Class Placement of Elementary School Emerging Bilingual Students

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Abstract

The present study tracks course placement and achievement from a large data set of "LEP" elementary students. The results indicate that the course placement for many students is uneven and unlikely to support the goals of bilingual or ESL education. For instance, many native Spanish-speaking students who began their schooling in a bilingual education classroom were later placed in ESL classes, then placed back into bilingual education, resulting in language learning disruptions. An analysis of achievement data suggests improper placement may result in lower achievement. However, it is argued that the general data collected by schools does not currently render much useful evaluation of bilingual or ESL education.

Krashen and Biber's 1988 work "On Course: The Condition of Bilingual Education in California" is one of many research studies documenting the effectiveness of bilingual education (e.g., Collier, 1992; Ramirez, Yuen & Ramey, 1991; Troike, 1978). Their study illustrated that bilingual education, when implemented properly, results in high academic gains. This paper explores the language class placement of non-English-speaking children in elementary school. Specifically, what are the language placement class sequences for Emerging Bilingual (EB)[1] elementary students? Are EB students "on course" for success? Additionally, how long do native Spanish-speaking EB students spend in bilingual education classes? In other words, do elementary age EB students begin in a bilingual education class then move to an English as a Second Language (ESL) class? Or is their class placement less educationally sound? For instance, do some students begin in an ESL class and then move to a bilingual class? The former class sequence would seem to disrupt English language acquisition and hinder native language development. A related question is how long do native Spanish-speaking EB students spend in bilingual education classes? Given the reported shortage of bilingual education teachers, do students frequently enter and exit bilingual education classes? What percentage of elementary EB students are placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes instead of bilingual education? Equally important, how many parents refuse to place their child in language-learning classrooms (i.e., bilingual or ESL)? The research literature on EB students thus far has been unable to address these questions. The present study examines a large data set of EB students over a four-year period to assess course sequence patterns. A corollary, but provisional, analysis of EB academic achievement linked to course sequence was also conducted.

Class sequence is a crucial element in language learning; especially important is the year in which students are transitioned out of a language-learning class. The data reporting class sequence or course of specific programs are rich, pointing out researchers' penchant for examining model programs. Gersten and Woodward (1995), for instance, analyzed data from a recent, well–controlled bilingual program in which language class sequence was ensured in a longitudinal setting. However, special programs that promise to ensure quality class placements do not necessarily reflect the common experience of EB elementary students. Indeed, educators and policy makers are given to understand that teacher shortages cause deep and enduring gaps in the delivery of language-learning classes. Finding the shortcomings in course sequence placement cannot be answered by studying special programs.

Experienced educators know that special programs, often by virtue of the experimental focus, can show impressive academic gains. However, few studies to date have explored the language acquisition of the EB student not served by a special or experimental program. By examining large student data sets, the chasm between educational ideals and policy constraints can be documented.

Requirements of a Sound Bilingual and ESL Education

For most children, becoming literate takes considerable time and effort. Similarly, children learning a second language must make great cognitive and emotional investments if they are to succeed. Yet, it is these two challenging acts of the human intellect, literacy in the native language and learning a second language, that form the axles on which the wheels of bilingual education turn. The twin goals of literacy in the native language while mastering a second language require high quality instruction. If bilingual education proceeds as planned, students enter late elementary school with sound content area knowledge, grade-level literacy skills in their native language, oral proficiency (and often strong literacy skills) in English, and pride in their cultural and linguistic heritage (Cummins, 1989). When fully implemented, bilingual education develops strong literacy skills in the native language, the linchpin of bilingual education. Without a strong foundation in literacy and academic development in the native language, the transition to English results in low literacy and cognitive skills in *two* languages. The distressing data documenting the large number of Latino dropouts, many of whom began their schooling in bilingual education, suggests that something, somewhere, has gone wrong (Kaufman & Frase, 1990). Strengthening bilingual education programs may be part of the solution, although a cause and effect relationship has not been clearly established.

Given the demands on bilingual education programs, it is clear that bilingual education must maintain the highest standards of internal consistency. ESL education, while not generally focused on native-language literacy, must develop literacy skills in a second language. This endeavor is equal to the challenge in bilingual education; therefore, ESL education must also be mindful of consistency over time.

