

## **ESL Teachers in Training: Perceptions Concerning Bilingual Education**

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### **Abstract**

Outside of the academic arena, personal beliefs concerning bilingual education (BE) are shaped by family, society and the media. When future language professionals bring limited experience in confronting cross-cultural issues, especially those pertaining to language minority students in U.S. public schools, what information and reflective processes influence development and/or modification of their personal views? Attitudinal data were collected from TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) graduate students prior to, during and after a formal course in bilingual education. Data indicate a spread of incoming stances regarding BE with these chiefly accounted for by family, community and, in some cases, direct experience with LEP children in the public schools. Likewise, there is a spread of outgoing stances with much variation in student reports of how and why they changed or retained their positions. In most cases, reported perceptions reflect tension between the two professions. Results of this study leave open the question of the TESOL/BE interface and whether it is embraced or not embraced by ESL teachers in training.

### **Background**

Since becoming a legal mandate in 1968, bilingual education in the U.S. has stirred up hot debate. The controversy centers on the question of whether a non-English-speaking child should receive instruction in her first language while learning English as a second language - the alternative being that the child receives instruction only in English. The support-dissent continuum has at its one extreme militant pro-bilingual education lobbyists, on the other powerful networks of those who advocate for English as the national language and, as such, the only language of instruction in our schools. Interpretation of the many facts and complex issues that feed the bilingual education debate make joining either of these often polarized camps far from a simple matter. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that a great deal of the tension between varying sets of interpretations has roots in deeply ingrained values, beliefs, cultural identity, and notions of an American way of life on the part of both sides. Issues that come into play in the development of a personal stance in this debate are therefore open to subjective interpretation and influenced by these pervasive factors. As such, as much as either camp would like to point to objectivity, empiricism and expertise in defending their views, when it comes to bilingual education, either side can in effect win the debate by interpreting "the facts".

The debate around bilingual education is consequently an often intense and emotionally laden one as it calls into play fundamental beliefs and values shaped by home, community and the larger societies in which these have been shaped. Moreover, multiculturalism and bilingual

education make for good human interest and are subsequently frequent targets for treatment by the media. Like familial and societal influences, media coverage affects people's beliefs and the ultimate formation of individual views and positions (Sleeter & Grant, 1988). Media treatment in conjunction with home and community influences ensure that at some level these issues have been encountered in contexts outside of academe. Graduate students in TESOL are no exception.

### **Conflicting or Complementary Professions?**

As growing numbers of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students cause a steady rise in the demand for district bilingual education programs, the need increases for professionals to staff the obligatory ESL (English as a Second Language) component of these programs.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the past decade has seen a surge in enrollments for TESOL graduate preparation in the U.S. The probability that these ESL specialists will interface with bilingual specialists is quite high. Moreover, recent trends toward the integration of content-area instruction and second language learning, in conjunction with two complementary trends, one toward cooperative learning in bilingual education, and the other toward communicative language learning in TESOL, are causing the efforts and activities of bilingual and ESL professionals to merge. The likelihood that ESL professionals will interface with bilingual programs as the number of students and programs increases is, therefore, strong (Milk, 1990). For successful cooperation and collaboration to take place within programs designed for LEP students, as opposed to having potentially competing interests played out, the issue of perceptions and corresponding attitudes on the part of ESL teachers in training toward bilingual education becomes critical.

An integral part of any TESOL preparation program is to foster respect for the linguistically different (Alatis, 1979). Moreover, experienced TESOL professionals "accept as given that all languages are equally principled" and that "[i]t is morally and ethically imperative that equal respect be accorded all people regardless of the languages they speak" (Dicker, 1992, p. 7). An effort to train TESOL graduate students to understand cultural diversity is typically reflected in required courses pertaining to cross cultural studies and is further a likely component of most courses in English language teaching methodology. In what context and to what extent students in TESOL graduate programs learn about bilingual education, however, is not clear though efforts have been made to devise curricula that promote values clarification regarding ethnicity and education (Darder, 1991; Landes, 1976; Milk, 1990; Wink, 1991).

Historically ESL and bilingual education have been treated, at least at a curricular level, as separate fields, separate strands. One result of the 'division' of these potentially complementary fields is a residual tension at both the theoretical and practical levels. For example, apart from examining the TESOL professional's role

in relation to content instruction (Hudelson, 1989; Richard-Amato, 1988), the literature on ESL teacher training lacks comprehensive treatment of the role of the TESOL professional in relation to bilingual programs.

In terms of practice, Cleghorn & Genesee (1984) found tensions between ESL and BE educators. Through observations of the social interactions among native French and native English speaking teachers in a French immersion program in Montreal, the authors found that societally based conflict between groups carried over into the school setting. Results of this study suggest that "although the long-term social objectives of immersion and other bilingual school programs may be to promote bilingualism and facilitate intergroup contact, the actual interaction patterns of teachers working in such schools may portray the very conflict and inequities they seek to resolve." (Cleghorn & Genesee, 1984, p. 595). In my own experiences supervising both ESL and bilingual teachers in the schools, moreover, I frequently observed an underlying sense of conflict between bilingual and ESL professionals, as opposed to collegiality and collaboration. It appeared that teachers and administrators were operating as if there were a mismatch of professional goals *vis a vis* the children they taught.

