a national conversation on the education of English learners.

The extraordinary impact of testing on instructional policy

High standards can be a very good thing, and they can be used as a policy tool to level the playing field for Latino students. The more transparent the standards are, the greater the likelihood that the Latino community can exert pressure to ensure that equal educational opportunities are provided in their schools. Furthermore, tests that are tied to these standards are an important means of holding schools accountable for giving students an opportunity to meet these standards. However, when testing does not take into account the curricular needs of English learners, it can have a very negative impact on instructional practice. We have seen that the blanket policy of testing all students in English (except those who have been in U.S. schools for less than one year), and tying the test results to sanctions and rewards for schools and students, has had the effect of distorting pedagogy in the classroom. Because teachers know that students who do not perform well on the tests *in English* can suffer penalties (for example, they can be held back a grade), we have seen a dilution of good literacy instruction in favor of an exclusive focus on phonics, decoding, and English vocabulary. We have seen bilingual teachers set aside broader literacy activities—storytelling, story-sequencing activities, reading for meaning, journal writing, and vocabulary development in the primary language—to focus exclusively on skills that would be tested on the standardized English test. Past research suggests that this may well produce short-term gains on test scores at the expense of deeper comprehension—a skill that will be tested in later grades, and one that is fundamental to more complex learning.

To the extent that standardized testing focuses solely on English skills, this is what teachers will endeavor to cultivate. Unfortunately, this may not be in the best interests of many English learners in the first several years of their schooling. It also sends the strongest possible message to schools that the only thing that counts is skills that are assessable in English. Deep and complex understandings of subject matter, framed in another language, are not valued. This is particularly worrisome because it may overlook some of our academically strongest students—those who come to American schools with a good academic foundation in their primary language and whose families have prepared them in important ways in the language of the home.

The impact of language policy on the preparation of bilingual teachers

One of the great ironies of the success of Proposition 227 is that its implementation relies to a great extent on the availability of teachers with good knowledge of the learning needs of English learners, and this generally means bilingual teachers. The meager research on “structured immersion” or

“sheltered English” approaches concludes that teachers should be able to reinforce and help explain lessons and to check for understanding in the primary language, even if this is done minimally (Gersten and Woodward 1985; Krashen 1991). Sheltered English is, in fact, a strategy recommended for use by bilingual teachers who are able to shape instruction in terms of the linguistic needs of the child (Walqui-van Lier 1992). In the absence of a well-developed pedagogy, which structured English immersion does not have, bilingual teachers are best equipped with the training necessary to provide responsive instruction for English learners. However, the success of Proposition 227 has seriously undermined the market incentives for teachers to pursue bilingual credentials. All the evidence suggests that the most immediate impact of the initiative has been to reduce the supply of such teachers for the present and into the future. If this proves to be the case, the state will have lowered the bar on teacher standards for English learners at the same time that it is attempting to raise the bar for all other teachers. The very students who are likely to perform at the lowest levels, and who are therefore the most in need of excellent teaching, will continue to be the least likely to receive it. Thus the proposition’s negative impact on the teacher corps may be its most profound and lasting legacy. Moreover, the erosion of the infrastructure of bilingual personnel—both in the classroom and in administrative positions—may make it very difficult to respond to alternative pedagogies.

A hopeful sign

Taking their cue from the Canadian experience, many researchers and policymakers have believed for some time that the most effective strategy for meeting the needs of English learners may well be through dual-immersion or two-way bilingual programs. These programs have the advantage that they incorporate the three core theoretical goals of bilingual instruction: academic enrichment, enhanced intercultural relations, and competence in two languages. They do this by combining English speakers and English learners in the same classroom with a curriculum that is taught in both languages but in proportions that balance issues of social power and linguistic hegemony. The goal of such programs is to produce students who are culturally and academically competent in two languages and who value cultural diversity.

