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Feature Article

Bilingual Programs: Short Shrift as Usual for a Double-Barreled Opportunity

There is a need for quality Bilingual education in many countries including the United States.

But, the delivery of quality, useful, benefiting-our-country learning to our children gets bogged down, side-tracked, subverted and "short-shrifted" by the bureaucracy, just like most other programs.

"A gentleman by the name of Ernesto Ortese, a foreman on the south Texas ranches quoted [sic] as saying, 'My children learn Spanish in school so that they can grow up to be bus boys and waiters. I teach them English at home so they can grow up to be doctors and lawyers.'"

(Thursday, April 30, 1998, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families, Committee on Education and the Workforce, words of Representative Martinez)

(<http://tinyurl.com/jlcu4>)

Aside from the political issues (because there is a perceived connection between the need for Bilingual instruction and immigration in the mind of many citizens), there are basic educational issues that seem to be ignored by almost everyone.

In addition, some "Bilingual" issues are economic, because, in many cases, children with lower English language proficiency will earn less money, particularly in an "Information Economy."

Is Bilingual education responsible for maintaining a large Spanish-speaking underclass?

Here are words from Congressman Martinez at the same House Hearing...

"None of my brothers and sisters went to college. In fact, I was only one of two that graduated high school of ten. But we did all right, and we didn't have bilingual education. But I'll tell you something else, 50 percent of the kids that started with me in kindergarten never finished high school, because they dropped behind because they had English-barrier problems. They dropped behind until they were so frustrated they dropped out.

(Thursday, April 30, 1998, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families, Committee on Education and the Workforce. Words of Representative Martinez)

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"If you are learning math, you first learn all the terminology in Spanish, Laotian, Tagalog, whatever. Then you have to retranslate it when you are taught it again. Is it any wonder these kids are bombing achievement tests when they are given in English? They are having to learn the subject matter twice.

(Thursday, April 30, 1998, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families, Committee on Education and the Workforce. Words of Mr. Jim Boulet, Executive Director, English First)

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