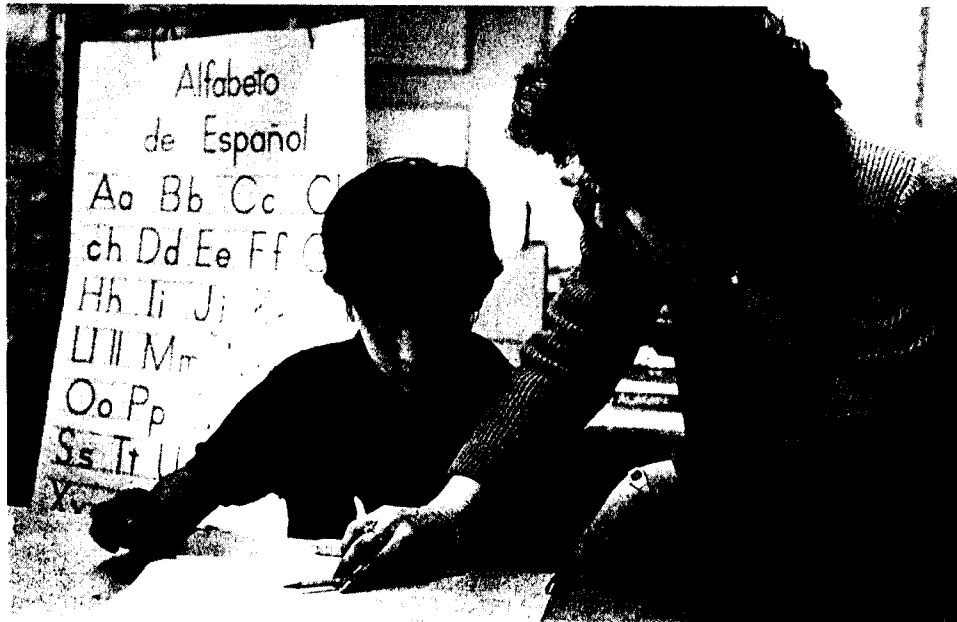


Bilingualism



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A new plan for bilingual education in the Los Angeles school system (above), the United States' second largest, calls for teaching most courses in students' native language until they learn English.

Bilingual education—various forms of instruction in two languages—has existed as a common way of schooling throughout the world for many centuries. While such instruction was used to some degree in the United States in the 19th century, it was introduced more formally in 1963 in Miami, FL, in response to the needs of the Cuban-American community and through the support of English-speaking parents who wanted their children to learn Spanish.

In the United States today bilingual education refers to the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction for all curricular subjects. While originally designed mainly for non-English-speaking students, increasing numbers of classes provide bilingual instruction for both majority and minority students who choose to attend. Federal and state legislation and court decisions have provided incentives for development of special instruction for language-minority students (those who come from a home in which a language other than English is spoken), with such programs having expanded throughout almost all of the states.

The original federal legislation, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, or Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was

designed to assist language-minority children of low-income families who were non- or limited-English-speaking as well as language-minority children who were not succeeding academically even though fluent in English. Reauthorized four times, the Bilingual Education Act of 1988 continues to provide special services for limited-English-proficient students of all socioeconomic backgrounds for those school districts that choose to apply for funds. Twelve states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin) mandate bilingual education for language-minority students through state legislation, and 12 additional states (Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Utah) have legislation explicitly permitting bilingual instruction.

Types. Many different types of bilingual-program models have been developed to meet the greatly varying needs of students. Four major models are transitional, maintenance, two-way, and immersion. Transitional ("early-exit") bilingual education is a segregated model, offered only to language-minority students who are limited in English proficiency. It

is typically a two-to-three-year program, designed to teach English as a second language and to continue students' subject mastery and cognitive development in native language. Transitional classes are especially important for older students, who cannot afford to lose time in subject-area instruction while learning basic English.

In contrast, maintenance ("late exit") bilingual programs place less emphasis on exiting students from native-language classes as soon as possible. Instead, students receive subject-area instruction in both languages equally for as many grades as the school system can provide. In the United States most maintenance programs end in the sixth grade with secondary-level instruction taught only in English, mainly for lack of bilingual-teacher resources. Research has shown that with no native-language instruction, it takes a student five to eight years to become fully proficient in all aspects of second language needed for schooling. This process can be shortened through the transfer of academic skills from first to second language in a maintenance bilingual program, as students generally begin to succeed in academic achievement after three to five years of schooling in both languages. In a transitional program, native-language instruction helps significantly. However, younger students sometimes are exited too early, causing their long-term academic achievement to suffer.

Two-way bilingual programs, a third model, are another form of the maintenance type, with English-speaking students added to the classes. In the beginning stages of implementation, two teachers instruct each language group separately in native language for a portion of the day, with second language activities that are meaningful to the students provided in all subject areas. As both language groups grow in their second-language proficiency, they work together at all times, with half of their curriculum taught in each language. This integrated model avoids isolation of the minority group, increasing self-esteem and intercultural understanding.

The fourth major program model, immersion, first was developed in Canada for speakers of English to learn French by being schooled in both languages. It has been so successful in developing proficiency in both languages as well as continuing students' strong academic achievement that immersion programs have mushroomed in Canada, even spreading to provinces where there are few French speakers. U.S. immersion programs now are growing in number, with more than 68 schools implementing bilingual-immersion

classes in Spanish, French, German, or Cantonese, and English. This model is not to be confused with structured immersion in the United States, in which the curriculum is taught exclusively in English, with the minority language not supported in school.

Early total immersion, one variation, initially provides all instruction in the minority language for kindergarten and first grade, introduces the majority language in second grade, and by fourth grade teaches half the day in one language and half in the other. Late total immersion, a second variation, provides the immersion experience in a minority language at seventh- or eighth-grade level. A third variation, partial immersion, is equivalent to maintenance, with students studying half a day in one language and half in the other for as many years as the school system can provide. Increasing numbers of two-way immersion classes, a fourth variation, now are developing in the United States.

Aims. In all types of bilingual programs, there are three instructional aims: (1) continuing development of the first language, (2) acquisition of the second language, and (3) instruction in all subject areas (e.g., mathematics, science, social studies) using both first and second languages. The program models may differ as to the time each language is introduced or ended in the curriculum, the amount of instructional time in each language, and the degree of integration of minority and majority students. While transitional bilingual programs are the most widespread in the United States, integrated two-way models are growing in popularity as more English-speaking parents choose to have their children participate in bilingual classes. In program evaluations, immersion, two-way, and maintenance bilingual programs have been the most successful in long-term high academic achievement of both minority and majority students.

Most language-minority communities in the United States have endorsed the importance of the development of students' first language literacy and school skills, either through formal public or private schools, or through informal home and community instruction, wherever possible. Research clearly shows that first language literacy and cognitive development significantly aid second language acquisition for school purposes. Sociologists have found that, contrary to the fears expressed by some monolinguals, bilingual schooling increases harmonious relations between ethnic groups and facilitates language minorities' acculturation to and successful participation in the new society.

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