That TESOL and Bilingual specialists share similar goals regarding their mission to serve the LEP student seems a logical assumption. Both professionals have opted to assist children with their linguistic and cultural transitions. Both share concern for the welfare of their students and in doing so recognize the potential difficulties these individuals face in their schooling. However, an apparent gap exists between beliefs concerning how language is best taught: there is potential disagreement as to whether the child is better off learning in her native language in conjunction with ESL, or whether she is more successful learning only English. The roots of this split can be traced to 1) orientation in teacher training;

2) sociopolitical experiences/orientation 3) socioeconomic experiences/orientation 4) 1-3 in the context of the professionals' respective cultures (Milk, 1985).

Milk attributes the conflict between TESOL and bilingual education as one that has typically resulted from a general confusion concerning appropriate classroom roles, especially the roles of the native and target languages in instruction. He further outlines possible sources of this divergence between the two professions:

- 1) different background variables for the teachers (including, in many instances, ethnicity);
- 2) different areas of specialization (e.g., linguistics versus curriculum and instruction);

- 3) differing philosophical orientations toward the phenomenon of cultural pluralism in our society; and
- 4) a different level of emotional commitment to such fundamental issues as the use of home language as an integral part of the child's educational experiences (Milk, 1985, p. 657-658).

Aiding children in acquiring their new second language is the integral goal of both bilingual and TESOL specialists: this is the fundamental point of departure for both professions. As such the two professions would ideally converge into cooperative instructional practice. Despite the above stated differences in orientation between professions, "ESL and bilingual education professionals share certain insights regarding the education of language minority students that place them in the same camp" (Milk, 1985, p. 658). However, when subgroups among teachers form along ethnic and linguistic lines rather than apropos their educational mission, "teachers' attention may be drawn to culturally related and possibly divisive differences rather than to educational commonalities" (Cleghorn & Genesee, 1984, p. 600). When fundamental beliefs regarding professional mission are in conflict, the potential for ideological rift is likely.

An important goal, then, for TESOL teacher preparation becomes one of guiding the prospective ESL instructor to recognize and respect views that could be perceived as potentially in conflict with the profession's as well as with her own. That is, that first language literacy and first language instruction are ultimately complimentary to the processes involved in acquiring English as a second language. Understanding the ways in which bilingual programs serve LEP students in their academic and linguistic achievements through native language instruction, and recognizing the benefits of working in concert toward common goals with bilingual teachers would ideally lead to more effectual collaboration on the part of the TESOL specialist with bilingual programs.

### **Teacher Beliefs**

Much attention has been focused of late on the issue of the lay beliefs which teachers in training bring to their preparation programs and practices (Cleghorn & Genesee, 1984; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Richardson et al, 1991). Lay beliefs are those shaped by family, community and the media and are by definition latent and stable. They are the force behind our attitudes and actions. When preparing teachers to work with Limited English Speaking (LEP) children, lay beliefs related to the interstices of language, culture, and identity become particularly critical.

This study is concerned with graduate students' lay beliefs about linguistic minority children and how they ought to be instructed

in the schools. The question of whether and how the study of bilingual education as an academic subject precipitates change in these beliefs is treated. Beliefs that graduate students in TESOL brought to issues associated with bilingual education are outlined. Of interest is first whether beliefs and attitudes changed or remained the same. Second, specific information and experiential processes participants reported as having precipitated change in these beliefs are examined.

### **The Study**

Participants for this case study were graduate students in a TESOL preparation program. This group, like TESOL trainees in general, has made a deliberate commitment to a career working with non-native speakers. They are - except for one African-american and seven foreign students - white, middle-class, mostly rural and suburban adults. They came to the task of examining bilingual education with belief systems influenced by the forces within the socioeconomic/cultural environments in which they were raised, educated and entertained. At issue is if and how their perceptions of and positions toward bilingual education tended to have been formed prior to close study of the issues involved, and how these came to take shape, change or remain the same during the process of becoming more informed. In short, it was of interest to determine both the beliefs and perceptions these students brought to their introductory course in bilingual education and what specific information and reflective processes during the course carried the most weight in influencing the development of a stance and/or any changes to preexisting positions.

Data from seventy students enrolled in a one-semester introductory graduate course, *Perspectives in Bilingual Education*, were collected and analyzed in an attempt to characterize the following:

- 1) the belief systems with which these chiefly White-american, middle-class students who chose teaching English as a second language (ESL) as a profession came to a course in bilingual education;
- 2) any modifications to their beliefs regarding the instruction of LEP children, given new information and an opportunity to reexamine these beliefs;
- 3) the topics and types of specific information they reported as having influenced change and/or development in their thinking.

Pre-course data from those enrolled in *Perspectives in Bilingual Education*, a course that introduces TESOL graduate students to policies and practices in educating linguistic minority students in the U.S. public schools, was collected. The identical course was taught by two different instructors; one in Fall, 1991, the other in Fall,

1992. These data concerned beliefs about linguistic minorities and issues likely to have been highlighted in the media regarding bilingual education (see Appendix A). Pre-course measures are compared to post-course assessment of the same beliefs. Analysis of these comparative measures is presented in conjunction with insights and observations made by students about their beliefs and processes of change throughout the semester in reflective writing assignments, in examination questions and orally during group tasks.

