

# Multilingual Education in Latin America

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Bi- or multilingual education is still an exception in Latin America, as it is in many other parts of the world. Most existing models are linked to specific ethnolinguistic communities that have maintained bilingual practices over time, including that of bilingual education: indigenous peoples and immigrant communities. Both groups have preserved their ancestral languages to varying degrees which sustains their claims for bilingual education in otherwise monolingual state territories.

Indigenous and immigrant communities including their schools belong to opposite poles on the scales of extreme inequality in Latin America. Their linguistic spaces and institutions share, however, some psycho- and sociolinguistic features and challenges which allow for comparisons on a certain level of abstraction. From a macro-sociolinguistic perspective, both communities exist as bilingual enclaves in sociohistoric formations of nation-state building processes oriented towards European models of linguistic and cultural homogeneity that seek to assimilate those who are different. Therefore, any stable bilingual community—indigenous or immigrant—faces adverse sociolinguistic conditions and will have to develop specific ideological, cultural, and linguistic justifications for its bilingual domains.

It is this entry's contention that that these two educational spaces share several common problems and possible solutions, and that they could greatly benefit from an exchange of experiences and expertise across the systems. Such collaboration could foster the growth of multilingual spheres and the transition towards pluralistic nation-states where cultural and linguistic diversity would be seen as global enrichment instead of a problem.

## Indigenous Education in Latin America

The sum of national census data gives the figure of slightly less than 30 million indigenous people in Latin America. Ninety percent of them live in the macro-areas of the Andes (Bolivia, the north of Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia) and Mesoamerica (Guatemala and Mexico) (Sichra, 2009).

From the beginning of the Conquest in 1492, colonialist policies materialized in education for indigenous populations through two basic approaches, a dichotomy that is still alive in our days. The first strategy aimed at linguistic and cultural assimilation through direct imposition of the European language (Spanish or Portuguese), leading to submersion or fast transitional programs; the second strategy sought subordinate preservation of indigenous peoples through slow transitional and some rare maintenance programs (Hamel, 2008a; López, 2009).

In view of previous educational failure with submersion and fast transitional programs for the indigenous population, a number of new modalities have emerged since the 1970s. In most countries, bilingual and bicultural programs gave way to the new concept of “*intercultural* bilingual education” (IBE) since the early 1990s. The two languages, content matters and competencies from indigenous funds of knowledge, as well as from national

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programs, should be integrated in a culturally and pedagogically appropriate curriculum. To redress historical imbalance, children are to know and appropriate their own culture in their language first in order to build a solid base of competencies, values, and ethnic identity (intracultural component). Next they should proceed to learn content matters from the national and global societies in order to integrate knowledge and competencies from several sources (intercultural component).

Under the label of “intercultural education for all,” mainstream students should develop a relationship of mutual understanding and respect by learning about indigenous cultures; they are expected to develop positive values towards diversity through a process of knowing, recognizing, and valorizing the other cultures. In areas of significant indigenous population density ( $\geq 30\%$ ), they should learn one of the indigenous languages (IL) of the region (in Bolivia, Mexico and some other countries; see Albó & Anaya, 2003).

On the micro-political level of pedagogical and applied linguistics, the question is which curriculum, pedagogical approach and what functional language distribution is appropriate and capable of integrating overall cultural and linguistic aims with academic achievement and empowerment in the context of prevailing asymmetric power relations.

In spite of local resistance, most countries officially adopted an intercultural bilingual model in the 1990s that establishes the right to mother tongue literacy and content teaching plus Spanish or Portuguese as a second language for students whose L1 is the indigenous language (Albó, 2002). However, historical discrimination and a pervasive diglossic ideology deeply rooted both in mainstream and in indigenous teachers’ and parents’ attitudes, raise high barriers against the implementation of such a curriculum that would be the most appropriate, both from a pedagogical and psycholinguistic perspective, and from the standpoint of the official declared goals of language maintenance and cultural development (López, 1998; López & Sichra, 2008). The most widespread modality still is transitional “Castilianization” which teaches literacy and content areas in Spanish and makes use of indigenous languages as the initial medium of instruction where necessary. The same procedure applies in Brazil with Portuguese. However, an increasing number of teaching materials in indigenous languages are being used alongside national language primers, and experimental school projects have engaged in new ways of improving indigenous education (Hamel, 2008a).