When the current superintendent of public instruction in California came into office in 1994, she articulated a goal of providing the opportunity for all children to learn two languages; and polls of parent attitudes show strong support for such curricular innovation in the public schools (Huddy and Sears 1990; Krashen 1996). However, the din of political rhetoric assailing bilingual education drowned out the voices raised in defense of a more progressive education agenda that viewed language as an asset rather than a liability. In March 2000, then U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley went on record as supporting a major initiative to increase fourfold the number of dual-language programs nationwide over the next five years; he also pledged to provide the financial support to make this a reality. Riley was quoted as saying, “I think it is high time we begin to treat language skills as the asset they are, particularly in this global economy” (Cooper 2000). According to the Center for Applied Linguistics, California, in spite of Proposition 227, is the state with the largest number of dual-language programs: eighty-three. However, with California set on a course to dismantle its bilingual-education infrastructure, the question at hand is whether it is already too late for this state to respond to the call for a language policy that makes educational, social, and economic sense.

TOWARD A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

Perhaps unwittingly, or perhaps because of the narrow visions and political constraints of the times, past research has largely played into a political agenda that was never intended to treat multilingualism

as a real possible outcome for English learners. Thus, studies have tried diligently to answer questions such as "Which program most efficiently moves English learners out of their primary language and into the English-only mainstream?" and "How can we attract more 'good' (no mention of linguistically or culturally competent) teachers for English learners?" However, if we are to heed the concerns of Gené García, who asserts that teachers must pay attention to both the roots and the wings of our English learners, as well as the concerns of Luis Moll and Richard Ruiz who admonish educators to build on the cultural resources in students' communities, then we must shift the dominant research paradigm in the education of English learners. Among the questions that must be explored are:

1. In what ways does multilingualism contribute to greater academic and cultural competence in children from all backgrounds?
2. In what ways does multilingualism contribute to the social and economic benefit of the state and nation?
3. How do multilingual teachers who share knowledge of their students' cultural backgrounds and experiences differ in their instructional effectiveness from teachers who lack these attributes?
4. How can we build educational programs that enhance the possibility of true multilingualism for all students?

Notes

1. Proposition 13 limited the property tax in California to 1 percent of assessed value for both residential and commercial properties. Proposition 13 gradually eroded the property tax base and resulted in the state's having to take over the major funding of many local public services, including education. After the passage of Proposition 13 in California, a number of other states passed similar legislation reducing property taxes.
2. Proposition 209 was backed by the University of California regent Ward Connerly, who the year before had successfully engineered a majority vote of the University of California regents in favor of barring the use of race, ethnicity, or gender in consideration of candidates for admission to the university. Proposition 209 extended this bar to state employment and contracting, as well as enacting the prohibition against the use of affirmative action for admission to all state-supported educational institutions.
3. Multiple criteria are used to classify students from limited-English to English-proficient status. These multiple criteria, at the discretion of local districts, commonly consist of passing an English-proficiency test, being recommended by a teacher, and scoring at or near the 36th percentile on an academic achievement test in English.
4. See, for example, K. Hakuta, *How Long Does It Take to Learn English?* (Santa Barbara: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute, 1999).
5. The designation ELD, "English-language development," is used by the state department of education to include all programs that focus on the use of English for the purposes of instruction. It incorporates the "structured English immersion" program cited in the Proposition 227 initiative, as well as similar programs that go by other names, such as "sheltered English" and SDAIE (specially designed academic instruction in English).
6. The UG IMRI coordinated data collection and analysis of the effects of Proposition 227 in sixteen school districts and twenty-two schools in California during 1998–1999. Researchers from the UC–Berkeley, UCLA, and UC–Davis campuses were involved in the study, which has been released as Gándara et al. (2000).
7. *Proposition 227: A Fact Sheet That Focuses on CLAD/B-CLAD Teacher Preparation*. Office of Policy and Programs, California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, October 1998.
8. Douglas E. Mitchell and Ross Mitchell, *The Impact of California's Class-size Reduction Initiative on Student Achievement: Detailed Findings from Eight School Districts* (Riverside: California Educational Research Cooperative, 1999). Available at <http://cerc.ucr.edu/publications>

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