The bilingual education course was constructed as an open forum where participants could explore and develop their own thoughts and opinions and where students could look at the issues critically from any point along the support-dissent continuum. Students were thereby encouraged to explore these extremes as well as multiple moderate viewpoints. Through study of and carefully reflection from these varied perspectives, the goal was to avoid any bandwagon effect so that more critical and informed positions would result. By critically examining knowledge and ideas, it was intended that students would ultimately clarify not only the status of their own beliefs, but those of society in general. Understanding all sides of the debate would, moreover, provide perspective on the systems of beliefs that shape the programs and policies in and under which they would be operating in the future as second language instructors. Students would ideally shape their philosophical stances in such a way that these would become informed, personal, and critical, leading to overall personal growth as future professionals in the field.

The following is the list of general topics covered during each one-semester course through readings, presentations, group activities, lectures and assignments.

- Historical Perspectives
- Definition of Bilingual Education - Terminology
- State Guidelines and Regulations for Bilingual Education
- Second Language Acquisition Theory and Bilingual Education
- The Effectiveness Debate
- Bilingual Education in Other Countries
- The Politics of Bilingual Education
- Bilingual Materials and Classroom Practices
- The Role of TESOL in Bilingual Education
- Pluralism vs Assimilation
- English Only vs English Plus

Topics were treated through a combination of readings, lectures, videotapes, guest speakers, group discussion, group assignments, student presentations, written assignments and examinations. Subsequent references to specific authors and topics are from the course text, Bilingual Education: History, Politics, Theory and Practice, James Crawford, 1991.

## **Pre-course Beliefs**

A pre-course questionnaire was administered prior to any introductory discussion regarding bilingual education. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire quickly, basing their responses on intuitive assessment of their personal levels of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements. Once finished, students were told that their responses would be shared anonymously with the class at the end of the semester and that for the time being this exercise had served to alert them to and prompt some reflection on issues to be covered in the coming semester. The same questionnaire was administered at the end of the semester for comparative purposes (Appendix A).

Students were also prompted to reflect on and report their pre-course beliefs regarding bilingual education in take-home essays. The following is a composite of both pre-course indicators from the questionnaire and related information culled from these essays. These are presented below in an attempt to provide a general sense of background for those beliefs students reported as having influenced their stances regarding how LEP children should be instructed in this country prior to the course.

### **- Sense of Culture**

In describing their own orientations to culture, these TESOL students consistently reported that they felt themselves to be more tolerant of "foreignness" than others with whom they grew up. Many expressed affinity for foreign travel and exposure to other languages and cultures. Responses overall reflected a predisposition to valuing things "foreign". One of the most striking consistencies in students' descriptions of how they felt about the topic of bilingual education prior to taking this course was not only a strong sense of empathy toward non-native speakers, but they had also, through a range of life experiences, come to value strongly the language and culture of peoples not from the U.S. In fact, the singing of praises of other cultures in terms of "richness" was frequently accompanied by laments at not having a "culture" of their own. There were complaints regarding white, middle-class American life as being "bland", "dull" and "whitebread".

Responses to the preliminary questionnaire, along with informal oral comments revealed that the majority of students were taking this course to fulfill a requirement and, moreover, that they had no special knowledge of or interest in bilingual education. Further, they were consistently unclear as to the rationale for such a course requirement in a *TESOL* preparation program. This can be seen as

supporting the aforementioned assumption that the mission of ESL and that of bilingual education are typically perceived as conflicting ones by teachers in training.

For this course, incoming beliefs concerning language minority students indicate adherence to the beliefs of the community at large. It became apparent from the questionnaire results and through class discussions that the majority of these students had, in terms of the bilingual education controversy, relatively undeveloped lay theories concerning the experiences of non-native speakers of English in this country, especially regarding children in the public schools. The issue was not only one to which they had given little if any critical thought, but also one they perceived as unrelated to their careers as ESL instructors. "Why", one queried in her course biodata statement, "is this course a requirement?" This sentiment was echoed in nearly one fourth of students' responses, a surprising frequency considering it was not suggested that they reflect on why they were taking Perspectives in Bilingual Education. Students admitted they knew very little about the topic and that they were having difficulty seeing the relationship between teaching ESL and bilingual education: "After all", wrote one student, "we're here to learn how to teach English, not to be bilinguals."

Overall, responses on the pre-course questionnaire reveal two generalizable frameworks within which new teachers in the field perceive the incorporation of first language instruction in the public schools. First, ESL teachers in training are as susceptible to the instantaneous formulation of a political stance based on headlines, media sound bites and the popular topic of middle class woes - the use of tax dollars - as are most marginally participating citizens of the U.S. Membership in respective status groups contribute to one's worldview and set up perceived group divisions where the group's resources (tax dollars) are concerned (Collins, 1977). This stance is further fueled by general anti-pluralist sentiment among the majority of middle-class Americans; their unspoken emotional commitment to the "American way of life". When, for example, students were asked to write three adjectives they related to bilingual education, the majority wrote "controversial", "political", "hot" and the like. The other class of response was of the "unsure", "don't know enough" type. The conjuring up of the first type of adjectives can be viewed as supporting the assumption that, even though these individuals had selected a career serving LEP students, the lack of information concerning bilingual education had promoted lay perceptions of a political controversy.