As the debate over the most effective and efficient method for educating the nation's EB population intensifies, the instructional sequence of EB students will come under increasing scrutiny. Instructional sequence is a critical element in any language-learning program, especially when the goal of the language-learning program is eventual mastery of the dominant language in both its written and oral forms, as is the case in transitional bilingual education. This debate, although not often characterized as such, is concerned with language acquisition class sequence. For instance, in early-exit bilingual programs students begin literacy instruction and content area learning in the native language, but students exit at the second or third grade into a non-language-learning class (Milk, 1993). Late-exit programs maintain native-language instruction much longer, sometimes as late as fifth grade, when students are moved to English instruction. In spite of the principal differences between these two approaches, their primary difference lies in the year in which students are exited from bilingual or ESL education. In this sense, the difference can be considered a class sequence difference.

Evaluation Challenges in Bilingual Education

The evidence documenting the effectiveness of bilingual and ESL education has become a political and methodological flashpoint. As Cziko (1992) points out in his review of the studies examining the effects of bilingual education, the research generally demonstrates the greatest success not for the typical programs, but for those that *could* exist, such as two-way bilingual programs (native English-speakers learn Spanish alongside native Spanish-speakers learning English). However, the political forces seeking to muddy the research findings in favor of an emotional appeal to monolinguals (who fear the nation is failing to "assimilate" EB children into U.S. culture) cannot be ignored (Porter, 1990).

Cummins (1992) argues that the most comprehensive and methodologically sound study of the academic effects of bilingual education was conducted by Ramirez, Pasta, Ramey, and Billings (1991). Now known widely as simply "the Ramirez report," this eight-year study of Limited English Proficient Latino students investigated the effects of three separate English language acquisition programs: (a) the English "immersion" approach, in which students are taught almost entirely in English throughout their elementary school years; (b) early–exit bilingual programs in which Spanish is used for instructional purposes about 30% of the time in Kindergarten and first grade and phased out quickly; (c) late-exit bilingual programs that use primarily Spanish instruction in Kindergarten, English for 30% of instruction in grades 1 and 2, 50% English in 3rd grade, and about 60% thereafter. The results of the Ramirez report indicate that late-exit bilingual education produced higher gains in math, English oral skills, and English reading as fast or faster than other courses. However, in spite of Cummins' endorsement and the promising findings, recent investigators have been critical of the report's methodology (Willig and Ramirez, 1993).

In contrast to the Ramirez report, Gándara and Merino (1993), who set out to study the efficacy of several language acquisition approaches (bilingual late exit, bilingual early exit, double immersion, sheltered English, and ESL pull-out), were forced to abandon their evaluation efforts because even at the instructionally superior schools, the test data were spotty or non-existent. They discovered that when examining programs not designed for evaluative purposes, the data simply did not exist. This finding suggests that very little is known about the experience of common EB students. After outlining the lack of quality data, they make several recommendations. First, that a national definition of limited English proficiency be developed. Second, that the focus on English proficiency be assessed using authentic and performance assessments. Third, a national effort should be mounted to develop several national "anchor" items which would allow better assessments. Fourth, that the policymaker's question, "Which program most quickly moves students into the educational mainstream?" be replaced with the question, "Which program yields the highest level of language proficiency (in two languages) and the greatest eagerness to learn?"

In summary, the data documenting the effectiveness of different models of bilingual education are sound. However, this evidence has often been limited to specialized programs and programs designed specifically for evaluation purposes. Even the Ramirez report was based on groups formed for the purpose of evaluation, not research. On the other hand, large scale data sets demonstrating the effectiveness of various approaches as they occur as a result of teacher supply, student home language, and program policy do not exist. It seems a wise beginning to examine the language course sequence of EB children.

Data Source

The present study uses a four-year longitudinal data set taken from the Public Education Information System (PEIMS) records in the state of Texas. These data record general categories of student characteristics, many aimed at securing funds for students in special programs (e.g., economically disadvantaged, special education). School districts in Texas are required to record PEIMS data and submit them to the state.

The data sets in the study began by selecting all LEP[2] students from the PEIMS data from four large school districts in the Houston area, whose combined total student population is over 309,000. This data set contained approximately 80,000 LEP students. Because this figure included secondary LEP students (recall the focus of this study is class placement of elementary EB learners), the data set was narrowed by selecting only those students in grades K, 1, and 2 who were classified as "LEP" in the school year 1990-1991. And because the study wanted to reflect the course placements of "average" students, special education students were excluded from the data.

