

Moral Dimensions of Bilingual Education

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Abstract

The complexities involved in equitably educating language minority students raise ethical issues and involve the moral dimensions of teaching in a diverse democracy. Acknowledging the moral dimensions of bilingual education may encourage policy makers and practitioners to consider their ethical motivation and commitment to equitably educating all public education students. We use sociopolitical and legal perspectives to analyze the historical development of bilingual education policy in the United States and explore two arguments supporting the moral dimensions of bilingual education: (1) a morality based on economic and social interdependency and (2) a spiritual morality. We examine the potential and limitations of an economic and social morality and develop the construct of a spiritual morality as a means of harnessing the combined powers of intellect, emotions, politics, and spirituality in the fight to provide equitable education for language minority students.

From the mid-1960s to the late 1990s, political, empirical, and pedagogical efforts to equitably educate language minority students have not successfully curbed persistent attacks on immigrants, indigenous language minorities, and bilingual/ESL education. The complexities involved in equitably educating language minority students exceed a strictly political, empirical, or pedagogical level of policy making. These complexities raise ethical issues and involve the moral dimensions of teaching in a diverse democracy. Acknowledging the moral dimensions of educating all children, including language minority students, may encourage policy makers and practitioners to consider their ethical motivation and commitment to public education in a diverse democracy.

Bilingual education in a diverse democracy like the United States can be characterized as a moral endeavor because education is mandatory in the U.S. and all children in the U.S. have a right to an equal education (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). However, mandate and equality may not be the only grounds upon which an argument for the moral dimensions of bilingual education can be based. Historical events and theoretical literature allow exploration of two additional arguments supporting the moral dimensions of bilingual education in the United States: (1) a morality based on economic and social interdependency and (2) a spiritual morality. In this article, we define and examine the power

and limitations of an economic and social morality. We use sociopolitical and legal perspectives to demonstrate that the historical development of bilingual education policy in the United States largely results from an economic and social morality. We then explore the complexities and possibilities of a spiritual morality as a foundation for the moral dimensions of educating language minority students. Empirical data researching the implementation of these moral dimensions of bilingual education in teacher education and classroom practice cannot be pursued until the constructs themselves have been explored. Future empirical research inevitably will critique and refine the constructs.

A Working Definition of Morality

Reference to morality and spirituality in public school settings can raise connotations of religious fanaticism seeking to blur the lines between church and state. These connotations contribute to the fact that, traditionally, issues such as morality and spirituality have been considered taboo in public education. In this section of the article, we establish a working definition of morality. In upcoming sections, we do the same for the concept of spirituality in educational settings. Other scholars exploring the moral dimensions of schooling in general ground their definition of morality in the proper role and function of public education in the United States (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). Our definition of morality focuses on relationships between diverse people in public educational settings. These relationships are guided by principles of equity that stress appropriate and fair treatment of all people, rather than simply equal, or same, treatment of all people. The focus of our definition emphasizes that morality addresses individual interactions and their implications in larger public realms.

A Morality Based on Social and Economic Interdependency

Language minority students, their families, and teachers suffer most directly from policy decisions that consider language diversity a deficit to overcome, and that make remediation the goal of public education for language minority students. However, in the long run, the negative impact will be felt in the larger American economy and society. U.S. society will suffer economically and socially if the growing population of language minority students in the United States do not adequately learn English and master academic content. This economic and social interdependency serves as motivation for diverse people to care about each other's well being. In this sense, economic and social interdependency can serve as a type of morality in diverse public school settings.

Models of political morality address economic and social interdependency within a society. Scholars concerned with the diversity of today's schools and society have turned for direction to various political models of moral decision making (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darder, 1991; Barber, 1997; Kozol, 1991). Bull, Fruehling, and Chattergy (1992) describe three approaches to political morality: the liberal perspective, the democratic perspective, and the communitarian perspective. Goodlad and Keating (1994) state:

It is cynical but realistic to observe, once again, that the common welfare is likely to advance when the advantaged see their self-interests and the common weal to be entwined ... There is no freedom without sustained attention to the personal and collective efforts required to maintain it. This requires, as Jefferson and others forging the Republic argued, a well-educated *citizenry*, not merely a much-educated elite (pp. 4-5, italics in original).

Speaking of all children's right to learn, Darling-Hammond (1997) explains: "Never before has the success, perhaps even the survival, of nations and people been so tightly tied to their ability to learn" (p. 2). Political moralities based on economic and social interdependency call upon all education stakeholders (students, teachers, administrators, family, and community members) to recognize and accept their moral responsibility toward educating language minority students.