### **Immigrant and Elite Bilingual Education (EBE): From Immigrant to Global Language Schools**

The history of European and, to a lesser extent, Middle East and Asian immigration to Latin America is well documented. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay absorbed about 90% of the European immigration to Latin America (Rosenberg, 2001). During the period of massive immigration (1875 to 1930), Spaniards and Italians represented the largest immigrant group in most countries, followed by the British, Germans, Polish, Yugoslavians (mainly Croatians), and French.

Argentina, Brazil, and Chile received three million Italians and 600,000 Germans (see Baily & Miguez, 2003). For 1990, high estimates identify some 500,000 speakers and almost 12 million citizens of German descent for Brazil, 300,000 speakers and 1 million descendants for Argentina, and 20,000 speakers out of 200,000 descendants for Chile (Born & Dickgießer, 1989).

Mainly the British-, French-, and German-speaking settlers founded their own schools and other institutions once they arrived to preserve their languages, religion, traditions and endogamic kinship relations. Most of these schools went through four historical phases. Founded as monolingual community or heritage language schools in the 19th or early 20th

century, they provided the children of the settlers with appropriate education, especially in rural areas where no other schooling was available. Teaching was conducted entirely in the immigrant language in most cases, and no students from outside the community were admitted.

In a second phase, teachers were brought over from heritage countries and the national language was introduced almost as a foreign language to provide the necessary language skills in dealing with the external society. Content matters were usually taught entirely in the immigrant language to foster language maintenance.

In their third phase, immigrant schools gradually weakened their character as enclave and ethnic community schools and joined the group of national elite schools (Mejía, 2002), together with other private institutions, opening their doors to the children of the countries' economic and power elites as bilingual schools. Two convergent processes triggered off significant changes in curriculum and language policy. As the immigrant schools became attractive for the national elites, they had to offer a curriculum that could satisfy the educational needs of their new customers. Today, divergent regulations from the home and the host countries often lead to a dual system of parallel curricula with separate languages, faculty, and management which unnecessarily doubles certain content matters taught in both languages. Many schools established segregated tracks for bilinguals and national monolinguals, combining L1 with immersion education.

In a fourth phase, some of the schools associated with prestigious and internationally powerful language communities have developed into "global language schools" (Banfi & Day, 2004) since the 1970s, offering modern, international technology and curriculum together with class segregation and the promise of molding the future leaders of business and politics. Their bi- or trilingual programs and international certificates add a cutting edge to the competitive value of these institutions.

Elite bilingual schools share a model of enrichment bi- or multilingualism (Mejía, 2008). None of the languages involved is under threat or clearly stigmatized, and students are systematically encouraged, awarded and recognized for the bilingualism they develop in the world's "good" languages. The fact that the schools promote bilingualism as a visible and positive trademark in a domain of social prestige has helped to introduce an enrichment perspective and to mitigate Latin American policies of building homogeneous and monolingual nation states.

### **Common Challenges in Indigenous and Elite Bilingual Education: Integration and Conflicting Orientations**

Certainly, the two systems under review have little in common in socioeconomic terms which locate them at the extreme poles between the rich and the poor. Despite fundamental differences, however, a number of sociolinguistic, pedagogical, and curricular phenomena in each system allow for cautious comparison. This entry will focus on problems of integration on various levels: the *internal* integration of curriculum and school communities, the *external* or *national* integration or indeed segregation from the country's political and cultural context, and the *international* integration into a global community of education.

