

# [Darling 1 – college essay](https://assignbuster.com/darling-1-college-essay/)

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Bilingual Education

The debate over bilingual education is nothing if not emotional. The

two sides seem to be spurred on by political opinions from liberals and

conservatives who want to further their own cause. In general terms, that

cause, in relation to bilingual education for liberals is that diverse

languages and customs enrich the U. S. cultural stew and should be allowed

to flourish (Worsnap 6). Conservatives, on the other hand, believe that

the mission of U. S. schools is to nurture a common language – English – and

a common national identity (Worsnap 6). The issue over bilingual education

goes back several decades, even a century, in America’s history. When this

country was founded, people came from around the globe to create a new

place to live in freedom and peace. So, from the very beginning of our

nation’s inception, there has been a need to teach newcomers English. At

first this was accomplished by complete submersion. There were no

“ programs” set up by the government, only a strong desire by those

immigrants to become a part of their new country. Until the 1960’s,

interest in bilingual education was limited. Then public and political

interest increased when thousands of Cuban refugees started pouring into

South Florida after Fidel Castro gained power in 1959 (Dunlap 8). At that

time, Dade County (Miami) wanted to help arriving children to adjust to

their new country, so in 1963 they became the first county to begin an

experimental bilingual education program in first to third grades at their

Coral Way Elementary School (Dunlap 8). Because this experiment was deemed

a success after just a few years, widespread support for bilingual

education helped advocates persuade lawmakers to fund bilingual programs

during congressional hearings in 1967; and they

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were successful when by President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the proposition

in January 1968 (Dunlap 8). The bilingual education act, adopted as Title

IIV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), made available

federal money for bilingual programs. Although the act did not require

local school districts to establish bilingual programs, it did encourage

their development by offering grants. In 1974 the act was broadened and

clarified the federal role in bilingual education, and for the first time,

federal money was made available for training teachers and developing

curricula and instructional materials (Dunlap 9).

“ Bilingual education started out in 1968 as a modest $7. 5 million

pilot program to help (immigrant) children learn English. Today it’s a $5

billion boondoggle including federal, state and local funds that actually

prevents kids from acquiring the language that will determine their

economic and social success as adults,” writes Rosalie Pesalino Porter,

author of the 1990 book Forked Tongue: the Politics of Bilingual Education

and chairman of the Institute for Research in English Acquisition and

Development (READ) (qtd. in Worsnap 6). This opinion is shared by many

experts in the field of bilingual education and also the side that I will

discuss in depth in this paper. But first, what exactly is bilingual

education and what different approaches are available to teach limited

English proficient (LEP) students English?

The definition of bilingual education is: instruction for those who

do not speak English, by teachers who use the students’ native language at

least part of the day. The term usually has meant teaching students to be

fluent in two languages (Worsnap 3). There are four basic alternatives for

instructing LEP children. The first of these is immersion or “ sink or

swim”. In this model, the LEP child is placed in a regular English

classroom with English monolingual children and given no more special help

than any child with educational problems (Rossell 19). A second technique

is English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, which consists of

regular classroom instruction for most of the day combined with a special

pull out program of

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English language instruction for one or two periods a day, or in some

districts two or three periods per week, and participation in the regular

classroom for the rest of the time (Rossell 19). A third instructional

technique is structured immersion, where instruction is in the English

language in a self-contained classroom of LEP children. The English used

in these programs is always geared to the children’s language proficiency

at each stage so that it is comprehensible, and the student thus learns the

second language (English) and subject matter content simultaneously

(Rossell 19). The fourth instructional technique, transitional bilingual

education (TBE), is when the student is taught to read and write in the

native tongue, with subject matter also taught in the native tongue.

English is initially taught for only a small portion of the day. As the

child progresses in English, the amount of instructional time in the native

tongue is reduced and English increased, until the student is proficient

enough in English to join the regular classroom. (Rossell 18) “ For most

people learning a new language, progress depends on two factors –

motivation and exposure to the new language, which means having the

opportunity to understand it and use it for real purposes,” said Patricia

Whitelaw-Hill, an ESL teacher for many years and executive director of the

READ Institute in Washington, D. C. (89). To this end, it is my opinion

that bilingual education is a waste of government money because it does not

expose LEP students to enough English for them to become proficient in an

timely manner and because bilingual education fosters a sense of separation

in stead of unity among students which transfers into our country’s lack of

unity.

