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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, second language education has traditionally consisted of three independent professions: foreign language education, English as a second language (ESL), and bilingual education. The independent development of these three fields in the US is due to a number of socio-historical factors, including: (1) the traditionally elite status of foreign language study, (2) the impact of second language acquisition (SLA) research on the emerging ESL profession in the latter half of this century, and (3) the evolution of a language rights ideology and subsequent resurgence and development of bilingual education during the 1970s and 1980s. This compartmentalization of second language studies into separate areas of research and program development, however, has consequently resulted in less than satisfactory progress for students across sociocultural/linguistic backgrounds. To adequately address student problems and goals, an understanding is needed of the potential for building relationships between foreign language teaching and language minority education.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Foreign language courses are popular electives in many secondary (and even primary) schools serving middle and upper class populations. In addition, foreign language study for one to two years is often required at state and private universities. With increased globalization and the corresponding need for fluency in languages other than English for business and diplomacy, enrollment in foreign language courses is currently higher than at any time since 1915 (Dandonoli, 1987). However, researchers (e.g., Hammond, 1988; Higgs & Clifford, 1982; Valette, 1991) note that mainstream students fail to achieve foreign language fluency through secondary and university course work. In effect, after four years of foreign language study, students have little ability to communicate in the language.

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1 There has been some recent application of theory from one field to another as well as a few collaboration ventures. For example, the relationships between second language acquisition and foreign language education are illustrated in VanPatten and Lee (1990). In addition, van Loenen and Haley (1994) instituted a “Consultative Model” in which bilingual education and ESL teachers collaborated in developing content-based curriculum in both the native language of students and English. Also, it’s not uncommon for bilingual specialists to draw on second language acquisition theory and teaching methods. Finally, there has been contact between bilingual education and foreign language education with respect to immersion schooling.
Second language acquisition experts (e.g., Doughty & Pica, 1986; Long, 1983, 1996) suggest that, in order to facilitate the development of second language proficiency, learners should be given the opportunity to negotiate meaning through using the language for actual communicative purposes. Although universities often provide study abroad programs, these tend to be of limited duration (typically one semester) and thus do not allow sufficient language exposure to develop fluency. In addition, ideological and structural constraints (see Ortega, this volume) prevent foreign language teachers from engaging in classroom language experiences needed to facilitate foreign language development.

In sum, foreign language education in the US currently not only predominantly focuses on monolingual English-speaking communities, but it also fails to provide students from these communities with the ability to communicate in languages other than English.

LANGUAGE MINORITY EDUCATION

An increasing number of students attending public schools in the United States are non-native speakers of English. Gollnick (1992) estimates that by the year 2000, nearly 50% of the school population will be from language minority backgrounds. The past few decades have revealed the failure of most schools to meet the needs of this student population, as indicated by high drop-out rates, low standardized test scores, poor attendance records, and the small numbers of these students who go on to post-secondary education (see Arias, 1986; Brown & Haycock, 1984; Espinosa & Ochoa, 1986; Gingras, 1989; Medina, 1988; Orum, 1988; Rumberger, 1987).

Bilingual education specialists (e.g., Cummins, 1981, 1986, 1989; Fishman, 1979) have described the need for maintenance bilingual education among immigrant populations in terms of cognitive and socio-psychological advantages and basic social rights. In effect, research on bilingualism has shown that second language acquisition is most successful when there is a strong foundation in the mother tongue (Hakuta, 1985; Thomas & Collier, 1997). In a study of 700,000 student records in five large school systems over the course of 14 years, Thomas and Collier (1997) found that “Only those groups of language minority students who have received strong cognitive and academic development through their first language for many years (at least through Grade 5 or 6), as well as through the second language (English), are doing well in school as they reach the last of the high school years” (p. 14). They further report that evaluations of programs ranging from complete immersion to maintenance bilingual education indicate that the least successful students were those who were provided only with ESL Pullout or ESL Content classes. Yet the vast majority of newly arrived immigrants receive only a few hours per week of ESL (pullout) classes; only a few have the opportunity to learn content through their mother tongue and build upon their native language skills in bilingual programs. In fact, since the 1970s, bilingual education for immigrants has suffered a steady decline due to lack of funds (Title VII experienced severe cutbacks) and lack
of public support (ongoing appeals for “English Only” federal and state legislation) (see Jasso-Aguilar, this volume).