Second, it appears these TESOL students perceive a conflict between the professional mission to teach English to LEP students rapidly and well and that of bilingual programs. Teaching English as well and as quickly as possible would then take precedence in terms of time and effort over first language instruction. There was, in short, an uneasiness *vis a vis* what is considered the mixed aims of two

separate programs: first language retention versus second language acquisition.

In sum, questionnaire responses in tandem with statements regarding bilingual education and the upcoming course in bilingual education in particular indicate that it is not unlikely that these future teachers were initially seeing their English-language teaching mission as one in direct opposition to that of bilingual education.

### - Critical Issues

Student responses on written assignments cannot necessarily be equated with the formation of personal belief systems due to the fact that responses are typically steered by what students perceive to be an instructor's agenda. However, assignments were designed to be as provocative and agenda-free as possible. Midway through the course, student responses to assignments were coded in order to detect which issues were carrying the most weight for them in making an argument in support of bilingual education. Students were asked to compose a response to the following statement:

*If you teach those kids Spanish, you're taking away their opportunity to learn English.*

The following is a breakdown of the arguments used in students' responses to this statement.

- A) Common Underlying Proficiency (Cummins) - 58
- B) LEP student self esteem - 32
- C) Loose time in subject matter - 17
- D) Statement reflects ignorance - 17
- E) Comprehensible Input (Krashen) - 14
- F) Evaluation studies - 14
- G) Reaction to political subversion - 11
- H) ESL an integral part of BE - 8
- I) Anti-submersion - 7
- J) Civil Rights Issue - 3
- K) Parental Involvement - 4

Despite the absence of any directions to do so, all 70 students responded to this task by defending the incorporation of first language (Spanish) instruction for limited English proficient students. Their method of defense took many forms.

The minority of essays contained emotionally charged counter attacks. Knee-jerk responses along the lines of "the speaker is ignorant/bigoted/xenophobic", for example, were used as a counter attack to the statement in only seventeen of the seventy essays. Similarly, category (G) -Reaction to political subversion - appeared in only eleven essays. In these contexts, references to the motives

of anti-bilingual education factions were used as a means of illustrating what writers felt was the source of a statement like this: That is, the speaker of such a statement is ideologically and politically aligned with English Only<sup>2</sup>-type factions and must therefore have a racist agenda. By contrast, the majority of arguments constructed in these essays was thoughtful and not driven by emotionality. They were calm and well reasoned. The tack, then, was more typically to build cases that relied on course information; e.g., authority within the field.

The most common tack students took in responding to the statement was to appeal to the theoretical. Cummins' "Common Underlying Proficiency" hypothesis was overwhelmingly favored as authoritative ammunition for their arguments. Of the seventy graduate students, 58 relied on the argument of interdependent language proficiencies to support the development of the first language in conjunction with English. The second most frequently used argument dealt with the importance of a child's self esteem (thirty-two of seventy). It was argued that the role of a child's cultural identity as tied to feelings of self-worth was critical to academic success and that historically undervalued languages and cultures must become valued through first language instruction. The argument that students in language submersion programs are robbed of the opportunity to maintain their grade level in the content areas was also incorporated as frequently. Additionally, seventeen of the seventy used Krashen's Comprehensible Input hypothesis to argue against sink-or-swim language policies. They underlined two specific tenets of Krashen's hypothesis - the need for low anxiety on the part of language learners, and the critical role comprehensible input plays in acquisition - to build their case against children being instructed solely in English. Reliance on effectiveness data from bilingual education programs (F) in building a case was infrequent. This is not surprising as the history of controversy surrounding evaluation designs in tandem with possible underlying motives that steer data interpretation rendered effectiveness data less authoritative than other sources of supporting information.

One of the most revealing and disturbing features of these essays as a whole is the fact that only eight of the seventy essays built their case by reference to the obligatory ESL component in bilingual education programs. One would think that the argument most likely to be made by ESL professionals is that LEP students study and learn English in conjunction with their studies in the first language. This, it will later be argued, may indicate that these future ESL teachers are perhaps not quite clear about and/or resistant to the integrated role of the two professions.

Categories of arguments employed least frequently are Anti-submersion, Civil Rights and Parental Involvement. Anti-submersion arguments consisted of stating that children simply cannot learn in language submersion situations - that they will fail

if not provided assistance in the first language so that they can understand what is going on in their school and classroom. The issue of Civil Rights was used by appealing to the fact that first language instruction in the content areas is a fundamental legal right was used by only three students. One of the three students who used this argument was a visiting student from the People's Republic of China. Another of the three was from the former Soviet Union. The issue of fundamental rights determined by the government may have been more salient for these students than the remaining American majority. Likewise, two of the four students who pointed out the barriers to parental involvement concurrent with the LEP in U.S. schools situation were foreign students. One of these students made her case by citing the disturbing experiences of her friends who could not communicate with their children's teachers and principal.

