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AUTHOR Hardwick, Hilary; Travis, Mike
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ISSUES IN SERVING YOUNG SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN
IN BILINGUAL-BICULTURAL SETTINGS

Hilary Hardwick and Mike Travis
September, 1985

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Hilary Hardwick

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"The only time we are all the same is when we're dead!"
- from Jamaica Highwater's Primal Mind

"Parents want their children to learn English absolutely. But they don't
want their language and their heritage destroyed in the process

Peter Schilla
Western Center on Law and Poverty

Education for minority language children has been an issue in Alaska for several generations. The State of Alaska has provided bilingual-bicultural education services to minority language students since 1972 when the Legislature passed a law mandating bilingual-bicultural education in grades K-12. During the 1984-85 school year, approximately 9,000 students (10% of all students) from the twenty Alaska Native language groups and many other language groups received bilingual-bicultural education services. The ten most populous language groups served by these programs include Yup'ik Inupiaq, Spanish, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Russian, Koyukon, Gwich'in, and St. Lawrence Yup'ik.

Bilingual-bicultural education services have impacted the development of minority language children in all areas of growth: Self-esteem, self-confidence, socio-emotional adjustment,

cognitive development, language acquisition and use, academic skills and overall sensory-motor integration as reflected through and by culture have been enhanced through these services (Omark & Erickson, 1983; Snow & Goldfield, 1981; Tabbert, 1985)

Education for preschool children from minority language backgrounds has not, to date, been supported in the same way education for minority language students in K-12 programs has been supported. Support for any type of preschool education for children ages 0-6 remains an important issue in Alaskan education.

Based on school-age incidence figures of 8-12% of the population being handicapped and at least 2% of the same population as gifted, it would appear that there are significant numbers of children from minority language backgrounds who may exhibit a special need. Using the same percentages for preschool education, it would appear that there are significant numbers of preschool children from minority language backgrounds, approximately 1% of the total preschool population, who may exhibit a special need.

This paper is organized into: (a) an overview of language development and use; (b) implications for programming for minority language preschool students (c) a review of existing programs and resources (d) a listing of issues for further study and (e) recommendations for future action.

Language Development and Use

Children do not acquire language solely by imitating adult models who correct errors and reinforce correct forms, but through actively exploring meanings in the context of interaction with significant others such as parents, grandparent, older siblings and peers. The focus of language acquisition is always on meanings or intentions and not the forms of language itself

(Cummins, 1984) In their homes most children experience a reciprocal form of interaction in which meanings are negotiated and not unilaterally imposed by the other speaker.

In order to be competent in communication, young children must gain skills and knowledge in four areas: grammatical or linguistic command of a language; sociolinguistic competence, that is, knowing the rules which define the appropriate use of language including verbal and nonverbal forms, style, gesture, facial expressions, tone of voice and appropriate use of space; discourse competence, that is, knowing what conversation is, topics which should be discussed, ways to introduce topics, ways of ending conversations, turn-taking, ways to organize what is talked about, and how to present oneself to the other speaker; and finally strategic competence, i.e., knowing the ways to keep conversation going through paraphrase, repetition, circumlocution, message modification and hesitation (Cummins, 1984). All children use similar strategies to develop skills in these four areas. In doing this, they build up their knowledge of meanings; specifically, they develop ways of categorizing words, concepts and events and interpreting the significance of these events. Learning what language to use to express a particular meaning is the heart of language development (Cummins, 1984).

The knowledge and skills for effective communication are acquired by children by interacting in their home and community environment. Appropriate language forms are learned from experiences in interacting with the social, cultural and language environment of the home and community. Parents, as one of the primary sources of language input for children at an early age, use 'caretaker' speech which is characterized by shorter, slower and syntactically more simple sentences as well as modifications of word choice and phonological structure. By the age of two children have learned many parts of the language's discourse system and socially appropriate uses of the language of the home. After the age of four, children speak differently to younger children than

they do to peers and adults. By having adults continue as conversational partners, children learn faster and the adults provide the children with needed background information and clarifications that are necessary to interpret meanings in many different settings (Cummins, 1984).

Implications for Programming for Minority Language Preschool Students

It is clear from this brief review of the process of language acquisition that children's cognitive and academic development is a direct function of their interaction with adults, both in the home and school setting (Cummins, 1984). In addition, studies (Cummins, 1976) reveal that when a child's first language is disused and the child is forced to operate with the help of the less well mastered language, English, it is likely that the child's interaction with his environment; (that is, receiving information, processing information, drawing conclusions and communicating those conclusions) may be less conducive to cognitive growth. The child may fail to comprehend much of the content transmitted in a class using his second language and may also find difficulty in expressing his developing intelligence and operating upon the environment verbally through the second language, English (Cummins, 1976).