Notions of economic and social interdependency have been well articulated in the literature, but this does not ensure that they have been heeded in reality. Recent statistics also reveal that the theory of economic interdependency has not promoted equitable distribution of the nation's wealth. Reports indicate that 1 percent of the U.S. population owns a greater share of the country's wealth than does 90 percent of the population (Yeskel & Leondar-Wright, 1997). Additionally, much work regarding the procedures that schools use to place students into classes clearly indicates that students' ethnic and linguistic backgrounds often influence their placement within an academically rich or poor curriculum to a greater degree than does their individual intellectual ability (Oakes, 1985; Goodlad & Keating, 1994). This same body of work also consistently demonstrates that academic tracking procedures are not the most effective means for meeting all students' learning needs or strengths. Scholars in this area strongly assert that systematically denying ethnic and linguistic minority students access to knowledge inevitably compromises the future of a democratic society.

A morality based on economic and social interdependency has been well articulated in modern bilingual education legislation and court decisions. A review of legislation and court decisions in the United States reveals attention to economic and social interdependency. However, such attention does not ensure that this type of morality has translated into sustained equitable education for language minority students.

History of Modern Bilingual Education Policy

An analysis of modern bilingual education policy in the United States reveals the economic and social influences guiding its development. To make sense of these influences, we use two frameworks for analyzing language policy: (1) Ruiz's (1988) notion of orientations toward language and (2) Secada's acknowledgement of the tension between mandates and enticements (Secada, 1990, quoted in Ovando & Collier, 1998).

Ruiz (1988) suggests that different orientations toward language impact language policy and planning: language as a problem, language as a right, and language as a resource. A language as a problem orientation considers linguistic diversity in society as a problem, which, like other social problems, must be overcome. The solution proposed by those who follow this orientation usually entails an exclusive focus on learning English and abandoning non-English languages. A language as a right orientation considers linguistic diversity as a basic human right for each individual. A language as a resource orientation asserts that linguistic diversity is a resource that should be conserved and used for multiple reasons, including economic or utilitarian rationales.

A persistent tension exists between "mandating" and "enticing" in U.S. bilingual education policy. Both strategies attempt to ensure equal educational opportunities for language minority students. Mandating bilingual education practices can be thought of as representing a language as a right orientation. Offering enticements, such as special funding opportunities, reflects more of a language as a resource orientation. We will now use the orientations toward language diversity and the mandate or entice tension frameworks to highlight the prominence of an economic and social interdependency as the driving morality behind modern bilingual education planning and policy.

Modern incarnations of bilingual education policy stem from the civil rights movements of the late 1950s and 1960s and from the War on Poverty. The rationale behind the War on Poverty recognized the economic and social interdependency of diverse citizens. Programs originating out of the War on Poverty sought to improve conditions for the underprivileged and thereby improve the country's overall condition. In 1968, under Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the first modern federal legislation for bilingual education was created. The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was an enticement program designed primarily to access federal funding (Bilingual Education Act of 1968). The Act was, according to Crawford (1995), "explicitly compensatory, aimed at children who were both poor and educationally disadvantaged because of their inability to speak English" (p. 40). This first enticement effort focused on funneling federal funding toward the problems facing language minority students.

The mandates that soon followed were strongly rooted in a language as a right orientation: the 1970 Memorandum from the Office of Civil Rights and the seminal Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols*. In *Lau* for example, the plaintiff parents did not seek bilingual education specifically. They did, however, ask that their Chinese-speaking children's rights to some form of "language remediation" be recognized and an appropriate remedy employed. The court found that the school district's failure to provide any specific program or language support violated the students' rights as enunciated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This attention to individuals' rights and the legal system's role in defending them illustrate a social morality. Law essentially addresses moral issues in that its purpose is to promote equitable interactions among people in a society.

