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Critical Analysis of “ Heritage Languages in America: Tapping a ‘ Hidden’ Resource” Critical Analysis of “ Heritage Languages in America: Tapping a ‘ Hidden’ Resource”

James Crawford approaches the idea of multi-lingualism in America as something that need not only be done to preserve the cultural heritage of immigrants, but to expand the capabilities of the entire nation in a globalizing world. His article pinpoints those characteristics of multi-lingualism that are functional both in terms of the individual and of the United States, and explores ideas for expanding literacy programs within the existing education system. Crawford’s fear is that too many Americans are complacent in their knowledge of English only, and that so-called heritage languages, including those of the Native Americans, are being lost when they might benefit the entire nation.

In terms of the individual, Crawford points out research data that clearly suggests the heightened cognitive abilities of people who are fully bilingual. He suggests that these improved abilities are the product of two different language - and therefore two different symbolic - systems: this means that an individual possesses the ability to approach a problem in two different ways and therefore has a greater chance to succeed. These strengthened cognitive skills are only apparent in people who have attained a balanced bilingualism, however, and to instill such strong language skills in American citizens the education system must make significant changes.

At the time the article was written, a mere 7% of American secondary schools had courses on offer for fully multilingual students; this contrasts sharply with the fact that bilingual graduates could earn up to 50% more than their monolingual counterparts. In fact, many businesses who require <https://assignbuster.com/bilingual-issues-crawford-article-heritage-languages-in-america-tapping-a-hidden-resource/>

multilingual staff have had to recruit from South American countries instead of their own despite the growing immigrant population. If heritage languages were properly preserved, Crawford argues, recruitment could occur internally and America's place as a global dynamic force would be secured.

Crawford believes that in a time when the world is getting smaller, it is not the best course of action to simply attempt to teach everyone English because this means we have lost touch with the cultural aspects of a foreign language. In addition, the preservation of heritage languages within the United States means the preservation of cultural values of both immigrants and Native Americans where links to their traditional lifestyles might be so easily lost. To promote multilingualism in schools would equip students with the skills and abilities they will need to succeed at the top of the chain in businesses throughout the country and the world.

The modern classroom is monolingual, and given the apparent stigma of speaking or using any language other than English, it is no surprise that English-as-second-language students drop their traditional language quickly. Crawford points out that if American schools want this trend to change, they must address the two basic factors that influence whether a heritage language is maintained by its young speakers: the social ranking of the language; and whether it is used primarily in the home from a young age. By working within established minority language social groups it becomes possible to preserve language skills that are of so much use now and later on in employment.

#### Reference List

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