

**Editor's Introduction:
Bilingual Education as a Moral Imperative**

Returning from the NABE Conference this year, I reflected on the changes that have taken place in our field over the past quarter century. Attending this conference in recent years I have noticed that many familiar faces in the crowd slowly and imperceptibly changed. The faces are much younger now and I don't recognize as many of them as before. It seems only recently that the nation took note of the rights of children to equal educational opportunities and of bilingual education as an important aspect of providing those opportunities. While many of us started our academic careers with little knowledge about bilingual education, we quickly embraced it as a truly viable weapon in this fight. Although research was virtually non-existent, we nevertheless believed in the basic right of people to self-determination—including their choice of language. A corollary of this was that children were entitled to comprehensible instruction. Arguably, for the first time in the history of American public education language minority children have acquired a substantial number of advocates who argue on their behalf in the public policy arena. Those of us who attended the birth of Title VII of ESEA had precious little research to support our conviction that bilingual education was a clear means to provide instruction in the many languages that kids in the public schools spoke in their families and communities. The *Bilingual Research Journal* (then the NABE Journal) did not arrive on the scene until eight years later. Given the absence of our knowledge base in those early years, it is somewhat surprising that we were able to consolidate this field into a genuine specialty in American education and subsequently, in research.

As I thought about the last three decades I could not help but wonder what the next thirty years would bring. Will they be as contentious and exhilarating as the first thirty? Will the fresh new faces attending the NABE conferences of the future be up to the ominous challenge now looming over the field like storm clouds? Will the new generation of scholars, teachers, and other bilingual education professionals, enjoy the challenges of course correction as much as those of us who helped to create this field at the outset? These are questions that only time and others can answer. Important parts of the knowledge base have been created although the need for more research in new areas seems as strong as ever. We are much less naive now about the ways in which education must be improved if we are to succeed more often in the quest to educate immigrant children. At the millennium, the question of education rights—for all children—seems to have been submerged in

talk of accountability and high stakes testing. Regrettably, much more accountability is now being demanded of students to learn rather than stressing their rights to quality education. Things shift. The nation as a whole is concerned with remaining competitive with respect to the work force rather than the less tangible aspects of education for civic duty for personal fulfillment and the examined life. The value of learning human languages has taken a back seat to learning computer languages. In that context, the challenges to our field are clear: to move into the new millennium with a clear vision of what we stand for today, as compared to where we stood thirty years ago.

The college years are a time when a young person is expected to experiment with life. It is expected that young people will go forth and in a Quixotic sense to tilt at the various windmills of life. Every generation of college students seems to do that with their own brand of energy and exuberance. For the first generation of bilingual educators, rooted in the 1960s, an important era faded. After tilting at those windmills of inequality and warmongering that characterized our generation we tried to incorporate some of our idealism into our lives as we joined the 'real world.' We worked, paid taxes, and attempted to play by the rules. The elements for a fulfilling life were all there. We had college degrees. We spoke English. We were young. We were ready to contribute.

Making a commitment to the field of bilingual education and the children that are helped in this process would insure that our lives would never be dull. The moral outrages which we had fought with great conviction never ended. Students and young activists continued to follow us into adulthood, and we continued to fight. With bilingual education becoming a career for many of us, it has at times felt as if someone else is in control of our lives. No matter how many studies on the effectiveness of bilingual education make it into print, the media wars are being won by cultural and linguistic zealots who can only see the world one way—theirs. No matter how much suffering is put upon English language learners, it seems that the relentless and bigoted attacks will never cease. And the general education community does little to alter or suppress these moral deficiencies.

For the past thirty years bilingual education has had to labor under conditions never before faced by other educators in the United States. Bilingual educators have often worked in substandard schools, with substandard administrators, and peers who do not care enough for their students. They have worked with the federal government looking over one shoulder and xenophobes looking over the other. With hardly any positive recognition, they have worked while an unforgiving and uncaring

public waits for the one mistake that will conclusively ‘prove’ bilingual education is a waste of money, time, and effort.

Like many of my colleagues at the conference every year, I renew my commitment to the original principles which have brought all of us a new century. This issue of the *Bilingual Research Journal* continues to sound the alarm in our continuing struggle. The ‘old guard’ of bilingual educators will inevitably shrink. It is time for a new and invigorated legion of scholars to pick up the standard and carry the work of equity into the new millennium. The scholarship collected in this issue shows that the new scholars are up to the task.