Three cohort groups were then chosen to offer a wider view of class placements. Each cohort group provided data over a four-year period (1990-1994). The first cohort's sequence (Cohort 1) began in Kindergarten and ended

in the third grade; the second cohort's (Cohort 2) sequence began in first grade and ended in the fourth grade; the third cohort's (Cohort 3) sequence began in the second grade and ended in the fifth grade. However, the current data set did not include all EB students. First, only students who remained at the same school during all four years of the data were included.[3] This constraint was placed on the analysis because it was not considered reasonable to expect schools to provide sequential language placements for students who entered and exited schools frequently. The data were limited to students who were classified as "LEP" for all four years of the data. An estimate of the number of students who exited language-learning classrooms after the first year can be derived from the number of students who remained in the data set. For Cohort 1, 4,962 students who were classified as LEP in their first year of the data remained in the data set after eliminating those students who did not remain at the same school for all four years. However, after culling only those students who were LEP classified all four years, the number decreased to 4,221 (a 15% decrease). An analysis of the counterpart data for Cohort 2 revealed a 28% decrease from 5,175 to 3,738. Cohort 3 began with 4,517 students but diminished to 3,021 (a 33% decrease).

Students whose parents chose not to enroll their children in language-learning programs were included in the data. Whereas many parents in this category opted to exempt their children from bilingual or ESL for all four years, students were placed in the parent denial category even if their parents removed them from language-learning class once during the four years.[4]

The data were organized into three cohort groups. The first Cohort of students were Kindergartners in the 1990-1991 school year. The data set followed Cohort 1 to the 1993-1994 school year, when they were third graders. Cohort 2 was composed of students who were first graders in 1990-1999 and followed them to 1993-1994, when they were in the fourth grade. Cohort 3 began in the same year (1990-1991), when these students were in the second grade and followed to the fifth grade. After the data were organized into the three cohort groups, students were tallied by the class sequence they experienced. Tallies were made for each possible class sequence combination. For instance, all the students who were placed in bilingual education for all four years were tallied. Similarily, each student who was placed in ESL for all four years was counted with other students who had experienced the same class placement.

Results

Table 1 presents data for Cohort 1, students who were in Kindergarten in 1990-1991. Presented are the frequencies for the total number of students and the number of students disaggregated by home language. (These data definitions also apply to the following two tables.)

Table 1

Class Sequences, Number of Students, Placement by Home Language, Cohort 1

Top row: Student Grade, (Year) **Remaining rows: Class Replacement**				**Number of students**	**Number of students by home language**
K (1990-91)	**1** (1991-92)	**2** (1992-93)	**3** (1993-94)		
B	B	B	B	2,499	2,499 (Spanish)
N	N	N	N	725	678 (Spanish) 28 (Vietnamese) 10 (Other) 5 (Korean) 3 (Chinese) 1 (Cambodian)
E	E	E	E	325	235 (Spanish) 58 (Vietnamese) 18 (Other) 8 (Cambodian) 3 (Chinese) 1 (Laotian) 1 (Korean)
N	B	B	B	168	168 (Spanish)
B	B	B	E	111	111 (Spanish)
E	B	B	B	86	86 (Spanish)
E	E	B	B	71	71 (Spanish)
B	B	E	E	55	55 (Spanish)
N	E	E	E	49	45 (Spanish) 3 (Vietnamese) 1 (Other)
B	E	E	E	46	46 (Spanish)
E	E	E	B	23	23 (Spanish)
N	E	B	B	22	22 (Spanish)
B	B	B	N	18	18 (Spanish)
B	B	E	B	13	13 (Spanish)
E	E	B	E	10	10 (Spanish)
Total				**4,221**	

Note. N = Not enrolled in ESL or Bilingual Class ("Regular"); B = Bilingual class placement; E = ESL class placement; NNNN = Students whose parents denied language class placement. The total number of students in the sample equaled 4,328; therefore, 107 students experienced a class placement not represented by the above sequences. None of the other class sequences totaled more than 10 students.