It appears that the majority of students felt that an appeal to theoretical support for bilingual education was a tack to take in response to this statement. This may have been due in part to the clarity and elegance of Cummins' theories. Four students did mention in their essays that Cummins' hypotheses (in Crawford, 1991) were a compelling influence as they were "eloquent", "logical" and "made sense". One respondent was so impressed with Cummins that she wrote that "all teachers should read him, then they would understand". Other motives should not be discounted. The additional interpretation - that for the purpose of debate, especially in an academic setting, citing the experts is likely to be considered the most effective tack - ought also to be considered. This trend to rely on authority will be taken up again in the context of student responses to an additional course assignment.

It is interesting to note that for this initial writing assignment students were able to defend a pro BE position fairly successfully. This is true in spite of what is for many conflicting underlying stances regarding bilingual education which came to be revealed in a later reflective writing assignment.

### **Post-course Reflections**

Students were given four weeks to write essays in response to final course questions (Appendix B). These essays were coded for 1) pre-course/post-course stance regarding bilingual education; 2) factors contributing to change 3) respondent profiles. A breakdown of pre-course versus post-course personal stances as regards the debate, accompanied by individuals' rationales for the retention or modification of these stances is presented below (Figure 1).

The following is a breakdown and analysis of the kinds of information students reported as having been most influential in contributing to the development of their personal stances as regards the bilingual education debate. It is a composite of reactions and reflections from student essays regarding the issues they identified as having been the most salient for them in developing and/or redeveloping their stances toward bilingual education.

### **1. Neutral or in favor of bilingual education**

#### *Self esteem - 47/70*

A recurring theme in the class was that of LEP children's self esteem. As proponents of bilingual education argue vigorously that self esteem is heavily affected by whether or not the native language and culture are valued, this became a frequent topic of discussion. Those students who cited this issue as swaying them towards a supportive stance felt strongly that bilingual education works to enhance self esteem through first language instruction. One experienced ESL teacher, for example, stated that she observed her students needing "more affirmation, rather than remediation".

#### *Theoretical Support - 43/70*

Students reported that to a great extent the theoretical contributed to their growth in understanding how to deal with LEP students and, to a minor degree, toward their attitudes concerning the benefits of bilingual education. One student put her finger on the reason behind this reaction nicely in stating that with all the controversial "mess" revolving around the bilingual education debate "it is not a surprise that Krashen and Cummins are held in god-like esteem". That the voices of theoreticians were quiet, yet compelling voices in the din was echoed by a number of respondents. By far the most compelling theoretical paradigm was that of Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) and his distinction between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Proficiency). These definitions and distinctions and their role in supporting first language instruction were most often cited as influential and were what caused many of these students to favor content area instruction in the native language.

#### *Valuing L1 and C1 - 37/70*

Over one half of respondents expressed how strongly they value knowing more than one language. All students had been required to study at least one foreign language before entering the TESOL Program and many had traveled abroad. Making the connection, then, between valuing knowledge of a "foreign" language, considering this an asset, and valuing an individual's first language and culture in a host country made salient for them the issue of first language retention as a factor in favor of native language instruction in the public schools.

#### *Empathy for LEP children - 37/70*

The issue of holding school children back by one or several grades due to the lack of proficiency in English was cited by over one half as having contributed to a more supportive stance regarding bilingual education. Three students mentioned the profound affect that an administrator's comment in one of their course readings had on their thinking: "...it was common to see 6th graders 'still on bunny books' because they had trouble learning to read in English" (Crawford, 1991:130). Additionally, compelling arguments were put forth that a child's first language is an asset that should be valued, not replaced entirely by English. Many reacted to Cummins' definition of "subtractive bilingualism" and stated that this was an unjustifiable approach that threatened children's sense of identity and self worth.

*Reaction against racism - 31/70*

Many reactions to the national anti-immigrant, anti-refugee sentiment in general and the English-Only movement in the U.S. in particular were quite strong for those who came to take either a neutral or pro-bilingual education stance. The motivations of those who wished to see the demise of bilingual education in the U.S. were considered to have racist undertones and many students were quick to react negatively to this in concluding that doing away with bilingual education would be antithetical to the rights of the immigrant and would ultimately serve to send an anti-foreigner message. One student felt "there is a conspiracy among white anglos to keep non-anglos from positions of power". Another expressed her conviction that it was "the arguments of English-only that sharpened my understanding of what it is all about and allowed me to advocate for it [bilingual education]."

*Reaction against submersion - 20/70*

A class activity that apparently affected student perceptions a great deal was a session in which students took on the role of non-native speakers in a Japanese 'immersion' class. They were 'taught' a geography lesson by a fellow classmate strictly in Japanese. The 'teacher' in no way modified her input and showed anger and impatience when they did not understand what she was asking them to do. Many cited this experience as evoking stronger empathy for LEP students placed in 'sink or swim' classroom situations.

*Socioeconomic equity - 16/70*

This cohort of students argued that every effort should be made, including utilizing LEP students' native language in instruction, to bring immigrant groups out of ghettos and into the social and economic mainstream. Without proficiency in English, they argued, LEP children risk failure. Bilingual education is one means of providing assistance so that parity can be achieved.

*The global village - 11/70*

It was argued that because the world is becoming less divided by language and culture, the U.S. should encourage the maintenance

and promote the value of other languages within its borders. The priority should not be to replace immigrants' native language, but to preserve it as a national asset. Not unrelated too was consistent support for valuing the native culture of students, that this would work against the divisive tendencies of nationalism.