In the first of several excellent articles, Abdeljalil Akkari addresses the issues that bilingual education needs to confront if it is to succeed beyond being a means to mainstream language minority children. Akkari traces the historical context of international bilingual education and the different models of bilingual instruction, and arrives at the conclusion that it should be the perfect opportunity to practice critical pedagogy in order to bring about productive sociocultural change. His contribution gives our view of bilingual education a decided international perspective at times missing in the discussions among U.S. practitioners. Akkari’s words exemplify the need to address the morality of the outrage conducted against innocent children in a classroom of the world.

Gary G. Aspiazu, Scott C. Bauer, and MaryDee Spillet provide the reader with a rare glimpse inside a Central American community education center in New Orleans. The article traces the creation of this center through the use of ‘liberation theology’, as a method to bring about educational change and address issues of powerlessness and empowerment in a small minority community. The reader is struck by the strong sense of parental concern and involvement demonstrated by the parents. However, in communities where bilingual education has been a focal point of community (parental), interaction, academic gains as well as feelings of betterment are often reported. This contribution to the bilingual education literature demonstrates why parents should be involved in not only bilingual programs, but in all of their children’s education. These authors show how empowerment and ‘liberation’ come from this involvement. For the very poor and dispossessed in our schools, survival in the United States is often related to the strength of the family. A strong sense of community also begins with strong families. The community center created by these participants saw actual academic improvement in students as well as experiencing a sense of community togetherness. This is an important concept for bilingual educators to grasp and understand. This article makes this point exceedingly well.

Mary Brenner's article on mathematical communication among language minority students is an excellent view of two distinct approaches to math education for English language learners. This research has implications for how language minority students actually learn concepts. It reports on a comparative study between two approaches to the study of algebra. Because little research exists in the education of English language learners at the secondary level, this is a welcome addition to the literature. Brenner compares the results from two classrooms using the same educational program. However, the end result was that students in one classroom outperformed the students in the other. Brenner delves into the "why" behind this result.

The next article in this issue is by Cynthia Brock, Mary Birgit McVee, Angela M. Shojgreen-Downer, and Leila Flores Dueñas. It is a fascinating case study view of literacy development in one particular child from Mexico. Brock and her co-authors explore this development and conclude that expectations in the United States and realities in Mexico come together to produce mixed results. Although the child in this case worked diligently to acquire the literacy asked for by her teachers, her background and the language of instruction had not been adequately considered in order to understand the needs of this particular child. Brock concludes that more knowledge about the child and her system of literacy preparation and learning could have proved useful to the teachers in the United States. Brock, et. al. provide a good roadmap for other teachers in attempting to understand the literacy development in immigrant students.

Rosemary Foster's article on the characteristics of a 'successful' bilingual education program (French immersion), in Canada represents an excellent report on why parents and students chose to continue with an immersion experience where others have given up. Foster points out that French immersion in Canada is losing enrollment each year, and with this in mind, she focuses on the perspectives of a select group of students who had elected to remain with their French immersion program.

Rafael Lara Alecio, Richard Parker, Claudia Aviles, Samantha Mason, and Beverly Irby present us with another timely study in mathematics education focusing on the use of manipulatives as an instructional methodology for Hispanic English Language Learners. In this basic research examining a narrow subject, the researchers were able to isolate the variables they wished to examine. While the study had positive findings for ELLs, the researchers felt that a larger sample would be necessary to demonstrate more dramatic findings. The study also found other factors that were not anticipated.

This contribution is also the first study to be published in Spanish since the new editors assumed their roles in the fall of 1998. We wish to express our gratitude to the external reviewers who made the publication of this paper possible.

Robert A. Peña examines a very interesting issue in his look at the interactions between parents and school officials in an attempt to convert from a traditional educational program to a dual language program. Peña's inside look is not a pleasant view of how the socio-political context of schools gets corrupted by school officials with a different agenda than the one which parents have for their children. Peña spent 21 months attending meetings and interviewing parents and school officials. The result is a very in-depth analysis of parent-school interaction. This type of research is extremely slow, painstaking, and very rare today. Peña's view of home-school interactions is a rare treat for those who know the importance of these interactions.