Perhaps the most striking finding in this table is the number of native Spanish-speaking students who participated in four years of bilingual education. Out of a total of 4,221 students, only 2,499 participated in bilingual education all four years. Examining the other sequence categories, over 725 students were excluded from either bilingual or ESL owing to parents who signed waivers opting them out of language-learning classes. The next largest group was made up of those students who participated in ESL all four years (N=325). This category, not surprisingly, contained the most students whose native language was not Spanish. These values suggest that across the four school districts and their individual schools, the low number of languages of speakers other than Spanish do not support the initiation of bilingual classes. However, 235 of the students who received ESL instruction all four years were native Spanish-speakers. These students are perhaps the victims of bilingual teacher shortages. As native speakers of Spanish, their proper placement would have been four to five years of bilingual education with perhaps a later transition to ESL. The native Spanish-speaking children who participated in ESL all four years missed a critical opportunity to learn to read and write in Spanish. The remainder of the class sequences demonstrates placement problems, which may be very disruptive to the language-learning process. For instance, 71 native Spanish-speaking students were placed in ESL classes for Kindergarten and first grade, presumably learning oral and written English, only to be placed in bilingual classes for second and third grade, where they would be asked to engage in Spanish literacy activities. This type of class sequence must be disruptive to early literacy development.

Other placements demonstrate the exigencies of teacher supply. Students who lacked a language-learning class placement (N) in any year experienced a major disruption. It is important to remember that the data set included only students who remained at the school for all four years. Therefore, it cannot be argued that the schools these students attended were not ready for them and therefore could not prepare for their class sequence.

Cohort 2, first graders in 1990-1991, was well represented by students who experienced non-sequential language placements (see Table 2).

Table 2

Class Sequence, Number of Students, Placement by Home Language, Cohort 2

Top row: Student Grade, (Year) **Remaining rows: Class placement**				**Number of students**	**Number of students by home language**
1 (1990-91)	**2** (1991-92)	**3** (1992-93)	**4** (1993-94		
B	B	B	B	2,001	2,001 (Spanish)
N	N	N	N	643	610 (Spanish) 16 (Vietnamese) 15 (Other) 1 (Laotian) 1 (Korean)
B	B	B	E	328	328 (Spanish)
E	E	E	E	326	248 (Spanish) 41 (Vietnamese) 16 (Cambodian) 10 (Other) 6 (Korean) 4 (Chinese) 1 (Laotian)
B	B	E	E	88	88 (Spanish)
N	B	B	B	74	74 (Spanish)
E	B	B	B	52	52 (Spanish)
E	E	B	B	47	47 (Spanish)
B	E	E	E	42	42 (Spanish)
B	B	B	N	38	38 (Spanish)
N	E	E	E	29	27 (Spanish) 1 (Vietnamese) 1 (Cambodian)
B	B	E	B	24	24 (Spanish)

B	B	N	B	23	23 (Spanish)
B	E	B	B	17	17 (Spanish)
E	B	E	E	14	14 (Spanish)
E	E	E	N	13	10 (Spanish) 1 (Vietnamese) 2 (Other)
E	E	E	B	12	12 (Spanish)
B	N	B	E	10	10 (Spanish)
Total				**3,738**	

Note. N = Not enrolled in ESL or Bilingual Class ("Regular"); B = Bilingual class placement; E = ESL class placement; NNNN = Students whose parents denied language class placement. The total number of students in the sample equaled 3,861; therefore, 128 students experienced a class placement not represented by the above sequences. None of the other class sequences totaled more than 10 students.

For instance, 328 students were placed in bilingual education classes for first, second, and third grades, and then transitioned into ESL in fourth grade (represented by the sequence "BBBE"). Because these students were still classified as "LEP," their proper placement was another year of bilingual education. Cohort 2 again demonstrates that many native Spanish-speakers were enrolled in ESL classes all four years; these students were also inappropriately placed. Seventy-four students were not enrolled in a language-learning class during their first grade but were subsequently placed in bilingual education for the next three years. In another instance, 42 students were placed in bilingual education for first grade, only to be placed in ESL classes for the following three years.

Cohort 3 data demonstrate that as elementary students increase in age, the number of students classified as "LEP" decreases (see Table 3).

