

Bilingualism in Canadian Education: Issues and Research

Canadian Society for the Study of Education. *Bilingualism in Canadian Education: Issues and Research*. Third Yearbook 1976. Edmonton: CSSE, 1976. Pp. 136. \$3.50.

In a time of instant experts on the language issue in Canada, it is incumbent on educational theorists and researchers to disseminate their scholarly findings. *Bilingualism in Canadian Education: Issues and Research*, the 1976 yearbook of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, was such an attempt. Originating in a session at the Learned Societies at Laval University in 1976, these papers covered disparate language groupings, including English second-language learners, French-speaking minorities, native speakers, Ukrainian and other ethnic communities. Like many collections, these articles were selected more for their representativeness, or possibly proximity (three of the five are attributed to people at OISE, than for their common theoretical perspective; however, they all purportedly treated common, yet diverse themes, including the "relationship between culture and language," "the purpose of language learning," "the role of politics," "teacher supply and the need for relevant teacher training programmes" (pp. 5-6). Marred by a number of typographical errors, their overall style of presentation ranged unevenly from experimental reporting, verbose explanation, uneven yet occasionally insightful description, cogent exhortation, to discursive literese.

The real contribution of the yearbook was more in the area of research, by providing useful case studies, than in issues, as the joint sub-title implied. Although it might "stimulate the reader to consider in greater depth the problems and promises of bilingualism in our schools" (p. 6) (the exigences of the school situation alone might do that), the dearth of theoretical analysis provided little delineation or explanation of the "unresolved issues." The *soi-disant* "unique and creative solutions" (p. 6) are usually neither, and sometimes counter-productive if considered in the larger context. "The tremendous amount of work that remains to be done" (p. 6) will continue, for lack of conceptual orientation, to be quantitative replications, and not well-diagnosed prescriptions. In many ways, this yearbook is representative of the following problems inherent in bilingual education as practised in English-speaking Canada.

1. *Reliance on testing.* Generally, testing at the early age of kindergarten, or even later, has unreliable results due to the authority role of the test or tester, and the fear of testing among lower socio-economic classes. Conclusive evaluation is not always possible in an increasingly mobile society. Thus, in the immersion programme in Victoria, there was a "substantial amount of missing data. In some cases more than 50% of students in a group who completed the pre-test were unavailable for the post-test" (p. 19). Yet longitudinal studies are essential in order to study recidivism.

Moreover, the tests frequently reflected the notion of bilingual education as an independent variable: progress along a continuum using test results as a standard is measured by pre- and post-programme tests. Little practical recognition of bilingual education as a dependent variable is evident in the selection of tests; for example, the Metropolitan Readiness Test did not completely avoid the problem of cultural relativity, a crucial element in language learning. In the "quasi-experimental design" (p. 13) of Campbell and Stanley (1963) which was used, there appeared little statistical consideration between performance and the results of the parental survey to verify if they were testing a self-selected group. Where the philosophical commitment to bilingualism, the frequency of French spoken at home, and the contacts with French-speaking people, the effects, or the contributing causes of participation in bilingual education? Correlations with the social context, urban or rural, or the socio-economic level for even a local area were also absent, as were comparisons of different types of bilingual education programmes, be it immersion, second language as a means of instruction or as a subject, or both.

2. *Lobbying.* Inasmuch as the government provided much of the financial resources, this research is essentially political despite attempts to maintain a low profile. The funding originated out of the perception by English-speaking Canadians of the crisis of bilingualism and biculturalism: namely, the "problem" was their failure or inability to speak both English and French, and the solution was language acquisition and maintenance by means of schooling. Thus most of the papers assume the defence of second language programmes. The articles become position papers garbed in scientific experimentalism or eloquent rhetoric.

On the other hand, the perception of the same crisis by French-speaking Canadians is given scant attention, and usually only in the context of French-speaking minorities.

Where is the analysis of the economic power structure which necessitates the acquisition of two languages for upward mobility and discriminates on the basis of ethnicity, of which language is the most visible element? Where are the alternatives to the alleged "solution" of schooling considered, e.g., positive discrimination in hiring, economic viability of the French language via regional disparity grants, and special status for Quebec, considered?

Such a focus on language learning as the means to solve socio-economic problems is fraught with difficulties inherent in the limitations of schooling itself. Furthermore, the two variants of language learning, second language acquisition and language maintenance, are not only sometimes combined with contradictory and internally divisive results, but they can also be in competition, especially for the limited research funds.

3. *Lack of a conceptual framework.* Not all the articles exclusively adopt this *parti pris*. Some realize the dysfunctional elements of bilingual education but do not probe deeply into the following questions:

Will any language programme reinforce one's identity as well as integrate that person into another culture?

Will vernacular education solve socio-economic problems?

Will language maintenance endow children with a more efficient and useful brain as Dr. Penfield claims (p. 91 cited in Lupul's article)? Or are the benefits of bilingual education derived more from prior self-selection than from the programme?

