

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 <https://assignbuster.com/darling-1-college-essay/>

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

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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

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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

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