*The first language is the glue that holds families together - 2/70*

First language retention holds the family together. This reason was given by a native Russian student whose initial stance was "When in Rome, do as the Romans do". That is, she felt that all immigrants to the U.S. needed to learn English as quickly and as well as possible and that this should take total precedence over L1 maintenance. Her thinking changed during the semester, however, as she found her quickly Americanized daughter refusing to speak to her in Russian. She cited immigrant parents who do not speak English and the tears in the family fabric their English-only speaking children were causing as reason for the modification of her stance. The second student to use this argument was also a foreign student who cited experiences of her friends who felt these same tensions with their children.

*Empirical support - 6 pro, 7 against*

Students used empirical evidence both to bolster support for and against bilingual education. Difficulties in assessment procedures were often mentioned. More often, however, the varying interpretations and conclusions arrived at depending upon an evaluator's agenda were discussed. The four students who cited what they felt were flawed assessment data expressed dismay that numbers would be interpreted according to political agendas and could not, therefore, be trusted to supply incontrovertible evidence that BE either worked or did not. As such, they felt that because there was a long history of test data manipulation, that these numbers could not be trusted any more than those with their political agendas could be trusted to provide empirical truths.

## **2. Neutral or against bilingual education**

*Not realistic - 10/70*

Students argued that existing models for bilingual education are unrealistic due to the fact that there is neither the financial support nor the professional expertise to implement these "ideal" programs. Schools are monolithic, argued one experienced teacher, especially as regards dealing with children who are "different" and will not, therefore, change. One respondent expressed her feeling of thorough hopelessness regarding making positive changes in the schools: "The system is entrenched. It will not bend."

*No link between theory and practice - 6/70*

These students reported seeing no correspondence between what was theoretically justifiable and what is and might be practiced in U.S. schools. "The jury is still out", one claimed. Others conferred

stating that no air-tight empirical evidence exists, just theories that don't supply much in the way of realistic models.

As reported earlier, Cummins' theories regarding bilingual education were found to be heavily influential in students' arguments in favor of bilingual education. There was one exception. One student felt, based on her own years of experience with LEP children in the public schools, that Cummins' BICS and CALP theories were severely flawed. Her experiences were that LEP students were so focused on academic achievement that they were consequently isolated from opportunities to develop oral communication skills. She therefore did not view these as valid theories.

*The L1 community is responsible, not the taxpayer - 4/70*

The child's first language community, stated these students, should be responsible for maintaining their children's first language and culture. It should not be up to the U.S. taxpayer to do so.

*Assimilation is the price of success - 4/70*

The argument that in order to succeed in the host country, immigrants and refugees must make every effort to assimilate to the U.S., including learning English at the expense of their first language, was compelling to four students.

*Immersion works - 3/70*

These students pointed to the successes of Canadian French immersion programs in constructing arguments against first language instruction in the U.S. If these programs work, "why can't we do the same thing here?" These three students maintained this belief even after reading and discussing Cummins' differentiation between dominant and subordinate language perceptions and their critical role in the success or failure of language immersion programs.

*Bilingual proponents are power hungry - 3/70*

This group believed that pro-BE political groups are motivated only by politics and power, not by any desire for the best education for their children.

*Disgusted by politics - 3/70*

This category of argument includes frustration expressed by respondents regarding the high level of emotionality and "dirty tricks" played by extreme pro and anti factions in the bilingual education debate.

*ESL is more cost efficient, more democratic - 1/70*

Convinced that the cost of implementing and maintaining BE programs was far greater than the cost of ESL instruction, this student felt that unequal distribution of tax dollars (more going towards BE programs) was not democratic.

*Bilingual education separates and stigmatizes - 1/70*

An experienced teacher of ESL in the public schools felt strongly that separating LEP children into first language groups for the purpose of instruction ran counter to the goal of ESL and mainstreaming. "Bilingual education separates and stigmatizes", she wrote, "and works against promoting acceptance of other cultures and languages in this country".

Among the seven foreign students enrolled in the course, shifts and non-shifts in position were evenly distributed. For the two students from the former Soviet Union, where education in both the home language and the dominant language is the status quo, the issues raised regarding the U.S. context of bilingual education was a source of puzzlement and, possibly as a result of this confusion remained neutral, with one student pointing to the critical role of the family and community as more important influences in L1 and C1 maintenance and growth. Two South American students reported that they came to the class with antagonistic feelings towards those in the U.S. who do not learn English like they had and at the end of the course felt that bilingual education was not the answer. "The family and its community can see to the maintenance of native culture and language: not the taxpayers of the U.S." A student from the PRC, on the other hand, came away from the course very supportive of bilingual education as he was particularly sensitive to political subversion via first language suppression.

Additionally, a mix of pro, anti, and neutral respondents (10 of 70) saw two-way bilingual programs as the 'solution' to both the bilingual education debate and as a means of dealing with the U.S. foreign language deficit. They saw two-way programs as benefiting both LEP and English-speaking children as opposed to one-way programs.