The 1978 Title VII Amendments swayed back toward a language as a problem orientation, stressing strictly transitional native language instruction. In the early 1980s, the first real policy attention to language diversity as a resource began to appear. Second language acquisition research began to establish itself in the 1970s and finally began to be acknowledged in policy during the 1980s. Second language acquisition research provided empirical evidence against myths of bilingualism as a cognitive limitation and supporting the language diversity as resource orientation (Ellis, 1994; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Research established crucial knowledge such as the distinction between learning English at a level suitable for social interaction and mastering it at a level suitable for successful academic performance and the relationship between gaining a threshold of literacy in one's native language and effectively acquiring a second language (Cummins, 1981a & b). Other work clarified that acquiring a second language follows a varied, yet systematic, sequence, rather than occurring randomly (Dulay & Burt, 1974; Krashen, 1977). Such understanding fostered research proposing that instruction focused on grammar can only influence a learner's acquisition of a second language if the instruction is close to the point when the learner would naturally acquire that grammatical structure (Pienemann, 1984). However, the effect of formal grammar instruction still sparks debate (Krashen, 1992 & 1993).

In the 1980s, improved understanding of the second language acquisition process provided a theoretical foundation for language policy and programs. *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) and the resulting *Castañeda* Standards explicitly stated that sound, or at least legitimate experimental, educational theory should guide bilingual education programs. Prior to this era, most prominent court rulings on bilingual education primarily focused on language minority students' civil rights. Those court rulings and resulting policy that did raise curricular, assessment, and personnel qualification issues did so without the benefit of the established empirical knowledge base provided by research on second language acquisition or bilingual education (*Lau Remedies*, 1975; *Serna v. Portales*, 1975; *Ríos v.*

Reed, 1978). The experiences of the OCR task force leader of the 1970s, Martin Gerry, as described by Crawford (1995), illustrate this situation: "Despite the limited research on bilingual-bicultural approaches at the time, Gerry had become 'sold on' their effectiveness while serving as a court-appointed monitor of civil rights orders in Texas" (p. 46).

The Supreme Court case *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) reiterated the rights of all children to receive public education. The 1984 Title VII Amendments included references to academic learning as well as language learning as goals for language minority students. The 1984 Title VII Amendments additionally provided for some native language maintenance programs and for teacher training. Attention to academic learning and native language maintenance come directly out of second language acquisition research, reflecting the language diversity as a resource orientation. However, the direction language policy and programs followed by the late 1980s reveals how quickly the language diversity as a problem orientation minimizes second language acquisition theory in policy decision making.

The 1988 Title VII Amendments disregarded second language acquisition research, asserting that it takes 5-7 years to learn sufficient academic English for success in school and enforcing a three-year limit on participation in most Title VII programs. These same amendments also turned support away from native language maintenance by increasing money allotted for programs using English as the only language of instruction. Advocates for language minority students took action in the early 1990s to help curb the strong language diversity as a problem orientation dominating bilingual education policy. Education reform movements were prevalent during the early 1990s, and advocacy groups like the Stanford Working Group determined that language minority students' needs would be addressed in these movements. The Stanford Working Group's efforts (August, Hakuta, Olguin, & Pompa, 1995) contributed to the 1994 reconfiguration of Title VII, which emphasized professional development, native language maintenance, and foreign language development. The reconfiguration also sought to improve research and evaluation of bilingual education programs. These areas of focus, which clearly respond to issues raised in second language acquisition research, reflect a language as a resource orientation. However, a short four years after the 1994 Title VII reconfiguration, second language acquisition theory was neglected, and a language diversity as a resource orientation was overturned in favor of a language diversity as a problem orientation.

In the late 1990s, bilingual education policy remains entrenched in a language diversity as a problem orientation, disregarding findings from second language acquisition research. California's Proposition 227 (1998) eliminates bilingual education programs, mandates that language minority students be mainstreamed into English-only classrooms after one year, and eliminates requirements for teacher training. Advocates of such

mandates justify their efforts by claiming language and cultural diversity are economic and social ills that must be remedied for the good of society. In a sense, they use a morality based on economic and social interdependency as a rationale for their efforts. The practice of statewide referendum votes, such as Proposition 227 or English Only's current campaigns in target states to have English declared the target state's official language, exacerbates a dangerous potential in the American political system. Especially in referenda, the potential danger exists for tyranny to be visited on minorities by the majority. This process exposes the vulnerability and limitations of a morality based on economic and social interdependency.

Outlawing bilingual education or other related language measures designed to aid language minority students runs counter to traditional notions of democracy and egalitarian principles which are, or should be, deeply rooted in American core culture. Certainly outlawing bilingual education seems to run counter to important statutory pronouncements, already law in this area, e.g. the many provisions of the Individuals with Education Disabilities Act (IDEA, 1998). The IDEA analogy highlights the incongruencies between antibilingual education efforts and existing legal precedents for equitably educating all children. We do not intend to suggest parallels between bilingualism and learning disabilities. Rather, we wish to point out how the IDEA's requirement of Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) for exceptional students, which affirms parents' rights to challenge decisions regarding the education program of their exceptional children, is fundamentally incongruous with laws and movements outlawing bilingual education and artificially limiting the tool box of available methods to achieve educational objectives.