Table 3

Class Sequence, Number of Students, Placement by Home Language, Cohort 3

Top row: Student Grade, (Year) **Remaining rows: Class placement**				**Number of students in each class sequence**	**Number of students by home language**
2 (1990-91)	**3** (1991-92)	**4** (1992-93)	**5** (1993-94)		
B	B	B	B	1,125	1,125 (Spanish)
N	N	N	N	569	545 (Spanish) 11 (Vietnamese) 2 (Cambodian) 2 (Laotian) 9 (Other)
B	B	E	E	339	339 (Spanish)
B	B	B	E	336	336 (Spanish)
E	E	E	E	248	195 (Spanish) 30 (Vietnamese) 14 (Other) 1 (Laotian) 5 (Cambodian) 3 (Korean)
B	E	E	E	109	109 (Spanish)
N	E	E	E	70	66 (Spanish) 3 (Cambodian) 1 (Vietnamese)
N	B	B	B	55	55 (Spanish)
E	B	B	B	33	33 (Spanish)
E	E	B	B	31	31 (Spanish)
B	B	E	B	30	30 (Spanish)
B	B	B	N	27	27 (Spanish)

E	E	E	N	12	10 (Spanish) 2 (Other)
N	E	B	B	12	12 (Spanish)
B	E	B	B	10	10 (Spanish)
E	E	E	B	10	10 (Spanish)
Total				**3,021**	

Note. N = Not enrolled in ESL or Bilingual Class ("Regular"); B = Bilingual class placement; E = ESL class placement; NNNN = Students whose parents denied language class placement. The total number of students in the sample equaled 3,110; therefore, 89 students experienced a class placement not represented by the above sequences. None of the other class sequences totaled more than 10 students.

Cohort 3 represented a total of 3,021 students, and, like the younger cohort groups, the majority of the students were placed in bilingual education for all four years. However, an examination of other class sequences shows that 109 students (all native Spanish-speakers) were placed in ESL classes after just one year of bilingual education. This placement represents early exit from bilingual education and may eliminate the positive literacy effects of bilingual education in the early grades. If children begin learning to read in Spanish, only to transition abruptly into English instruction after one or two years, they are unlikely to have achieved enough generalized literacy skills to make the transition to English reading an easy one. Cohort 3 also reveals a greater percentage of students whose parents chose not to have them placed in any language-learning class. Such parents may believe that their EB children must begin to participate in general school programs as they approach middle school, where language-learning classes may be less common.

Limitations

The limitations of the data in this study center around three important themes. First, those who work in language-learning education know that simply because a class is categorized as bilingual, there is no guarantee that the students in that class are receiving native language instruction. Bilingual teachers are often prevailed upon to teach more English than research and theory in bilingual education call for. Principals and non-language-learning teachers who fail to understand bilingual education may compel bilingual teachers to develop English-speaking skills at the expense of literacy in Spanish. In addition, some bilingual teachers, in spite of being bilingual themselves, lack trust in the foundational literacy theory of bilingual education

and thereby fail to encourage native language literacy, focusing on English reading and writing instead.

Conversely, a class not considered bilingual might invite students to read books and perhaps receive instruction in their native language. This predicament may become more common; many bilingual teachers report that the paperwork and extra effort involved in bilingual education compels them to teach in non-language-learning classes. However, because such refugee teachers are bilingual themselves, they often read books in Spanish and may encourage children to write in Spanish. Of course, there is no way to circumvent this potential threat to the study's internal validity without visiting each and every classroom and documenting language use. But if we trust that for *most* classes labeled bilingual a significant portion of the day is spent on Spanish instruction, then the large data set can be considered valid.

Second, it is also important to point out that many bilingual teachers in Texas do not hold clear teaching certificates (i.e., the shortage has caused schools to hire so-called emergency permit teachers). Data from the Texas Education Agency (Texas Education Agency, 1999) report that over 30% of all Texas bilingual teachers do not hold the bilingual certificate and are therefore teaching without the proper education or without having passed the required tests. A greater percentage of ESL teachers are fully certified, but earning the ESL certificate in Texas requires passing a paper and pencil test only; coursework, though available, is not required. Therefore, even classes labeled bilingual or ESL may be staffed by teachers who do not understand the fundamental purposes of their teaching context. For instance, a bilingual teacher may teach all day in Spanish but fail to provide the proper ESL component.

Third, four years of data do not include the total language acquisition sequence for many EB students. Those students who began bilingual Kindergarten in 1991 (Cohort 1) were followed only through the third grade. For these students, another year of bilingual education would indicate a late exit program. However, such a conclusion cannot be drawn from this data. Similarly, Cohort 3 students lacked data for grades 1 and 2, again making it impossible to determine whether these students participated in an intact bilingual or ESL program. Additional efforts must be made to develop complete data sets for EB students.

