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Bilingualism, Hispanic Pov- erty, and Intraculturalism

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Introduction

To become apprised of the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) initiatives in bilingual/bicultural education, one, naturally, searches the Internet under Texas Education Agency, Curriculum, Bilingual education. After being welcomed to the site, the researcher is offered two brochures. One is titled English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs: Benefits for Your Child; in a question-and-answer fashion, it asks and answers the following questions:

- *What is English as a second language?*
- *What is an ESL program?*
- *What is the purpose of an ESL program?*
- *Who should be enrolled in an ESL program?*
- *Will my child be*

taught the same subjects and learn the same skills as students in the regular program?

- *Who is responsible for teaching in an ESL program?*
- *How is an ESL program different from English language arts instruction?*
- *How can parent be involved in the ESL program?*

The second brochure is titled Bilingual Education Programs: Benefits for Your Child! It, likewise, asks and answers these questions:

- *What is the purpose of bilingual education?*
- *Who does the bilingual education program serve?*
- *How will the bilingual education program help m child?*
- *Will my child be taught the same subjects and learn the same skills as students in the regular programs?*
- *Will my child learn English?*
- *Who is responsible for teaching*

in a bilingual education?

- *How can parents become involved in the bilingual education program?*

English Is Necessary

Finally, under the first two entries of the heading Related Links, the researcher is informed of the meaning of TEA's English Language Proficiency Standards (ELP) and Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS):

The English language proficiency (ELP) standards contain the language skills that limited English proficient children in Texas are taught to ensure that they have the full opportunity to learn English and succeed academically. The ELP standards are part of the state-required curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The ELP standards consist of the Spanish language arts TEKS (grades K-6) and the English as a second language TEKS (grades K-

12). (Texas Education Agency, 2004).

The ELP standards include second language acquisition skills that enable limited English proficient students to become fluent in English. In order for these students to learn the academic English necessary for academic learning, their second language acquisition skills must be addressed in all their academic classes, whether they are learning mathematics, science, or other subjects. The ELP standards also include the language arts skills that all Texas students are required to be taught. (Texas Education Agency, 2004).

History and Healthy Identity Formation

All this sounds good until one hears of professional studies like that of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute stating that "Texas fares poorly in Hispanic education standards" (KRGV-TV, 2006):

Texas ranked lowest among the nation's four

southern border states in its standards for teaching Latin American and Mexican history. The national study was released today by the Washington-based Thomas B. Fordham Institute. On a scale of zero to ten, Texas scored a five--just above the national average of four-point-two. California scored a ten. Arizona scored a six. New Mexico scored an eight. Walter Russell Meade, who reviewed state education standards, says the subject might not be getting the kind of emphasis that it deserves. State Board of Education member Pat Hardy is a history and geography teacher for the Weatherford school district. Hardy says Texas uses a "spiraling curriculum" to teach world history that has more depth than most states. She says the curriculum introduces concepts at different levels and expands on them later.

One must wonder whether the Texas Education Agency is

really in touch with the societal identity and place of the Hispanic population in its own state whose 1,951 mile border with Mexico has more crossings (legal) than any other border in the world (Wikipedia, 2006). This datum is not a mere interesting curiosity but an indicator that the Texan Hispanic issue is here to stay and that educators fail to understand the importance of culture in the healthy formation of personal identity.

Hispanic Dominance in Texas

In the city of Houston, the Hispanics, besides being the fastest growing ethnic group, make up the largest body, enjoying 37 percent of the population, followed by Anglos with 30 percent, and Blacks with 25 percent. Sixty percent of all students in the Houston Independent School District--the largest in Texas and seventh in the nation--are Hispanic (Mexican Institute of Greater Houston, 2006, ¶1). Steve Murdock (2006) reminds us that the

Texas population is getting old and very Hispanic. By 2040, young Hispanics will dominate the Texas population. "If you wonder what the future of this country will look like and you live in Texas, all you need to do is look around you. The state is a precursor of what we can expect nationwide" (p. 7). Murdock, also, predicts that the 2040 population will be 59 percent Hispanic, 24 percent Anglo, with mainly Asians outnumbering Blacks as the state's third largest ethnic group.

