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In this brief account are discussed the efforts made by New York City public schools to establish special programs for non-English speaking students, especially Puerto Rican migrants. The pioneer project using bilingual teachers to instruct "orientation classes" in East Harlem's Benjamin Franklin High School is described. Special attention is paid to the Puerto Rican Study, co-sponsored by the New York City Board of Education and the Fund for the Advancement of Education, that undertook to seek a sound basis for improving educational opportunities for non-English speaking children. A summary of the Study's final report is comprised of concise explanations of chapter contents. Eight recommendations for administrators and teachers responsible for these programs conclude the paper. (AF)

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THE CHALLENGE OF BILINGUALISM IN EDUCATION IN THE CITY  
OF NEW YORK\*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Educators in the City of New York have long been conversant with the trials and tribulations of several generations of non-English speaking children and adults who have sought to begin a new life in a new land at whose portals stands the Statue of Liberty with its very meaningful inscription:

"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."<sup>1</sup>

The very same words of hope written by Emma Lazarus some years ago, may now also be seen by other immigrants in the International Arrivals Building of the John F. Kennedy International Airport.

In the early days there was no clearly defined organized program in the schools of New York City to meet the needs of non-English speaking children. Individual teachers sympathetic to the problems faced by these children tried to help them during, before,

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and after school hours in their own way. Some were successful, others were not too successful.

For adults who spoke little or no English there were evening school classes in "English for Foreigners". These were largely designed to assist the foreign-born in preparing for the examination which would enable them to qualify for American citizenship. In most schools teachers had the notion (justified or not) that it was illegal to use a foreign language, even only occasionally, as a vehicle of instruction. They therefore did their best to stamp out whatever native competence the foreign-born child had in his own language. The teachers' stern admonition always was: "Speak English!" Apparently the teachers felt that since English was the language of the country, the mother tongues of the non-English speaking children might conflict with it. This attitude, I am happy to report has been changing more recently. Many teachers are now convinced that, properly developed, a foreign language and English can be mutually reinforcing.<sup>2</sup>

In the City of New York, up to World War II, the linguistically disadvantaged had been largely adults of European stock who had not yet acquired the rights to citizenship. Moreover, the tremendous flow of these immigrants had been cut to a mere trickle by discriminatory and restrictive legislation between World War I and World War II.

The picture changed considerably, however, at the close of World War II when hundreds of thousands of Puerto Rican children and adults came to New York to seek a better life. These newcomers could be termed "migrants" rather than "immigrants" since they were already American citizens with all the rights and privileges thereunto belonging. In other

ways they were just as disadvantaged as other immigrants, and particularly in their lack of command of the English language, in their socio-economic status, in their social adjustment to their new environment, and in their self-image as representatives of their mother tongue.

As the number of Puerto Rican migrants increased by the hundreds and thousands, some schools took the initiative on their own and established special classes and special programs for non-English-speaking Puerto Rican pupils. One of the pioneers in this effort was the Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem.<sup>3</sup> To this school came hundreds of Puerto Rican boys whose ages varied from 14 years to 18 years and whose previous schooling was not of a uniform character. Many of the boys came from isolated rural areas in Puerto Rico where the educational facilities were not as good as they were in the large urban centers. Their educational preparation in their own native language was thus very often quite inadequate. Their knowledge of the English language was practically non-existent. Since most of the boys came from small rural communities in Puerto Rico, they were faced with a formidable problem of social adjustment to life in the City of New York, the world's greatest metropolis. In addition they needed considerable assistance in improving their self-image as representatives of their mother tongue.

In order to meet the needs of these non-English-speaking Puerto Rican boys, the Benjamin Franklin High School established "orientation classes" in which were placed those boys who could not possibly make reasonable progress in normal classes because of their lack of knowledge of English.

The orientation classes were taught by bilingual teachers who were equally competent in conducting classes in English and Spanish. The orientation class teacher spent the entire morning with his orientation class group. He taught them English, Spanish and Social Studies using both Spanish and

English as the languages of instruction. He also served as their guidance counselor and took the group on trips during which the students visited museums, libraries, universities, government agencies and other places that it was helpful for the students to know if they were to make the proper adjustment to their new environment. In addition to their classes with their "orientation teacher", the students were scheduled for classes in Health Education, Art, and Music, in which they met their English-speaking schoolmates. These classes were not segregated, but were heterogeneous in character. It was felt that the non-English-speaking Puerto Rican student could make reasonable progress in these classes in spite of his lack of knowledge of English. Moreover, in these classes he was given the opportunity to mingle with English-speaking students and to engage in conversation with students whose background was not Spanish-speaking.

