



# On Hispanic Education:

## Bilingual School Improvement

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One of the most promising educational movements going on today that could have a significant impact on bilingual education, is the school improvement movement. Emanating from effective schools research, the school improvement movement is an effort to incorporate research premises into school practice. Among the basic tenets of the school improvement movement is that all students, regardless of family background, socioeconomic status, sex, limited English proficiency, etc., will achieve mastery of the essential objectives in each subject area or course. In implementing school improvement, therefore, schools cannot separate excellence from equity because you either have learning for all or you don't have effective schools or effective school improvement.

Bilingual education as an educational intervention to help limited English proficient (LEP) students is therefore getting more attention than previously by schools involved in the school improvement movement. I call this bilingual school improvement. Included in implementing bilingual school improvement are a) improved efforts to operationalize the basic philosophical tenets of multicultural education, b) accountability that LEP students will demonstrate at least minimal academic mastery, c) disaggregation of LEP student data relating to achievement, attendance, and disciplinary behavior d) incorporation of research-based findings in bilingual education, and e) school-based planning and decision-making. Let's discuss.

The basic tenets of multicultural education as found by this researcher are the following: a) Gaining positive self-identify and self-acceptance for oneself and one's culture; b) Accepting and fostering cultural pluralism; c) Developing greater understanding, respect and acceptance of cultural differences in individuals and groups; d) Developing positive and productive interaction among and with persons from diverse cultural groups; and e) Promoting equity among the culturally different groups which compose our community, state, and nation.

In my articles entitled "Minority Language Student Self-Esteem" (El Renacimiento, Feb. 29/March 27, 1988) and "Tenets to Follow in Educating Hispanics" (El Renacimiento, April 28/May 25, 1986) I outline a number of things that schools can do to operationalize the above basic tenets; among these are: a) promoting language pluralism for all students; b) creating a culturally pluralistic school climate, c) having the employee profile in school reflect the racial and language diversity of composition of the student body, and d) having teachers and administrators have a firm grounding in the influence of self-esteem on the academic achievement of minority language students. Promoting and achieving educational equity for all is chief among these.

Bilingual school improvement also includes defining minimum academic mastery as being the acquisition of knowledge, skills and concepts which enable LEP students to be demonstrably successful in the next grade level either in school or in any other school in the community, state or nation. Bilingual school

improvement in schools therefore includes accountability that the proportion of limited English proficiency (LEP) students who demonstrate at least minimal academic mastery shall be the same as the proportion of non-LEP students. Should this not be occurring, then effectively improving schools accept accountability that there shall be annual gains in the percentage of LEP students demonstrating minimal academic mastery until they are achieving at the same proportional level of mastery as non-LEP students.

As a result, schools undergoing school improvement efforts are encouraged to disaggregate student achievement data so as to enable that school to determine which students with which characteristics are not achieving at mastery level. This means that with bilingual school improvement, schools are being urged to more stringently examine achievement levels of students with different ethnicity, national ancestry and language background. When such schools determine that students with such differences are not achieving at a level of other students, then greater efforts should be made assist them. In addition, bilingual school improvement calls for disaggregating data relating to LEP student attendance and disciplinary patterns. It could be that attendance and disciplinary problems could be affecting the LEP student's achievement. Such schools will gather, analyze, and publicize disaggregated student achievement, attendance, and disciplinary data to demonstrate whether or not they are effective in implementing bilingual school improvement.

Bilingual school improvement also incorporates the characteristic of being research-based in its implementation of improvement efforts in bilingual education. Bilingual school improvement is not school improvement unless the program design includes principles and practices which research shows are effective in helping LEP students. Such research findings include, for example, a) the use of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) and not just oral language proficiency as exit criteria from bilingual education programs (see article entitled "CALP for Hispanics," El Renacimiento, May 25/June 28, 1987), b) allowing LEP students to remain in bilingual education programs from five to seven years instead of just three years, and c) utilizing the LEP student's native language to attain knowledge of concepts and subject matter until they are able to do so to the same level of comprehension in English.

Another characteristic of bilingual school improvement is the formation of a building level planning and decision-making team composed of teachers who have the respect of their peers and of the building principal. To be effective, bilingual school improvement must have as a basis, the buy-in and ownership by the very educators who are implementing the improvements that will have an impact on LEP students. The role of the principal as the chief leader and/or the main decision maker has got to change to one of shared leadership with teachers. Empowerment of teachers and shared decision-making are key to bilingual school improvement.