To begin with, I am against any more government money being spent on

bilingual education because the current methods being used are taking too

many years to teach LEP students English. In America today, Transitional

bilingual education (TBE) is the most common approach for teaching

immigrants English in our schools. “ The majority of elementary school

programs have as their goal exiting a student after 3 years,” says

Christine Rossell, a professor of

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political science at Boston University and co-author of Bilingual Education

Reform in Massachusetts. “ But these programs also allow students to stay

in the program longer than three years . . . Indeed, many children stay in

a bilingual program throughout their elementary school career ” (19).

According to Keith Baker, an independent social science consultant, “ One

study using a nationally representative sample of over 300 programs of

LEP’s, found that depending on the type of program, the average length of

time that students were in a special program for LEP’s was 2. 6 to 3. 5

years. This study also showed that students remained longer in programs as

the use of Spanish increased in their program ” (30). In addition, Rosalie

Porter states that, “ it will not surprise anyone to learn that at all

grade levels students in ESL classrooms exited faster than those served in

bilingual classrooms.” She continues, “ Most students in the ESL program

were out of it in two to three years, while most students in bilingual

classes took four to seven years to move into regular classrooms” (35).

All of these experts, and many others, who have researched bilingual

education have come up with the same results and that is: it is taking way

too long for LEP students in bilingual programs to learn English. Suzanne

Guerrero, a 14-year veteran bilingual education teacher in California had

this to say:

In order for children to become fluent in English, they must be

exposed to English as much as possible. This is especially true

for the many students whom school is the only place where they

use English. Yet I am required by my district to teach those

children who do not come from English-speaking families in their

native language – Spanish in my case – until they formally

transition into English. To do this, they must meet certain

criteria, which includes passing a Spanish reading and writing

test with a score of 80 percent or higher. It takes a long time

to teach children to do that in English, let alone in two

languages. (93)

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How can students who are exposed to a majority of their native language in

school instead of English be expected to learn English? The answer is:

they can’t. This becomes clear in a study conducted by the New York City

Board of Education from 1990-1994 where three-year exit rates were compared

between ESL and bilingual education programs. The study showed that for

LEP students who entered in Kindergarten that 79 percent of the ESL

students exited the program after three years in comparison to only 51

percent in a bilingual education program. When students entered in second

grade, 67 percent of student in the ESL program exited after three years

with only 22 percent from the bilingual program. These numbers lowered

again when LEP students did not enter until the sixth grade with 32 percent

from ESL and 6 percent from bilingual education. (Amselle 121) “ For these

reasons, I believe it’s best to begin teaching English to non-English-

speaking students in the earliest grades,” says Whitehill-Law. “ This means

that most students can be fully integrated into mainstream classrooms well

before the crucial high school years” (90). Because of the importance of

literacy skills in academic success, students need to achieve fluency well

before high school. It’s extremely important to develop these reading and

writing skills from the earliest age possible (Whitehill-Law 90) and to

expose LEP students to English in large quantities without confusing their

learning with native-language instruction.

Another reason that I do not support more money being spent on

bilingual education is because it does not promote unity among citizens in

this country. When schools choose to use TBE (Transitional bilingual

education) to teach LEP students English, they are promoting the use and

learning of the students’ native language and culture, and they are also

keeping these students out of mainstream classes and away from English-

speaking peers for many years. Senator Robert Dole, R -Kan. said that U. S.

schools must teach immigrant children English and “ stop the practice of

multilingual education as a means of instilling ethnic pride or as a

therapy

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for low self-esteem or out of elitist guilt over a culture built on the

