

Bilingual Education is Half-Empty

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ONLINE EDITION

By Matt Sanchez

"Ghetto" may not be Spanish for "poverty," but in America "bilingual education" is English for "failure." Most agree that knowledge is power; the problem with the current public school bilingual-education programs is that instead of learning two tongues, students learn to speak one language poorly and the second language even worse. Newt Gingrich recently came under fire for making similar claims and for declaring Spanish "the language of living in a ghetto." For the most part he got it right. It's a two-for-one scam: the high aspirations of integration are canceled out by the low expectations and standards.

Let's get something straight: Bilingual education in the United States is not to be confused with the haughty European "vision" of bilingualism, or the fond wishes your parents had that you'd actually pick up some Spanish from your Latina nanny. The American version of bilingual education is like the term "inner-city": It's code for "Hispanic" in the formal or "Latino" for the political. Why single out America's fastest-growing minority group?

For one, the cottage industry of elite Latino nationalists wants to encourage "pride" or "orgullo" as a means of "fighting the power." It's the leftist *lucha libre* using the school system as a pinata.

Of course, believe it or not, it often comes down to money. School districts get more funds for students enrolled in bilingual education. Can any other motive possibly explain the push to recognize Ebonics as a foreign language? Teachers get more money for being "bilingual-certified," which does not mean those teachers are actually bilingual themselves. Moreover, the "self-esteem" lobby thinks learning ethnic pride will somehow overcome other scholastic deficiencies, like the unwillingness to maintain standards for reading and writing. It's "Si, se puede" with fingers crossed.

The end result is a group of students who are not only left behind, but also left out. The subtle racism of lower standards is met with the open hostility to challenging the student. Instead of demanding results or setting standard proponents, bilingual education demands more money — a guinea pig of bilingual education can spend years in a program where normal standards simply do not apply. If this sounds harsh — good! This farce has gone on long enough. Hispanics face enormous problems in the public school system and bilingual education tops the list. Unlike past generations of immigrants, multiculturalism will turn a blind eye to a lack of integration and chalk up this wholesale dumbing-down to "cultural diversity." Full disclosure — this is personal. Even though my mother tongue is English, I was placed in a bilingual classroom.

Currently, fewer than half of Hispanic kids are finishing high school and even fewer are going to college. I'm not just citing facts — I have personal experience in this field. As a student-teacher, I taught bilingual education to Spanish speakers. These were young, adaptable fourth graders who often could not read or write in Spanish, much less in English. The quickest and most direct route for these kids to both acquire literacy and a decent shot at scholastic success was the time-proven method of immersion. Instead, these kids had poorly translated books and a program that was a scholastic dead end. Through one standard and a stronger emphasis on English acquisition, Hispanic students may one day be just as eager to show off a well-earned diploma as they are to gleefully wave a foreign flag.