Discussion

Do these data suggest that the schools in this study were providing satisfactory language-learning class sequences? Because this is the first study to track EB students' course sequence, this obvious question has no definite answer. While it is true that many students experienced the proper placement, many others jumped from one class to another and others failed to receive much specialized language instruction at all. Could the students in these latter categories be considered the "failures" of language-learning programs? We know that many EB children do not acquire the requisite literacy skills needed for secondary and tertiary education. But we cannot lay the blame on bilingual

education when a student spends one or two years in bilingual education only to be moved out of the bilingual class the following year because the school could not find a certified teacher. Such a student did not receive the full benefits of bilingual education and consequently failed to reach the threshold literacy skills in Spanish to ensure a successful transition to English literacy.

What could be the cause of the failure to provide students with a proper learning sequence? Perhaps the interruption to language learning could be the result of teacher shortages, but such a finding is difficult to prove. It is clear that there is a severe shortage of bilingual teachers in Texas, but instead of placing students with bilingual or ESL teachers, the state has encouraged (through the liberal granting of emergency permits) school districts to hire teachers without the required teaching certificate. And yet even in a state where emergency permits are very easy to obtain, many students were bounced from one class to another. The data in this study, however, cannot provide specific information on the number of teachers on emergency permits whose students were included in this study. Nevertheless, the number of emergency permit teachers in Texas is far too high. Policymakers could therefore serve EB students by ensuring an adequate supply of bilingual and ESL teachers. One clear solution is to make significant and lasting moneys available to support the certification efforts of high school students who wish to become bilingual teachers. The United States has failed to nurture its youthful bilingual talent, though programs like Career Ladder, a grant funded by the Office of Bilingual and Language Minority Affairs, is making some headway. The state of Texas, which is second only to California in the number of EB students, has no statewide initiatives to increase the number of ESL and bilingual teachers.

Another potential reason for non-sequential class placements is the class size "cap" in Texas. Kindergarten through Grade 4 classes in public elementary schools are capped at 22 students. Therefore, if a bilingual teacher reaches 23 students, the school administration is bound by the education code to remove one student and place him or her in another, smaller class. In reality, teachers regularly agree to classes with a few more students than the 22 the law mandates, but schools who adhere strictly to the class cap may take their more capable bilingual learners, with parent permission of course, and put them in a regular class if that will ensure that the teacher's class can stay under 22. This issue cannot be addressed using the data in this study.

As a first attempt at documenting the class sequence of common EB students, this study's most prominent conclusion is that further research is needed. Yet, the results of this study clearly demonstrate that many EB students are not receiving appropriate class sequence. Indeed, such students are "off course."

However, assessing the negative effects of unsound class sequences cannot be adequately answered without some form of literacy assessment. As a corollary and very preliminary investigation, this study linked the results of the statewide reading achievement test, known as the Texas Assessment of

Academic Skills, or TAAS, with students by class sequence. Before reporting the general findings, several important caveats must be proffered. First, the TAAS test in the final year of the study was given only in English. Consequently, no statewide measure of literacy achievement in Spanish was available. A Spanish version of the TAAS was given to third grade bilingual education students in 1992, after which additional Spanish versions were not developed. It took over seven years to develop a complete Spanish TAAS test, which will be required of all bilingual education students in 1999.

Further, even the English TAAS data are mere shadows of actual emerging bilingual student achievement. Because the TAAS test data are reported as the percent of students who pass the test (the State Board of Education quite arbitrarily established a cut-score of 70% of items correct), schools are very strategic in which students they test. Students classified as "LEP" can be exempted from the TAAS test for up to three years, but schools can choose to test those students they believe will pass, thus amplifying the percentage of their students who took the test and passed. "LEP" students might also have taken the test but their scores were not included in a school's pass or fail categories.