BILINGUAL MODELS OF EDUCATION

The major difficulty in providing immigrant students with the bilingual experience needed to facilitate academic achievement lies with inherent contradictions in the views held by many US educators towards bilingualism. Generally, immigrants’ native language skills are devalued and disregarded. Thus, language minority children often lose pride and facility in their native language while failing to develop adequate academic abilities in English. On the other hand, although monolingual English speakers are encouraged to study other languages for enrichment purposes, they too fail to achieve bilingual ability.

Given that second language education is failing both native English-speakers and non-native English speakers, an alternative view of bilingual education in the United States is clearly needed. Fishman (1979) suggests:

[Bilingual education]...could possibly be a powerful enrichment for...affluent American children, but such is our current blindness with respect to it that we largely insist on seeing it merely as ‘something for the poor.’ Nevertheless, it is in the latter general enrichment manifestation, as well as in the context of the self-maintenance efforts of our various non-Anglo cultural groups, that its true contribution to American education and society will ultimately be made (Fishman 1979:19).

In the twenty years since Fishman first recommended bilingual education for enrichment purposes, little progress has been made towards developing second language programs which would benefit students from both minority and English language backgrounds.

The ideal form of bilingual education for developing bilingualism across student populations is the two-way model. In this model, native speakers of English begin by learning content in English while studying a second language. As students develop fluency in the second language, content courses in that language are added until a balanced curriculum of both English and the second language is achieved. Immigrant students, on the other hand, begin learning content in their first language while studying English. Again, a balanced curriculum in both languages is eventually achieved and maintained throughout students’ schooling. In addition to allowing for native and non-native speakers of English to develop oral fluency and literacy in two languages, this model has a number of additional advantages compared to other models. First, it allows students to keep pace with the school curriculum in their first language while acquiring a second language. Research has shown (Cummins, 1981; Thomas & Collier, 1997) that it takes between five and seven years for students to develop sufficient fluency in a second language to meet academic demands. Secondly, students are provided with built-in native-speaking
conversation partners in the second language. As mentioned above, research has shown that use of the second language for actual communicative purposes is essential to developing fluency (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Long, 1983, 1996; Long & Crookes, 1992).

Although the cognitive, social, and economic benefits of bilingualism are well-documented (e.g., Hakuta, 1986; Lopez, 1995), a number of myths and misunderstandings about language learning have prevented the implementation of bilingual education programs. In fact, most likely largely due to misinformation about second language acquisition disseminated to Californian voters, legislation (Proposition 227) was passed in the spring of 1998 which prohibits bilingual education in that state. The irony of Proposition 227 and similar federal and state proposals is that all students, that is, both immigrants and monolingual English speakers, can be harmed by any legislation which restricts the learning of languages other than English.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Given the prevailing misunderstandings about second language learning, bridges between foreign language teaching and language minority education need to be built in order to provide both native and non-native speakers of English with optimal opportunities for academic and socioeconomic achievement. There is a particular need for foreign language and ESL professionals to develop an awareness of the linguistic and cultural resources immigrants bring to educational settings and, subsequently, work together in developing language programs which utilize these resources.

This volume on Foreign Language Teaching and Language Minority Education seeks to examine the potential for building relationships among second language educators towards fostering bilingualism. In the first section of this volume, Social and Political Contexts for Language Partnerships, Jasso-Aguilar (chapter one) and Ortega (chapter two) examine current obstacles to developing bilingualism which are inherent in second language policies and programs. In chapter three, Syed and Burnett then suggest possible implications of issues associated with acculturation, identity, and language for linguistic minorities. Drawing on recent SLA and education theory, Syed further outlines in chapter four the possibilities and potential for developing collaboration and partnerships across primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. In the second section, Community Language as Resource, the authors provide research findings on the Foreign Language Partnership Project designed to capitalize on the resources of immigrant students to enhance foreign language learning. Shonle and Thompson Rolland explore the language and educational development of project participants in chapter five while Burnett and Syed report in chapter six on issues of identity. The concluding section summarizes the potential benefits of and promise for language partnerships in second and foreign language situations.
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A summary account of this report will be found in K. Davis and R. Jasso-Acuña (Eds.) (1997) The Foreign Language Partnership Project published by the Center for Second Language Research as a technical report. A video tape of the project, Foreign Language Partnership (Davis & Syed), is available from either of these two sources:

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