traditions of the West” (qtd. in Worsnap 2). He later added that

“ Promoting English as our national language is not an act of hostility but

a welcoming act of inclusion. . . , bilingualism supporters are

pressing for long-term exercises in native-language instruction and

thousands of children are failing to learn the language, English, that is

the ticket to the American dream” (qtd. in Worsnap 2). Official-English

supporters say that their adversaries are liberal elitists who want to

separate Americans in warring ethnic camps, confined to language ghettos,

isolated from economic opportunity and contemptuous of U. S. culture

(Worsnap 2). They also accuse the bilingual camp of wanting to explode the

cultural melting pot that has made the United States a relatively peaceful

society derived from many cultures (Worsnap 2-3). Why should America be

different than any other nation with a common language? Just as Americans

relocating to a foreign country, immigrants coming to the United States

“ have a duty . . . to understand and respect our system, including our

language,” said Stanley Diamond, chairman of the National English Campaign

(qtd in Worsnap 8). President Theodore Roosevelt, one of the country’s

foremost advocates of “ Americanization”, wrote in The Foes of Our Household

(published in 1917), “ any man who comes here . . . must adopt the language

which is now the native tongue of our people . . .. It would not be merely

a misfortune, but a crime to perpetuate differences of language in this

country” (qtd in Dunlap 7). Bilingual education, with its insistence on

maintaining people’s native languages at the expense of our common

language, violates the basic tenet of nation-building (Roth 16). “ We must

not lose sight of the fact that this is not just an abstract public policy

issue; bilingual education and our national language policies have real

world consequences,” said Rep. Toby Roth, R-Wis., sponsor of an official-

English bill. “ When our policies serve to divide rather than unite us, the

rips appear in the very fabric of the American nation” (16). He added,

“ Only those who are ripping off . . . government programs, like

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bilingual education . . . are opposed to official English” (qtd in Dunlap

3). Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., wrote in his 1995 book, To

Renew America, that “ Without English as a common language there is no

American civilization” (qtd in Dunlap 2). It is clear to me that

programs like bilingual education separate instead of unify and that

without unity in this nation, we cannot hope to see immigrants achieve the

true American dream – prosperity – they came here to find.

Advocates of bilingual education say that their main goal is to teach

English to non-English-speaking children. “ But the truth is that their

primary purpose is to perpetuate a seriously flawed teaching method so that

the bureaucracy that supports it can sustain itself. Their livelihoods

depend on promoting the myth that children taught in one language will

learn English,” says Sally Peterson, founder and director of LEAD (Learning

English Advocates Drive). “ If these children ever do learn English, it

takes years” (89). Advocates also claim that children need to be taught in

their native language because of self-esteem. But there is no evidence

that bilingual education has an impact on a student’s self worth (Peterson

79). “ Why after 25 years can’t bilingual education advocates silence

their critics with overwhelming proof that native-language instruction

works?” proposed Peterson. Her answer, “ They cannot, because the proof

does not exist” (79). Another misconception by bilingual supporters is

that reading skills easily transfer from one language to another. This is

only true in certain limited cases. Being literate in one language means

you have an understanding of what the reading process is about which is an

important first step. For different languages, however, different decoding

strategies are employed. The vowel systems in Spanish and English are

quite different, and this causes a lot of initial difficulty in reading for

Spanish speakers. (Guerrero 91)

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Native-language-based bilingual education is a human tragedy of

national proportions. Thousands of promising young people in public

schools are segregated for years by language. They fail to achieve their

potential because they cannot compete in the educational mainstream,

so in turn, they become discouraged and quit. (Peterson 79) Statistics

prove that when students are not proficient in English by high school that

drop out rates increase dramatically. In a November 1989 population study

by the U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, they found that

only 10. 5 percent of English-speaking teens dropped out of high school in

comparison to almost 50 percent of Spanish-speaking teens that have a

difficulty with English (Amselle 112). Currently in the U. S., there are

over two million LEP students in the public school system with more and

more moving here every year. Billions of federal, state and local dollars

are being spent on bilingual education programs that do not work. In 1992

alone, over $5 billion dollars of state and local money was spent on

bilingual education (Amselle 118). And what has been the result of this

grand expenditure? Well, there are no results because there has been no

accountability set up to monitor bilingual education. Both California and

Massachusetts, in state reports published in 1992 and 1994, admitted to

this failure (Porter 34). In addition, California, with 1. 2 million LEP

students also reported that teachers were not testing students for exit

from bilingual programs and keeping these children in bilingual classrooms

years beyond the point where they need special help (Porter 34). Bilingual

education has grown tremendously from its modest start and currently some

2. 5 million children are eligible for bilingual or ESL classes (Chavez 10).

According to Roth, 32 million Americans don’t speak English and in just

five years, that number will rise to 40 million which when put in

perspective means that one in seven homes, the inhabitants speak a foreign

language (13). For most of our nation’s history, America gave the children

of immigrants a great gift – an education in the English language. What

are we doing now for these new Americans today? Instead of giving

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them a first-rate education in English, our bilingual education programs

are consigning an entire generation of new Americans – unable to speak,

understand, and use English effectively – to a second-class future. (Roth

13)

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