

## DUAL-LANGUAGE EDUCATION DOES NOT WORK

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Second only to the conflict in Iraq—of which the purposelessness and corruption become more evident to more persons by the day—the issue that registers on polls as the most important to people's choice of presidential candidate is immigration policy. Moreover, this is intertwined inextricably with the growing movement to establish English legally as our official language. Typically, the spokespersons on both sides of this web of concerns speak viscerally rather than rationally.

Since many of those who promote either a hard-nosed anti-immigration policy or an English-only society are themselves woefully lacking in knowledge of the history and legal structure of our country or inept and incompetent speakers of the very language that they claim to want to safeguard, one must conclude that they are motivated by something other than a concern for the preservation of the purity of either our culture or our language. That something seems to be a mindless and shallow jingoistic xenophobia.

This is unfortunate because it largely has denuded the movements to establish immigration within reasonable limits and English as our national language of the legitimacy that they deserve. The unfair conflation of the anti-immigration forces and the English-only proponents has infected the one with a sophistic blurring of the distinction between legal and illegal immigration and the other with an insidious anti-ethnicism.

The emotional charge that these issues carry is understandable.

For example, it is unreasonable in a country that requires minimum English proficiency for citizenship to expect voting—the most fundamental exercise of that citizenship—to allow for ballots in any language other than English. I know of no other nation where such an indulgence would be given a hearing, let alone be treated as credible.

Or, anyone walking through midtown Atlanta who becomes lost and randomly asks directions, especially of laborers whom we expect to know the town in which they work, finds that the number of them who cannot speak English is frustratingly staggering.

In addition—and forgive me if I seem to belabor this—we teachers, who have experienced the fruits of dual-language education, realize what an utter failure it is. Indeed, since I have allowed students to submit simultaneous essays in English and in their home language (when it was one of those of which I had a good reading knowledge), I discovered that many students in high school, after years of dual-language education—and this included primarily students who were born here—were functionally illiterate in both languages and that I had to make as many corrections in their home language writing as I did in their English writing.

This contrasts in my mind with the experience of my grandparents, who learned English without special classes, by immersion in the life of this, their new, country.

The deficiency of dual-language education is no secret. Especially not to savvy immigrant parents. The most pervasive example in our system involves Hispanic students—whom I single out, not from any anti-Hispanicism, but because they are our most numerically massive example. At the last high school at which I taught (in Texas), I was assigned to teach a ninth-grade remedial English class. When I saw that all the students spoke English, I asked them if they knew why they were in such a class. They did not. I assumed, therefore, that they must have come to this country relatively recently, but all of them assured me that they were native born. In my mind, at that point, I converted the class into a standard class (in which, by the way, they did no worse—and no better—than native Anglo students).

When I talked this over with a Hispanic friend, he told me that this was the predictable result of dual-language education, namely that students are shuttled from one substandard class to the next year after year. He added that when informed Hispanic parents enroll their children in school and come to the enrollment form's question "Is any language other than English spoken at home?", they answer "No."

In short, the lesson that we should learn both from our own experience and from the experience of other nations is that the lack of a national language leads to lack of linguistic competence in both native and transplanted citizens.

We need to make English our official language and to monitor the movement of persons into and out of the nation—not as a way of excluding anyone, but as the only sure way of producing inclusiveness for all.

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