The question of what is gained or lost by an earlier or later introduction of formal instruction in the second language is an important issue for programming. In some cases the later introduction of the second language, English, has distinct advantages for many minority language children and little in the way of disadvantages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). The most important fact affecting the formal development of the second language in school settings is the individual's level of conceptual development. Thus the educational program which fails to encourage the optimal verbal level of conceptual development through the child's first language, but rather teaches through the medium of the second language, English, will be seen to directly counteract its own aim, the learning of English

(Cummins, 1980 as cited in Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). Educational programming for minority language preschool children should thus focus on the development of a strong, stable first language before introducing English as a second language.

Programming for minority language students who come to the formal school setting using varieties of English which are not similar to the language required in that setting, is another complex issue which should be covered in another issue paper. Many of the issues to be explored later in this paper are also of great importance in understanding the procedures for identification and assessment and the selection of appropriate services for these preschool children who may be at risk.

Resources and Programs

Several questions arise when approaching the state of the art in minority language services. First, what are the developmental needs of the bilingual exceptional child? What is a model program? What are the components and characteristics of effective services? What best practices are available and are there studies to support them? What type of public policies are necessary to ensure programming that is least restrictive and age appropriate with effective transitioning into the academic system that begins at age six? How is proficiency involved and how will aspects other than language be addressed?

There is very little literature on bilingual/multicultural programs for preschool aged handicapped children. While there exists a substantial body of research which supports bilingual services for school age children, there is little empirical evidence regarding information and research about preschool bilingual programs. Information and research about the characteristics of very young special needs children from non-English speaking backgrounds is also seriously lacking (Omark & Erickson, 1983).

There has been significant research done on first language acquisition and development in young children, but there is little research available on language development and acquisition of young children from bilingual settings (Miller, 1984, Omark & Erickson, 1983; Padilla & Lindholm; Schloff & Martinez, 1982). In addition, discussions seldom reflect interest in evidence of effectiveness and developmental appropriateness of models or approaches for teaching preschool bilingual children.

The major emphasis in bilingual education at the present time is on increased language proficiency as the rationale for services and models. One model described by Cummins (1981) identifies at least two major dimensions of language proficiency: basic communicative language skills and academic language skills. Although there are research findings to conclude that proficiency in basic communicative language skills does not predict academic success, many programs focus on the language aspect and assume that this will impact academic skills through its purported effects on cognitive development. In a report presented at the Ninth Annual Conference of the California Association for Bilingual Education (Tempes, Burham, Pine, Compos, Mathews, Lear, & Herbert, 1984), a group of professionals provided data on several models being implemented in that state and the theoretical rationale behind them. This study which was carried out with Spanish speaking children, offered results showing that instruction in the first language enhanced academic progress. It was also noted that readiness skills varied markedly between groups who were given instruction in their primary language and who were given instruction in English depending on academic motivation and level of language proficiency in either language.

Research information on programs for young exceptional children from minority language backgrounds revealed several trends and models. First, the minority language populations that have received the most attention include: Hispanic, Black Dialect, Asian, and American Indian. The American Speech, Hearing, and Language Association (ASHA) has a resolution (1984) identifying

these groups as targets for programming, investigation and training. Second, early intervention models reflecting Federal or state support for at-risk preschoolers and their families are available, including such various agencies as day care, Head Start and public school programs. Day care and Head Start most often are either home-based (that is, the services are provided within the home setting with the parents and other family members and utilizes the language and culture of the home) or center-based (which usually includes a mainstreamed environment utilizing English instruction for all the children). Public schools most often provide direct services to only the handicapped young child on a one to one or small group basis. Recently, however, more and more public schools are providing mainstreamed programs. A third trend that appeared was the emphasis in many programs on transitioning from the primary language into English as quickly as possible with limited data on proficiency skills to support this process. An underlying implication was evident throughout, that more research is needed, that evaluation and evidence of effectiveness were critical issues, and that young special needs bilingual children and their families have limited, if any, service options.

In Alaska, the emphasis in bilingual programs is on grades K-12. Bilingual funding in the state does not address the birth to five-year-old population. The majority of the programs available to young bilingual children and their families are provided through Head Start, Parent Child Programs, Infant Learning Programs and school district preschool programs. However, some of these programs (Infant Learning, some school district programs) are limited to those children with identified handicaps. Others, like Head Start, are not limited to bilingual or non-English speakers or handicapped but rather the focus is on mainstreaming all children who are eligible. Information collected from telephone interviews in the spring of 1985 with school district and Head Start personnel revealed that, with the exception of a handful of villages, most of the bilingual efforts consisted of picture identification, vocabulary, naming, counting in the native language and at times

an intermixing of both language, i.e., snack time is spoken in the native language and the remaining instruction is in English (Duthie & Hardwick, 1985). In some situations there is a bilingual aide who is able to translate if there seems to be confusion or lack of understanding in English. There are also programs where all of the staff speak the native language fluently and all instruction is in the primary language. In almost no instances are both languages presented with equal emphasis or frequency.