With these caveats in place, the data demonstrated that in each cohort, the highest scoring students on the English TAAS were those whose parents opted them out of any language-learning class, even though the mean score for these students did not rise above the passing standard. The lowest scoring group in each cohort was comprised of students who were placed in bilingual programs all four years. The remainder of the course sequences essentially indicated that the less consistent the course placement, the lower the achievement. Achievement data taken from a Spanish test may reveal great successes by those students who participated in bilingual education, indicating that future instruction in English would build on existing literacy and numeracy knowledge in Spanish. The most important issue is that there was no large-scale measurement program in Spanish for such students and therefore no way to tell. The limitations of the TAAS data curtail any hard conclusions regarding the effects of course sequence on academic achievement. The course experience and literacy achievement of the common EB student, and thus the programs in which they participate, remains largely unevaluated.

This study corroborates the findings of Lam and Gordon (1992), who found that few states had clear guidelines for testing EB students and the majority of those states that did test EB students made no modifications to the test or testing procedure. Duran (1989) also points out the need for better testing of language minority students.

Nationwide, legislation contained in Goals 2000 and the Title I Reauthorization Act mandates that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) include more EB students in its program. Perhaps the new NAEP procedures will provide a clearer picture of the common EB student's academic growth. In Texas, the development of a Spanish TAAS could demonstrate that bilingual education does indeed promote high literacy skills in Spanish, skills that can be brought to bear in the acquisition of English

literacy. But the TAAS tests, in spite of being the only required measure of student achievement in the state of Texas, has undergone little policy or psychometric scrutiny. The development of the Spanish TAAS continues this unfortunate tradition. Texas Education Agency officials have admitted that the Spanish tests were merely translated from the English versions and not built directly from the Spanish instructional objectives (Starz, 1998). Nor were the English and Spanish properly equated. Therefore, equal performances on the English and Spanish tests will reveal lower scores on the Spanish test, thus underestimating the academic achievement of bilingual students. The only conclusion we can draw from the assessment predicament in Texas is that Gándara and Merino (1993) are correct: the current achievement data by EB students are "mythological."

The impact of class sequence, however, deserves to be properly assessed. Educators and policymakers need to know the effects of improper class sequences, and a strong dependent variable is necessary. Tests that measure linguistic or academic achievement in a single language, by default, underestimate cognitive achievement in EB students. Recent advances in combined language aptitude and achievement testing are showing promise. One of these developments is the Bilingual Verbal Abilities Test (Munoz, Shrank, Cummins & Alvarado, 1998). Briefly described, this test first presents verbal ability items in English and then offers missed items in the student's other language. Early reports suggest that this assessment process provides better estimates of academic achievement because students can take advantage of their linguistic flexibility (Shrank, Fletcher & Alvarado, in press).

Finally, the equivocal interpretations of the data should not detract those who are responsible for the policy decisions regarding EB children from the research on the cognitive and social advantages of bilingualism. Studies such as Hakuta and Diaz (1985) and Bialystok (1991) strongly support the view that bilingualism, in general, and biliteracy, in particular, result in positive consequences for metalinguistic development. Policymakers and educators must stay the course during the certain and heated political debate over English-only proposals and their impact on language-learning classes. Consistent, sequential ESL and bilingual class placements offer children an educationally sound and humane introduction to the English language. Both ESL and bilingual education, when properly implemented, result in a national resource: a multilingual citizenry capable of forging new alliances in an increasingly interdependent world.

Notes

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1. Many second language-learning educators are concerned with the connotations of the term LEP. As a mass term referring to all children for whom English is not the native language, it places a compensatory focus on their education and loses sight of the fact that all children (excepting those with deep organic learning disabilities) learn

a first language in its oral form. Consequently, I prefer the term Emerging Bilingual (EB), a term which better describes the educational goals for such children.

2. The school districts included in this study are given wide latitude in choosing tests to determine those students who are considered "LEP." However, most of the schools included in this study used a combination of the Language Assessment Scale as a measure of oral proficiency and the Aprenda as a measure of Spanish literacy. The final decision to remove a student from a bilingual or ESL class is determined by a committee of language teachers and administrators at each school.

3. The elimination of such students from the data is not meant to imply that such students should not be included in studies of effective language-learning programs. On the contrary, mobile students must be included in future studies. However, this study sought to see how well schools were doing with those students who remain on their campus. In addition, obtaining data for those students who move often would require a database consisting of all students in the state of Texas, the nation, and likely other countries (EB students' U.S. schooling may be interrupted by trips to Mexico). Needless to say, such data are unavailable.

4. Parents of Spanish-speaking children who "denied" their children a placement in bilingual education but who agreed to placement in ESL were included in the parent denial category.

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