Another important statute that conflicts with laws and programs outlawing bilingual education is the Native American Languages Act. This act also highlights how a simplistic one-size-fits-all law such as Proposition 227, or a federal clone of such a law, fails to take into account the complexity of American culture and of existing goals and statutes. Congress passed the Native American Languages Act (1990) with support from at least one group advocating English as the official language of the United States: U.S. English. U.S. English supported the act late in its legislative process and urged the President to sign the bill into law. U.S. English released a statement noting "the unique relationship of native North American nations to our country" as a reason to preserve languages that "otherwise would be in danger of extinction" (West, 1990). Clearly, the unique nature of Native American languages, languages that face the danger of extinction, warrants different treatment from languages affected by Proposition 227. Proposition 227 is supposedly intended to help "immigrants" whose languages are in no danger of extinction. The act's purpose, as explained by the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, to which the bill was referred, is "to establish as the policy of the

United States that it is the right of Native Americans, including Indians, Alaskan Natives, Native Hawaiians and Native American Pacific Islanders to preserve, practice and develop their indigenous language. ” IDEA’s and NALA’s goals of equitable education for all students stand as precedents against Proposition 227 or any related federal proposals that require language minority students to obtain waivers to receive appropriate education programs and learn in their native language.

The Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999 is proposed to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and thus revise Title VII of the ESEA. The National Association for Bilingual Education (1999) issued three main concerns regarding the bill: 1) the wording of the bill may be interpreted as emphasizing learning English as quickly as possible over achieving academically while learning English, 2) the wording of the bill does not promote two-way bilingual programs fostering bilingualism and biliteracy for all students, and 3) the bill stresses aligning accountability measures over effective instruction for language minority students. The bill clearly reflects the current school reform movement’s fervor for explicit standards and strict accountability as the means for improving schooling for all children. Standards and accountability measures can be interpreted as mandates. Critics of explicit standards and strict accountability measures assert that common standards and standardized accountability may not best attend to the needs and strengths of diverse students (Weinstein, 1996; Bigelow, 1999; McKeon, 1994). However, explicit standards and strict accountability do attend to economic and social interdependency by demonstrating a serious concern that our nation is at risk if it does not improve schooling for all students.

This overview of modern bilingual education legislation and related statutes reveals the strengths and limitations of a morality based on economic and social interdependence. Enticement strategies, such as federal grant programs, emphasize our economic interdependency as a diverse nation. The rationale for granting money to bilingual education is that it is an investment that will benefit the entire nation. Mandates, particularly court decisions, have advanced a morality highlighting our social interdependency. Protecting individuals’ civil rights is seen as contributing to a more fair, well functioning society. However, with language minority student populations reaching near majority proportions, enticements and mandates grounded in a morality based on economic and social interdependency still have not brought about equitable education for language minority students.

What alternative arguments exist that consider and promote the moral dimensions of educating language minority students? In the following section, we explore a morality grounded in spirituality.

Exploring a Spiritual Morality

Addressing the topic of spirituality in educational settings must first be distinguished from a call to introduce organized religion into public policy or school curricula. However, participation in society and schooling does include spiritual dimensions (Wexler, 1996; Purple & Shapiro, 1998; Palmer, 1998; Buber, 1965). In this section, we explore the spiritual dimensions of equitably educating language minority students. We subscribe to Cutri's (in press) definition of spirituality in educational settings as:

1. A quality of personal reflectivity and acknowledgement of a power higher than one's self (Mayes, in press)
2. A compassionate desire to connect with other people and one's self that contributes to a sense of a mission for a greater good (Palmer, 1993, 1998)
3. A motivating and sustaining force for social action (Wexler, 1996)
4. A holistic consideration of people (p. 6)

We will explore how each component of this definition contributes to a spiritual morality and offers insights into fostering equitable public education for language minority students in a diverse democracy.