#### **Elite Bilingual Schools**

The internal integration of languages, content matters, and teaching methods into a well-structured curriculum challenges many elite bilingual schools. The implementation of two national curricula and separate teaching faculty who frequently know little about the "other" language and curriculum obstruct integrated multilingual communication and academic development.

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Until now, divergent ideological orientations towards the heritage and the host country may create conflicting asymmetric value systems that affect external or national integration. In addition, many EBE schools maintain little communication with national debates on education. They prefer to connect with their "home" countries and receive academic input, teachers, and teacher training from there.

On the other hand, global integration emerges as a decisive force. In fact, EBE schools in Latin America increasingly incorporate their members into the emerging global arena, creating new de-territorialized "third cultures" and international networks of business, science, and technology.

### Indigenous Education

Problems and challenges of integration emerge for indigenous education in Latin America too, though in different ways. Most countries in Latin America possess a national curriculum that engages in a conflicting relationship with the curricular needs and practices of IBE for indigenous populations. Education and language planning for such programs poses problems that can be traced to similar levels of internal, external, or national and international integration.

A number of contradictions arise for the internal integration of the intercultural and the bilingual component of IBE since content matters and competencies from indigenous knowledge base as well as from national programs need to be integrated adequately. To design the appropriate curriculum, indigenous funds of knowledge need to be identified, often reconstructed from oblivion and fragmentation, and systematized to serve as the pedagogical input for the curriculum. The successful integration of such an intercultural curriculum that avoids imbalance, unsuitable misrepresentation of indigenous knowledge via Western systematization, and dichotomized juxtaposition, presents a significant challenge for curriculum design (Gustafson, 2009; Hamel, 2009). As we have seen, the role and the functional integration of the two languages and strategies for their teaching as L1, L2, or as two first languages depending on sociolinguistic conditions posit similar unsolved problems.

The external or national integration of IBE faces similar challenges. To attend the specific local needs, an appropriate IBE curriculum requires a significant degree of independence from the national curriculum which is matter of conflict and negotiation. Some countries like Brazil, Colombia, and Guatemala allow advanced autonomy on the basis of a minimal common core, whereas countries like Mexico and Argentina impose the national curriculum with only slight adaptations (López, 2009). In the end, new programs and practices will only work when they gain legitimacy, that is, when indigenous teachers, students and communities acquire power, a significant degree of autonomy, and control over their education.

International integration of IBE becomes crucial in transnational migration. Many indigenous migrants reinforce their ethnic identity and language use in the host countries in Latin America, the United States, or Europe where they develop lively transnational, often trilingual communities. The educational systems both in Latin America and in the target countries of migration (United States, Canada, European Union) have encountered considerable difficulties and resistance to meet the needs of indigenous migration that has so far remained largely invisible. Education will have to include intercultural components, competencies, and content necessary for survival and empowerment in migration.

## **Integrating Perspectives from Complementary Knowledge and Experience: Desiderata for Research and Action**

### Strengths and Weaknesses

In sum, a pluralistic orientation of cultural and linguistic enrichment and intercultural learning could improve internal pedagogical, national (horizontal), and global (vertical) integration.

Indigenous education reveals significant strength in the field of culture and language relations, nurtured by anthropology, descriptive linguistics, and sociolinguistics. The system was for a long time strongly influenced and even administrated by anthropologists, since it was anthropological insight that developed an understanding of how indigenous societies existed and survived as subordinate but distinct ethnolinguistic polities in the context of nation states. Anthropological theory developed frameworks to direct the dynamics of these contacts to enhance either mostly acculturation (Aguirre Beltrán, 1973), or exceptionally independent endoculturation and accommodation without assimilation. Descriptive linguistics provided structural analysis and alphabets, and later on sociolinguistics supplied knowledge about the relations between languages and their speakers, language contact or conflict, shift and maintenance. Clearly, the combined contributions of these disciplines helped to sharpen our understanding of how different cultural models and cosmovisions, as well as asymmetric language conflict relations interfere in the micro-cosmos of the classroom.