Hispanics Unprepared for the Workforce

Now, relating these data to education, Klineberg, drawing on the conclusions of a 2005 survey, concluded that:

Almost all the good jobs today require high levels of technical skills and educational credentials, and a high school education is not enough to get a good job. The jobs of the future economy require postsecondary education, at

least community college. (Mexican Institute of Greater Houston, 2006, ¶4).

If this is the case, the Hispanic community is in crisis, for 20 percent of American-born Hispanics and 52 percent of Hispanic immigrants have less than high school education. In 2003, public school districts in Texas showed that Hispanics had a three times greater dropout rate than that of Whites and an almost 30 percent higher than that of African-Americans (Mexican Institute of Greater Houston, 2006, ¶6).

One should not be deceived into thinking that this is solely an Hispanic problem: If the Hispanic community in the U.S. hurts socially, economically, and morally, so will the nation, as a whole, hurt. To wit, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, high school dropouts will earn 35 percent less than the median relative earnings of the American population ages 21 to 64, causing a loss in tax revenue for the state and higher costs re-

lated to juvenile crime, drug abuse, health and social services (Mexican Institute of Greater Houston, 2006, ¶7). Lewis (1996), accordingly, holds that "it is pure nonsense" to believe

that teachers and administrators, even those in the most disadvantaged schools, are justified in believing that they cannot have much of an effect on the lives of the poorest children because of what happens outside the school and what has occurred before these youngsters are old enough even to attend school At the core of the problems of those on or nearly on welfare is the inadequacy of the schools' efforts to teach what they should teach first and foremost-- language. Above all else, young children must be taught to read, write, speak, and listen so well that they can use these skills competently and can interpret increasingly challenging material. (¶¶2-3).

To break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy, population should, first

of all, be categorized according to priority which Lewis classifies in this way (Lewis, 1996, ¶7):

- (1) there are young mothers and fathers whose literacy skills must be made good enough to prevent their children from reliving the cycle of low skills/low wages.
- (2) there are teenage mothers with poor literacy skills who must be prepared for an increasingly demanding workplace, and there are teenagers at risk of dropping out and/or starting families too early; finally,
- (3) there are the unborn, who should be able to count on entering families that are prepared to think of the future of their newest members from the moment of their births.

Finally, Lewis (1996) offers four research-based proposals for adoption by educators, schools, and communities to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty:

- (1) educate the

parents (especially the mothers) of young children already in the system, for the educational level of mothers is the most important influence on the educational attainment of children;

- (2) combine educational and contextual training for welfare mothers--most of whom are teenagers--for whom job success is, obviously, of extreme importance--cognitive researcher Thomas Sticht, drawing on results from the military, business, and education, argues that young people can learn basic skills best when education is embedded in job preparation;

- (3) urge those young men and women who are apt to make bad choices to go to college, for such a ray of hope, according to the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS-88), is related to staying in school and to delaying sexual activity; and, finally,

- (4) begin, from now on and from the

delivery room, programs for literacy enrichment, for studies of infant development and research into cognition have shown that, starting at birth, early language stimulation has an influence on brain development and, later, on learning success.

Intraculturalism

Maybe educators, with their lofty ideals, can learn something valuable from the leanings of materialistic marketers. To empower companies and marketers, the innovation consulting firm Cheskin has released *Nuestro Futuro: Hispanic Teens In Their Own Words*, representing a 30-hour video profile of U.S. Hispanic teen lifestyles, attitudes and behaviors. In the words of the Hispanic teens, themselves, the profiles bring key issues to light. Stephen Palacios, Cheskin executive vice president, states (Hispanic Ad.com, 2006):

Currently, many marketing programs correctly focus on multicultural markets, celebrating

distinct cultures for targeted products, services and communications. With youth, we believe the trend is toward 'intraculturalism'--the combining, sharing, and recreating of multiple ethnic identity influences. Studying this phenomenon in Hispanic teens can provide insights into not only this segment, but how this ethnic variable is playing a greater role for teens generally. (¶3).