**Discussion**

The graduate course in bilingual education did not affect a direct reversal of position except in four cases (came to course against bilingual education, left course supporting bilingual education). On the contrary, it left a good percentage of teachers expressing ambivalence regarding the debate in general and their roles as ESL instructors in bilingual education programs in particular. In other words, only one-half of these seventy students came away from the course as advocates of bilingual education programs for LEP students. Eleven students, among whom only four planned to teach in U.S. public schools, pointed out the fact that ESL is a key component to all bilingual education programs. One future public school teacher who came away from the course very supportive of bilingual education, especially in terms of valuing the retention of the first language and culture, expressed frustration at what she perceived as being "up against". Her fears and frustrations grew out of two interviews for ESL teaching positions. In the course of both interviews she

brought up the issue of helping her future students make use of and maintain their native languages. The response she received from both school officials who interviewed her was that "what the school wanted was 'quick English' and nothing more". She was ushered out and never contacted regarding the positions. Despite these experiences, she claimed she was "committed" and was still going to advocate for first language and culture maintenance. For the most part, however, ESL remained in these students' minds a separate and somehow superior means of meeting the needs of non-native speaker children. Sadly, few used in their arguments nor acknowledged the real and potential synergies between bilingual education and ESL professionals.

The bulk of changes manifest in the reflective essays was away from beliefs that linguistic and cultural assimilation at all costs was the goal for LEP children and towards the belief that students' first language and culture needed to be valued as part of instructional processes. Those who cited this shift and a broadening of their understanding *vis a vis* the second language learner's situation, claimed these new insights would ensure they as ESL teachers would value the cultural and linguistic identities of their students. The extent to which this understanding will be instantiated in practice is, however, not clear. For example, in discussing the importance of a teacher's valuing LEP students' first language and cultural identity, one graduate student who was at the time teaching an ESL course to Indian adults, for example, said she had "written a couple of the Bengali words that I know and tried to say them" as her effort in this direction.

### **Implications**

It is only in the last decades that the fact that second language acquisition is greatly affected by the dominant culture's attitudes toward the learner, her culture and her language has come to the fore (Darder, 1991). As the one representative of the host culture that has the greatest potential impact on the learner's self concept regarding the target language community, the TESOL professional has the often unstated mission of demonstrating understanding and respect for the student's native language while instructing her in the language of the mainstream culture. Hand in hand is the TESOLers obligation to understand the political and pedagogical issues that feed and impact the program(s) serving the LEP student, be it bilingual, ESL, or some combination.

Given a population such as the one targeted for this case study, a group most likely predisposed to empathy and respect for the needs of diverse language groups by virtue of their chosen careers, it might follow that any non-supportive preconceptions regarding bilingual education would rapidly dissipate and be replaced by a more informed, supportive view. Given thorough treatment of information,

it would follow that these TESOL graduate students ought to extend their support beyond LEP advocacy and reach a level of conviction that supports native language instruction for LEP students in the public schools. However, "[I]ndividuals shape their beliefs and behavior to fit their niche in the social structure". (Sleeter and Grant, 1988, p. 178) A group of White-american, middle-class graduate students such as this one comes to the study of bilingual education as language-learning advocates, but they also bring ingrained beliefs shaped by their own culture and society and, in tandem, certain perceptions of professional mission.

Assumptions drawn about this case study group can supply no formulas for educating the general population regarding bilingual education. Again, these are students who made a thoughtful career choice in second language education, a choice most likely influenced by preexisting insights and/or experiences that would cause less resistance to empathizing with non-native speakers and their needs. These students have undertaken, through their studies, a quest for understanding how language (first, second and foreign) is acquired as part of their chosen profession and, therefore, maintain a predisposition toward valuing language in a way the layperson necessarily may not. What their processing of bilingual education issues illuminates is that some facts appear to be more compelling than others given their group status, motivation and preexisting knowledge. Cummins' work, for example, was by far the most compelling influence on teachers' thinking regardless of whether their resulting position was neutral, supportive or against.

Profound change in sociopolitical attitude can begin with becoming informed; whether or not such change is sufficient in depth to override predispositions formed in and by one's status community is questionable and can only be born out through longitudinal study of the impact these future professionals have in their role as ESL teachers. Regardless of the personal views that develop, for future TESOL professionals understanding these issues serves to enhance respect for people of diverse cultures. For White-american, middle-class graduate students whose roots are in a pro-monolingual, often xenophobic culture, dealing effectively with these issues becomes a necessary prerequisite to providing service to LEP individuals. In terms of this group's future role as spokespeople for language minorities and the programs which serve them, whether these changes in viewpoint are sufficiently personalized to the extent that these professionals will raise their voices, actively advocate for or against first language instruction in the schools is only a matter of supposition.