EBE in turn has regularly enjoyed significant international investment in modern applied linguistics and foreign/second language teaching, L1 development in contexts of diaspora and language through content teaching. One of its most important contributions is the development of additive enrichment bilingualism, the invaluable experience of creating stimulating environments of bilingual learning that help children to develop self-reliance in their languages and cultures.

On the downside, IBE traditionally had weak input from applied linguistics and pedagogy. The field lacks detailed studies about bilingual language acquisition and academic achievement. Over the past twenty years, IBE has attempted to compensate its deficit in pedagogy, psycho- and applied linguistics by drawing on bilingual education experiences in the United States, Canada, and Europe. In EBE, in turn, there seems to be an acute lack of anthropological and sociolinguistic insight to understand intercultural relations.

### Areas of Conceptual Cooperation and Mutual Learning

Indigenous IB schools could greatly profit from L1 development and L2 teaching methodology based on an integrated communicative approach including content and language integrated learning and teaching (CLIL) where EBE tends to be successful. Transfer of cognitively demanding academic skills from one language to the other might improve in both types of bilingual education through exchange and mutual learning.

For elite bilingual schools it would certainly be an enriching experience to introduce an anthropological and sociolinguistic perspective into their work, both on the micro level of their internal integration of languages, cultures, and learning communities, and on the macro level of societal integration. A reassessment of their often dichotomized curriculum, possible conflicts between languages, and their teaching practices from an intercultural learning perspective could help them to reach intercultural competence. Given the drive towards intercultural national curricula for mainstream education in many Latin American countries, EBE could no doubt profit from participation in the debates and experiences in their host countries.

## Multilingual Education as a Touchstone for Pluricultural States

A broad comprehensive framework of language policy and planning in applied linguistics is called for to interpret the language and education policies in bi- or multilingual education and to connect all language types involved: the national language(s) of each state, as well as indigenous, immigrant, and foreign languages, both on macro and micro levels. Such a framework understands language policies as a historical process of change in social language constellations where state institutions and other social forces intervene. It encompasses not only the transformation of discursive and linguistic structures and uses (e.g., standardization, *Sprachausbau*, diffusion, shift, revitalization, etc.), but also and fundamentally a change in the relationship that the actors involved establish with their own languages and others in a shared territory as part of overall power relations (see Hamel, 1993, 2008b for a discussion).

When we analyze the language policies concerning the two types of bilingual education and their communities in Latin America, we realize that one common factor which allows for an integrated comparative interpretation is their relationship with the state and the dominant society as it developed over time. Conservative and nationalist forces still consider multilingualism as a problem for the state, although they recognize certain minority rights; and assimilation of minorities is often still the overall goal. Many members of ethnolinguistic minorities have internalized this hegemonic ideology and developed defensive attitudes regarding the “illegitimacy” of their languages. Here, a new language policy needs to be developed to transform the relationship that the dominant *and* the subordinate actors maintain vis-à-vis the prevailing language constellation in order to overcome it.

Bilingual communities and their educational institutions at the two poles of societal stratification may contribute significantly to this transformation in their own ways. In particular, they can demonstrate how the funds of knowledge stemming from their heritage languages and cultures—indigenous or immigrant—make significant contributions and enrich the dominant societies. The undeniable educational leadership of elite bilingual schools in developing enrichment multilingualism can help to erode further the unsustainable ideology of monolingualism. And the unquestionable legitimacy of indigenous claims to be recognized as peoples and to have their linguistic and educational rights respected may work towards the same goal from a different societal pole. Language and education policies promoting diversity for majorities and minorities can no longer be dismissed as marginal components of state policy. They have become a touchstone to appraise the quality of democracy, pluricultural, and plurilingual commitment and the construction of modern states in Latin American and in most parts of the world.

**SEE ALSO:** Bilingual Education and Immigration; Heritage Languages and Language Policy; Indigenous Languages in the Twenty-First Century; Language and Globalization; Language Policy and Multilingualism; Multilingual Education; Multilingualism and Minority Languages

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