Intraculturism is a new word to explain the ease with which America's youth adopts and adapts aspects of a diversity of cultures into their identity. Distinguished from multiculturalism celebrating distinct cultures unto themselves, Intraculturalism

is a fluid process of identity formation that continually borrows from a diversity of traditions and attitudes. For instance, a young girl of Hispanic descent may combine hip-hop fashion with Mehndi-stained hands when she goes out dancing to her favorite Reggaeton artists. The next

morning she sits down with her grandmother to watch a telenovela before logging onto MySpace.com to catch up on her diverse network of friends. Why is this important? As a dominant trend among American teens, which is driven by an increase in the diversity of peer groups and social permissibility, intraculturalism is bound to shape this country's future cultural landscape. The trend is most prominent among Hispanic youth, a demographic that is growing six times faster than other market segments . . . Hispanic youth currently control \$20 billion in spending power and influence over \$200 billion in household spending. Hispanic teen culture and attitudes are influencing "mainstream" American values through their growing presence and intraculturalism - shouldn't we have a picture of what that means? (¶7).

Summary and Conclusion

The Texas Education Agency's offerings on Bilin-

gual/Bicultural education is interesting but, certainly, not enough. Few, today, deny the importance and need for the U.S. citizen or permanent resident to master English; it is a given. This country's culturally Anglo-Saxon forefathers, over two hundred years ago, framed a Nation with the best of Western civilization; now, in the twenty-first century, that marvelous State, still so strong and resilient, must creatively blend into its fold the Hispanic strain of that same historically great Western Society. This coming together of two major cultures from the one common civilization is, once more, testimony to the soundness and intrinsic strength of the American Way in which religion, government, education, and all social institutions must work together to mould a divinely-inspired society. To do this in accord with America's accustomed theistic benevolence, the blending of cultures must always mean giving preference to the most socially powerless.

Intraculturism is a new word to explain, in youth, the fluid process of identity formation that continually borrows from a diversity of traditions and attitudes. It is, however, naive to imagine that young people are *freely* making decisions that will eventually blend into some new American scene. They are manipulated, to a great degree, by the money-making media, by capitalism. For, in this writer's experience, the young U.S. Hispanics are, nowadays, showing themselves to be little different from the young Mexico City Hispanics—thanks to cable and satellite television which is, virtually, the ubiquitous stage for the amoral entertainment industry. Daily, church and school are, it seems, having less influence on the cultural formation of today's youth and of tomorrow's "mix-and-match" society.

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Thoughts on Learning

Question: I happen to believe that reading is the single most important academic skill that students need. I also believe, as your post states, that vocabulary is a key predictor of academic success, too.

The problem with vocabulary instruction is that the teacher often has the students look up the word, define it and memorize the definition only to regurgitate it back on a test. My own daughter struck me in sixth grade when she could state definitions of words and then use them totally out of context in a sentence. Of course, research also states that if teachers did a simple thing like ask students to use the words correctly in a sentence, it would tell if the

students truly knew the definition or not. Your thoughts?

Answer: It was so refreshing to read that "reading is the single most important academic skill that students need." I could not agree with you more: To the experienced, insightful teacher, reading/writing reveals intelligence, logical thinking, critical thinking, creative thinking, playful thinking, analytical thinking, synthetic thinking and on and on.

Words, as I see it, cannot be incorporated effectively into a person's active and passive memories in the form of isolates but are best "possessed" by a learner 'within a practical context"; that is to say, it must form part of something that the hearer or reader is bent on or is ready to learn.

When I have the occasion to teach, I always use my regular vocabulary, elucidating what might be unfamiliar vocabulary to my hearers with synonyms comfortably embedded alongside what might be an unfamiliar word. This assures me

that the hearers do understand what I am talking about and, also, that they know there are other words--sometimes better words--to express the same notion. The most important goal is that the hearer understand, first, by my using the nickel and dime words and, of course, I pray that, later, they will eventually understand and remember the dollar words.

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The mission of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri School System is to promote biculturally the formation of Christian character, Catholic lay leadership, Christian fellowship, and community service by integrating the Gospel message into a liberal arts

educational program in the spirit of joy exemplified by St. Philip Neri, the Oratory's founder