## **Conclusion**

Bilingual education in the U.S. generates intense, emotion-laden

debate. Related discussion is often characterized by issues muddled by overreaction by polarized parties. As McGroarty so aptly states:

The intensity of the debate that surrounds bilingual education reflects strongly held value positions and tensions that frequently have little to do with curricular or pedagogical questions regarding optimal educational programs for students who do not know English.  
(McGroarty, 1992, p. 7)

In an academic environment, the debate is clearly tempered by an instructor and the environment itself. Nonetheless, and especially in the case of such a high-profile topic in the media and one charged with sensitive issues related to fundamental precepts of a society, students bring with them a host of preconceptions and mixed stances that could be seen as mirroring those of the general public. This case study illustrates the extent of the debate's complexity with the mix of resulting stances on the part of these participants demonstrating the range of possibilities regarding personal interpretations and consequent beliefs. By extracting a select population from a large one, granted a population which can be characterized somewhat reliably as empathetic, as having made a certain investment in multiculturalism, and determining what specifically contributed to the formation of a personal stance, we can at least surmise that for this group the facts and theoretical positions cited by them contributed to their personal views on bilingual education.

This population shares some professional/academic and socio-economic characteristics. Yet they evidenced quite different attitudinal outcomes when provided the same information, materials, and assignments. They had equal exposure to and opportunity to process the issues, yet reached often contradictory conclusions. This fact supports the notion of the extreme complexity of the bilingual education issue. It reflects the depth and personal level at which responses to language issues, language policies and, in particular, bilingual education are interpreted. If this group of individuals who are committed to a career of working for and with non-native speakers of English cannot be considered natural advocates of bilingual education given a hefty dose of information concerning it, one is left understanding why the general population, beyond misconceptions developed via the media and powerful entities such as English Only, has come out against the instructional approach. Second, in terms of their future roles as professionals collaborating with bilingual education programs, it is on the one hand heartening to know that as ESL teachers they better understand the needs of LEP students and, because of this understanding and empathy for them, will be advocates for the best education possible regardless of instructional approach. On the other hand, however, one can only speculate that in the case of those for whom bilingual education is a source of ambivalence or is just the wrong way to go about assisting LEP children,

tension between the two professions will persist.

**Notes:**

1. Current federal and state regulations concerning the education of LEP student require not only that there be bilingual assistance but also that each program have as an integral component instruction in ESL.

2. U.S. English, English Only, Institute for Research on English Acquisition and Development (READ), Federation for American Immigration Reform, English Language Advocates, etc.

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APPENDIX A - Pre/Post questionnaire

**STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please take your time and answer each question carefully.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

NATIONALITY: \_\_\_\_\_

From what nationality(ies) is your family: \_\_\_\_\_

Is English your first language? \_\_\_\_\_

List three adjectives which in your mind describe Bilingual Education in the U.S.

\_\_\_\_\_

For the following statements, mark on the scale how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

	AGREE			STRONG			STRONG DISAGREE		
	+++	++	+	+	++	+++	+++	++	+
Learning another language is hard.		++	+	+	++	+++	+++	++	+
Children learn language better than adults.	+++	++	+	+	++	+++	+++	++	+
	+++	++	+	+	++	+++	+++	++	+

English is the national language of the U.S.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
Taxes should be spent to teach Hispanic children in Spanish.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
People who come to this country should learn English like my ancestors did.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
It takes an adult a longer time to learn a second language than it does a child.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
You never lose a language once you know it.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
Learning more than one language is a waste of time.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
Taxes should not be spent teach Cambodian children in Khmer.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
Supporting Bilingual Education is not politically correct.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
My parents support Bilingual Education.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
I want my children to maintain their ability to speak, read and write English regardless of where in the world we may live.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
Without English you can't get ahead in this country.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+
Immigrant and refugee children can learn all the English they need if they spend enough time with American kids.	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+	+-+

**Questionnaire Results**

1=strong agreement  
6=strong disagreement

	Pre-course Average	Post-course Average
1. Learning another language is hard.	3.29	2.18
2. Children learn language better than adults.	2.60	3.68
3. English is the national language of the U.S.	2.63	4.74
4. Taxes should be spent to teach Hispanic children in Spanish.	2.96	2.40
5. People who come to this country should learn English like my ancestors did.	2.60	2.87
6. It takes an adult a longer time to learn a second language than it does a child.	2.62	3.60
7. You never lose a language once you know it.	4.52	4.50
8. Learning more than one language is a waste of time.	5.81	5.73

9. Taxes should not be spent to teach Cambodian children in Khmer.	3.74	4.25
10. Supporting bilingual education is not politically correct.	4.33	4.57
11. My parents support bilingual education.	2.48	2.98
12. I want my children to maintain their ability to speak, read and write English regardless of where in the world we may live.	1.48	1.53
13. Without English you can't get ahead in this country.	2.19	2.27
14. Immigrant and refugee children can learn all the English they need if they spend enough time with American kids.	3.50	5.07

N=26

### Appendix B - final essay questions

In terms of race or ethnicity, describe your upbringing. Describe familial and community perceptions of ethnicity that you feel impacted your belief systems as an adult and your decision to enter the language teaching profession.

Capture as completely as possible your beliefs concerning Limited English Proficient public school children at the start of September, 1991[2].

Describe how you feel now.

Trace the course of the semester in your mind (using your notes, readings and thinking). Pinpoint specific information that influenced any modification in your thinking about bilingual education.

How do you currently conceive your role as a TESOL professional as regards bilingual education?











- 1... Federal and state regulations concerning the education of LEP students require that there be an ESL component to all programs bilingual or otherwise.
- 2... U.S. English, English Only, Institute for Research on English Acquisition and Development (READ), Federation for American Immigration Reform, English Language Advocates, etc.