Elizabeth Arnot-Hopffer and Patrick Smith offer a most interesting insider's view of the creation and implementation of how a successful bilingual program was created in Tucson, Arizona. Stressing literacy development in Spanish and biliteracy in English, the researchers illuminate how a local school can create programs aimed at meeting local needs. The researchers stress the point that often local educators are better at gauging the needs of local children as opposed to schools following nationally developed curricula. The research presented confirms what other researchers have long pointed out. That is essentially, that literacy in the first language transfers to literacy development in the second language. Also, this particular local model of bilingual education demonstrates how effective bilingual education can be with exceptional students. The researchers are quick to point out that this particular model may not be the panacea for all bilingual education programs across the nation. However, given the proper support at all levels, schools may be able to use the *Exito Bilingüe* model to create their own locally appropriate programs.

Kip Téllez's study of course placement and achievement among elementary bilingual students presents a basic problem for many districts with high numbers of ELLs. It is assumed that initial placement of students in bilingual classes is not only important, but also routine and appropriate. Téllez's study of a large metropolitan school district showed that the placement for many students is uneven and unlikely to support the goals of bilingual or ESL education. This study has much to offer school administrators concerned with the effectiveness of bilingual

education programs. This effectiveness is viewed here from several perspectives: 1) students jumping around in class placements (uneven placements), 2) the failure of schools to properly assess the child's needs, 3) instruction that does not provide for maximum learning, and 4) providing children with unqualified teachers. This study is a must read for those interested in researching the many variables involved in ELL children's educational progress in our schools.

In our Research in Practice section, Barbara Harrison details the development of a Maori language immersion program for children ages 5 to 17, in a New Zealand community. The article is a historical piece detailing how each year of school was added, until all grades were operational. Harrison, with a great deal of attention to detail, carefully plots the development of this program and gives the reader an inside look at the issues involved in heritage language maintenance. Harrison also helps us understand the history of the relationships involved in the two societies essentially coming together through the auspices of 'schooling.' There are issues of community involvement and leadership, the training of Maori-speaking teachers and Maori administrators, as well as the future of funding for Maori language programs, that are also explored in an in-depth manner. The issues brought forth by this research are of the utmost importance if such programs are to continue in the future.

Our first book review in this issue is a treat because it is written by one of the 'founding scholars' of American bilingualism studies, Joshua Fishman. Fishman reviews the *Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* by Colin Baker and Sylvia Prys-Jones. Fishman does a masterful job of informing the reader of the importance of this enormous contribution to the field of bilingualism and bilingual education. Fishman believes "there are really at least three fine and substantially separate introductory books here"—a superb (and well-deserved) compliment to the authors. Professor Fishman is impressed by this book with its tremendous detail, and calls it "one of the very best books in this field of the millennium."

Our second book review is an intense look at T.G. Wiley's *Literacy and Language Diversity in the United States* (1996), by Jule Gómez de García. Gómez de García delves deeply into the subject of literacy among linguistically diverse populations and how policy makers create policies that ignore the needs of linguistically diverse populations. The review is a well-written and studious view of literacy as a means of making decisions about children who often are merely statistics—as in

a comparison of majority and minority children's performance on standardized tests. Gómez de García also looks at Wiley's three scholarly orientations toward literacy and the implications these have for a diverse society.

• • • • •

I began this introduction worrying that we might be in danger of having the fire for bilingual education in our hearts being diminished by the adversities we face. With the recent heightened attacks on bilingual education it is difficult to imagine that. However, after reflecting for several weeks on the contributions contained in this issue, I have hedged on this view. While not completely convinced that we are doing all that we should be doing in research and in higher education in particular, I am heartened by the contributions contained in this issue. It demonstrates that bilingual researchers have not lost their desire to attempt to make a difference in children's lives. Like issues raised by researchers before them, the topics taken on in this installment of the *BRJ* are the types of issues that make some people uncomfortable. And they should make many people uncomfortable. Yet, the manner in which the work has been carried out and reported is indeed a credit to our authors and reviewers.

Alfredo H. Benavides
Tempe, Arizona
April 2000