As soon as they gave evidence of being able to profit from attendance in regular classes, students in the orientation group were moved out into the regular stream. Most students remained in the orientation class for one entire semester. A few had to remain in the special class for an entire year.

As time went on, with the increasing in-migration of non-English-speaking Puerto Ricans of school age, more and more elementary, junior and senior high schools in many areas of the City of New York, became keenly aware of the need for establishing an adequate program of bilingual education. Accordingly, officials of the public schools decided to seek a sound basis for the development of a city-wide program to improve the educational opportunities of Puerto Rican and of other non-English-speaking children. This led to the initiation of the Puerto Rican Study which was jointly sponsored by the Board of Education of the City of New York and the Fund

for the Advancement of Education from 1953 to 1957.

The final report of the study<sup>4</sup> was published by the Board of Education of the City of New York in 1958. The Study dealt with a report on the education and adjustment of Puerto Rican pupils in the public schools of the City of New York. Although the Study was focused on the work of the public school in the City of New York, its sponsors believed that the findings might be useful to all schools, public and private, that are trying to serve children from a Spanish-language culture.

The final report of the Study was divided into three parts, prefaced by an introduction or overview and followed by a concluding chapter with emphasis on the future.

The introduction described what the Puerto Rican Study was - its background, sponsorship, objectives, relationships to the total school program, the nature and scope of its operations, some of its outcomes, and the first steps taken to translate its findings into practice.

Part I, Chapters 1 - 6, presented the Study's contribution to the development of methods and materials for teaching English to non-English-speaking children, described the materials developed, and charted a program for their continuing improvement. Part II, Chapters 7-12, digested more than a dozen studies of Puerto Rican pupils in New York City schools, their problems in achieving a satisfactory educational-social-cultural adjustment in New York City and how the schools could help them more effectively. Here an attempt was made to point out the interrelationships of language and cultural adjustment.

Part III, Chapters 13-18, brought together data and conclusions of the Puerto Rican Study with respect to major issues that are basic to the formulation of policies and long-range programs.

The final chapter attempted to synthesize the many suggestions and proposals presented in Parts I, II, and III for improving the educational opportunities of Puerto Rican and of other non-English-speaking children in New York City schools. It was more than a summary. It was a guide to action that will make children of non-English language background an asset to mainland schools.

According to Dr. Warren W. Knox, Assistant Commissioner for Instructional Services, New York State Education Department, in New York City alone there are approximately 250,000 children enrolled in the public schools who come from Spanish-speaking homes in neighborhoods where Spanish is the language of the stores, of the church, and of the streets, as well as on radio and television. By actual test, approximately one-half of these Spanish-speaking children, not to mention Spanish-speaking adults, are unable to speak English and are classified according to a State approved scale as non-English speaking.

Dr. Knox makes the following recommendations for administrators and classroom teachers who have the responsibility for teaching English to non-English-speaking pupils:

- (1) The teacher should understand and appreciate the culture of the non-English-speaking and culturally different pupils.
- (2) The teacher should foster an appropriate pride in the customs, mores, and traditions of the pupils' native culture.
- (3) The teacher should be bilingual and have sufficient background in and command of both English and the pupils' native language to move from one language to the other with complete ease.
- (4) The teacher should use this knowledge of the pupils' language to anticipate their difficulties in adopting the English sentence pattern, idiom, and pronunciation.

- (5) The teacher should use the choral method in developing correct patterns and pronunciation, starting with the class as a whole, then moving to smaller groups and eventually to individual pupils.
- (6) The teacher should have sufficient knowledge of language to understand the foundation of any language and the way in which the structure and design of languages develop.
- (7) As long as necessary, but no longer, the basic subjects as in mathematics, science, social studies, and health should be taught in both the native tongue and English.
- (8) Pupils should be taught to speak and to read their native language correctly at the same time they are learning English.<sup>5</sup>



NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Quoted from John Bartlett, Familiar Quotations, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), p. 742.
- <sup>2</sup> From an address given by A. Bruce Gaarder, at the General Meeting on the Foreign Language Program in New York, 29 December 1964.
- <sup>3</sup> Emilio L. Guerra, "The Role of the Teacher of Spanish in the Orientation of Non-English Speaking Pupils", Hispania, February 1949, pp. 59-63.
- <sup>4</sup> J. Cayce Morrison, The Puerto Rican Study 1953-1957, New York: Board of Education of the City of New York, 1958, pp. 1 - 265.
- <sup>5</sup> Warren W. Knox, "Bilingual Education", Language Federation Bulletin, November 1967, pp. 6 and 8.