Issues for Further Study

This section of the paper deals with the topics of assessment and diagnosis, program services, staff development, and curriculum and materials. Within each of these areas there are many questions which need to be addressed. These questions are presented here to help guide program planners in their efforts to determine appropriate services for minority language students who may be at risk.

Assessment and Diagnosis

1. How do we assure that identifying and assessing communicative competence in both languages is being done appropriately?
2. How do we assure that cultural and linguistic differences are accounted for in all aspects of assessment and diagnosis?
3. What criteria will be used and developed to determine appropriate training in cultural awareness and skills for staff working with bilingual children?
4. What assessment instruments will be used? Can they be adapted for multiple populations? Can local norms be established and be reliable? What are potential biases in these tests?

5. How will children's skills be compared within the primary language population if it is not English?

6. How will qualified bilingual/bicultural professionals to administer the assessments and diagnosis be recruited?

7. What training requirements in coursework and application will institutions and Federal and State Education Departments develop for credentialing and instructing these professionals?

Program Services

1. What level of competence for a well-grounded understanding of child development theories and group learning theories will be expected for staff?

2. What type of program is appropriate to meet the communities' expressed wishes and perspectives as well as the needs of the children and families to be served?

3. What are the essential components of a sound program?

4. What are the eligibility requirements for inclusion in the program to be implemented and how are they determined? What involvement do community members, parents, staff and agencies have in establishing these requirements?

5. What resources are available (i.e., strategically located resource service centers and resource networks of bilingual/multicultural child care and development programs)?

6. How will funding be provided and by whom? Are there creative financing systems available in addition to Federal and State supported programs? What are the options and alternatives for funding and to which agencies should funds go?

Staffing

1. What are the central issues in the recruitment, utilization, training, monitoring and development of staff?

2. What type of training do administrators require to understand multicultural programming and criteria for staff recruitment.
3. What are the roles of program staff and what qualifications are needed?
4. What credentialing procedures are established for aides and teachers? How is certification of experienced aides processed as a career ladder to pursue other advanced credentials or degrees?
5. What are the appropriate adult-child ratios?
6. What are the inservice training needs of staff and how often and to what extent will training be provided?
7. How are parents involved and utilized as program resources? How are community members included? What are the roles of parents and community in serving the needs of their children?

Curriculum Materials

1. What evidence of effectiveness and appropriateness do the curricula and materials demonstrate?
2. Are the materials appropriate for target students from minority language families?
3. How available are the curriculum resources needed and how much training is required to effectively use them?

Recommendations

Because, as has been discussed, each culture has unique characteristics of linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence and because

services to children should be provided in the least intrusive manner possible, one conclusion to be drawn is that families and communities should utilize the primary language of the child for language and cognitive development at least until the kindergarten years. The available research, although sparse, supports this recommendation as well as the following:

1. Parents should be encouraged to communicate with their child in the preferred language of the home and community.
2. Young children should be taught their culture in the preferred language of the family and community and this cultural transmission should continue throughout childhood.
3. Children who are at risk or who have been identified as having a handicapping condition should be provided experiences that help them build upon linguistic and cultural competencies gained as members of a family and community.
4. People who wish to assess young children, provide educational experiences to them and evaluate the successfulness of these services must utilize an understanding of the facets of linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence required in the communities and family settings of young children.
5. Instructional services aimed at linguistic, social and motor skill development of young children should be grounded in the culture bases of these young children and use their first language to the greatest extent possible.
6. Additional issue papers should be written to address the questions posed in the preceding section.

In order to approach the topic of developing appropriate services to minority language children at risk, the following steps should be taken. Research findings on this topic should be more widely disseminated. School districts, agencies, communities and families must identify the needs of the minority language child and determine effective ways to impact the student's present and later

development and success within the mainstream society. It is then the ethical responsibility of those involved to develop a plan and process whereby the needs of these students will be met.

The types of questions that need to be asked include: (a) What types of legislation and funding will be required to meet the needs identified?; (b) Under what criteria will programs be developed, implemented and evaluated at both the State and Federal levels?; (c) How will agencies establish agreements and who will be responsible for supervising and monitoring services?; (d) What level of community, parent and professional involvement will be needed for the goals and objectives to be met?

There needs to be a reordering of priorities for services to minority language young children with special needs and their families. Community-based programs need to be established and supported. In discussions that are currently being held in Alaska, issues and funding for multicultural and bilingual programs designed to serve birth to 6 year old special needs populations must be included. This population must be considered in the development of comprehensive services for young children at risk in Alaska.

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