A quality of personal reflectivity amounts to a willingness to examine your own beliefs and form moral assessments about your beliefs and resulting practices. All teachers have beliefs and assumptions about language minority students that result from the teachings of their own families, personal experiences, hearsay from peers, and the media. Some of these beliefs may be well informed and contribute to constructive interaction with language minority students. However, some of the beliefs held may represent non-constructive stereotypes that impede effective learning and teaching relationships. Most teachers are not trained to examine their own beliefs, form moral assessments of them, and then appropriately maintain, modify, or change their practices. Even when teachers are taught information that could help them in such self-reflection, they are usually only asked to engage with information on an intellectual level. Therefore, their reflection does not consider moral dimensions and they do not participate in reflection with a sense of purpose and a power higher than one's self. In other words, often times the reflection that teachers do engage in regarding their beliefs and assumptions about language minority students remains an objective intellectual exercise rather than a spiritual, or transformative, experience.

Objectivity and an exclusive focus on intellectualism can be overcome when teachers foster "a compassionate desire to connect with other people and one's self that contributes to a sense of a mission for a greater good" (Cutri, in press, p. 6). A desire to connect with other people can be particularly complex when interacting with people from cultural and linguistic backgrounds different than one's own. In this situation, it is easy to focus on differences and

remain detached from other people. This state of detachment allows language minority students and their families to remain mere demographic statistics, rather than be recognized as human beings with whom one can develop a respectful relationship. Additionally, a prolonged sense of detachment from others impacts one's sense of self. Detached from others and from one's self, daily practices become devoid of significance. Teaching then is no longer considered as a profession contributing to a greater good for society and humanity in general.

Reducing teaching to a technical craft without moral significance obscures the relationship between equitably educating language minority students and making the world a better place. However, when teachers consider the education of language minority students to be part of a larger spiritual project to make the world a better place, spirituality becomes a driving force for social action. Teachers can combine their intellectual, emotional, and political commitments with their spiritual commitments. These forces combined provide a stronger base from which to fight the difficult struggle toward equitable education for language minority students.

Too often students are treated as unidimensional entities consisting only of a brain and cognitive needs and strengths. Failing to recognize the impact of students' social, emotional, linguistic, and spiritual dimensions can severely limit the learning process. Similarly, failing to recognize teachers as multidimensional entities compromises the teaching process. In the face of the challenges facing students and teachers today, we cannot afford to dismiss these other sources of strengths and needs. A holistic consideration of people not only focuses attention on the entire person, but also highlights people's potential rather than focusing on their deficits. Such a focus on potential, rather than a deficit approach, greatly increases the possibility for equitably educating language minority students.

We recognize that this type of reflectivity and spirituality, grounded in personal meaning-making and socially progressive action, may make many people committed to progressive social change wary because it appears highly subjective and individual. One person's spiritual quest for meaning, for a direction to serve and affect their environment and fellow humans in positive ways, may run counter to another's. We also recognize that a potential outcome of seeking a spiritual morality through reference to something greater than the individual—even the divine—may not be completely unifying. However, a potential to lead to a plurality of visions of what constitutes desirable progressive social change, does not negate the power of a spiritual referent frame for social or political action. A spiritual referent frame for social or political action may be the most powerful way to effect change and ameliorate self-interest through attending to higher interests or imperatives—as individually perceived. To leave such a motivating force for political and personal action only in the

hands of the political Right, which seems willing to draw upon overtly religious and spiritual rhetoric and fundamental practices, is misguided politically, and weakens the needed power base for socially progressive reform and for recognition of minority language rights in education. Purpel and Shapiro (1995), citing Lerner (1987), note:

[T]he thirst for moral meaning is one of the deepest in American life. Moral vision [Lerner] says, far from being a 'soft issue' is potentially the guts of American politics. It powerfully fuels the 'traditional values' crusade of the Right that continues to haunt and obstruct attempts at a more progressive politics (pp. 378-379).

A commitment to bilingual education rooted in an overarching spiritual morality includes and energizes attention to social and economic interdependency, critical awareness of political processes, and social justice. Simultaneously, a spiritual morality supports and pushes people to recognize additional dimensions of our shared humanity and to consider teaching-learning relationships as having even more significance than purely utilitarian ends. A spiritual morality accesses teachers' intimate concerns and commitments and incorporates them into the public concern of equitably educating language minority students. With such a focus, the economic, social, and spiritual interdependency of people in a diverse democracy can be better understood and facilitated.

We offer the construct of a collective spiritual morality as a means of harnessing the combined powers of intellect, emotions, politics, and spirituality in the fight to provide equitable education for language minority students. Future work must empirically research and critique the potential of a spiritual morality to inform bilingual education public policy, teacher education, and classroom practice.

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