Will language maintenance only serve to reinforce discrimination or to exclude ethnic groups from the WASP inner elite by making them more visible?

Will language programmes be able to accommodate equally both cultures when the power structure is unequal? Will it be implicitly directed towards one-way assimilation due to the value assumptions (e.g., literacy, Burnaby, p. 78) which affect decision-making choices and structures (e.g., schools)? Should such bicultural programmes be discouraged in an attempt to preserve one culture? Or is this romantic paternalism which denies the dynamic element of another culture to change and develop?

Whereas the articles by Shapson-Kaufman, Burnaby, and Lupul, all provide information, case studies and postulations, the ones by Churchill and Greenfield suggested a more interpretative perspective in their titles but proved disappointing. Both acknowledged Paulston's observation in 1975 that bilingual education should be treated not as an independent variable causing children's behaviour, but rather as a dependent variable explained by social conditions. Considering the earlier and extensive treatment of this aspect by Joshua Fishman in *Language and Nationalism: Two Interpretative Essays* in 1972, this recognition is rather late. Moreover, it is hardly a conceptual breakthrough to anyone familiar with related work in other disciplines, such as history which Churchill facetiously dismisses as being preoccupied with decision-making and lobbying (p. 40). Although he realizes the limitations of the intra-disciplinary perspective, he does not further a multi-disciplinary approach by developing theoretical constructs which serve to reconcile competing jargons or suggest new hypotheses. In the diagram on page 36 of the "fundamental concepts" and "axes of analysis" which include society, school, bilingualism and the individual, there are only categories for the listing of related theories rather than a dynamic model. Yet even this list omits many useful typologies and analyses, for example of W. Mackey and the International Centre for Research on Bilingualism. Moreover, his dismissal of the range of bilingualisms denies him the use of the relevant terms "bilingualism of promotion" and "bilingualism of concession" which would have elaborated his preference for Schemerhorn's term "dominant group." The latter concept is vacuous without its contextualization in the power structure of the society.

Whatever the strengths of research on bilingual education, they lie in precise description, albeit with limitations and biases. The weaknesses lie in the consideration of mere abstract issues without rigorous analysis and critical evaluation. Greenfield's article purportedly addresses the "crisis of purpose in Canadian culture" after first dealing with the 'facts' of second language programmes and the social and cultural implications of second language learning. The 'gist' of the article is "that research on the 'effects' and 'problems' of language learning must reach beyond technical questions about methods and consequences of second language learning, if it is to speak to major social questions in this country and indeed, if it is to yield findings which are coherent, meaningful, and consistent" (p. 108). More cogently phrased, we should stop looking at bilingual education as an end in itself, and start examining the ends for which bilingual education is the means. Were the article to have done this, the yearbook might have been worthy of dissemination to every Canadian.

However, what followed was naive romanticism. Consider the following examples: "We need now to exercise and strengthen a similar imagination (literary, artistic, and historical)

in the social affairs of the country and to consider how it might be applied in education" (p. 132), instead of concientization with a view to clarification of the power structure and development of appropriate strategies. Or, "these are the conditions (interpenetration of two relatively equal language groups, groups which are secure in their own integrity and independence") which the new nationalism is bringing to both French and English Canada, and it has provided the essential means to permit English Canadians to break their long-standing tradition of unilingualism," instead of some increase with high recidivism in a bilingualism of promotion among English speaking Canadians due to economic incentives for second language acquisition.

Although pan-Canadianism serves the interests of English-speaking Canadians (like its earlier version the Bonne Entente Movement which sought to overcome resistance to Conscription), it can be defensibly argued. Yet inconsistencies abound in Greenfield's article. Consider the following: "One way bilingualism supported largely by the French is clearly no longer an acceptable condition for the francophones who are determined not to lose their language." What happened to the French-speaking opposition to Regulation 17 in Ontario? Also, after denouncing the Toronto Board of Education for importing ready-made solutions and even problems (pp. 110-112), he then blithely proceeds to adopt without question the assessment of the OECD Report (market research for the multi-nationals, albeit solicited by the Canadian comprador elite) that what Canada lacks, and presumably should have is an explicitly stated, overall national conception of the country's interests for a politically motivated educational reform based on comparable models of the 'state-nation' or politico-operational integration. Moreover, any suggestion that this is the only, and hence preferred alternative for English-speaking Canadians, or any consideration of the French-speaking preference for socio-cultural integration is completely lacking.

Yet the yearbook is not without its interesting features. It contains a novel, and substantially altered version of bilingualism to that of the B and B Commission. In Lupul's article, the English-speaking view of second language learning as a panacea for economic problems takes the form of language maintenance for French Canadians, second language acquisition of French for those English Canadians who wish it, and bilingualism combinations of English and the vernacular for the "other ethnic groups" (p. 101).

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