

The New York Times

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 15, 1997

Desperate to Learn English

By Alice Callaghan

LOS ANGELES
Juana and Florencio left the poverty of their rural Mexican village in 1985 and came to Los Angeles to work in the garment district's sweatshops. In 1996, they pulled their three children — all born in Los Angeles — out of school for nearly two weeks until the school agreed to let them take classes in English rather than Spanish.

Seventy other poor immigrant families joined this school boycott in February 1996, insisting that their children be allowed out of the city's bilingual program, which would not teach English to children from Spanish-speaking homes until they learned how to read and write in Spanish. In the end, the parents prevailed.

Yet, throughout California and elsewhere in the country, many Hispanic parents are worried that bilingual education programs are keeping their children from learning English.

These children live in Spanish-speaking homes, play in Spanish-speaking neighborhoods and study in Spanish-speaking classrooms. With

Alice Callaghan, an Episcopalian priest, is director of the Las Familias del Pueblo community center.

little exposure to English in the primary grades, few successfully learn it later.

This is why many Latino parents are backing a California ballot initiative that would end bilingual education for most children in the state. The measure will be put to a vote in June if enough signatures are gathered to put it on the ballot.

School administrators, Latino politicians and other advocates of bilin-

Latino immigrants fight bilingual education.

gual education have denounced the measure. Though they acknowledge the failings of the system, they insist they can fix it with time.

Yet after 25 years, bilingual education has few defenders among Latino parents. In a Los Angeles Times poll this year, 83 percent of Latino parents in Orange County said they wanted their children to be taught in English as soon as they started school. Only 17 percent of those surveyed said they favored having their children taught in their native language.

One reason bilingual education is

so entrenched is money. Bilingual teachers in Los Angeles are paid extra, up to \$5,000 a year; schools and school districts receive hundreds of dollars for each child who is designated as having limited proficiency in English. About \$400 million in state and Federal money supports bilingual educational programs in California. Because such money is not readily relinquished, students languish in Spanish-language classes.

Moreover, there are not enough bilingual teachers. In Los Angeles, the shortfall has been so severe that the city has granted emergency credentials to people whose only claim to a classroom lectern is their ability to speak Spanish.

Latino parents know that placing their children in English-language classes will not cure the many problems plaguing California schools, where the Latino dropout rate is 40 percent and Latino students have consistently low achievement test scores. Unless these students can learn in English, future school reform efforts will not help them.

Most parents who participated in the school boycott last year labor in garment district sweatshops. Others wait on tables, clean downtown offices or sell fruit or tamales on street corners. All struggle on average monthly incomes of \$800.

Education is their only hope for a better future for their children. The first step is learning English. □

Los Angeles Times

FRIDAY, APRIL 10, 1998

Riordan Backs Move to End Bilingual Classes

By JIM NEWTON
and DOUG SMITH
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

After months of deliberation, Mayor Richard Riordan on Thursday endorsed the campaign to end California's system of bilingual education, which he described as a well-intended experiment overtaken by special interests and now badly failing the state's children.

"I know of a few laboratory examples of bilingual education succeeding," the mayor told members of the Westchester Chamber of Commerce. "But in the vast, vast majority of schools it is a total failure."

The mayor, who has no authority over schools but who regularly expounds on educational programs and initiatives, urged the Los Angeles Unified School District to take the money now being spent on bilingual education classes and instead devote it to after-school and weekend English-language instruction.

Riordan added that he would "use every effort" to see that money was shifted to those "total immersion" programs so that non-English-speaking students would receive extra help adjusting to classes in English.

Riordan's endorsement of Proposition 227—known as the Unz initiative for its chief backer, Silicon Valley executive Ron Unz—lends powerful backing to the anti-bilingual campaign. Riordan is a moderate Republican who ran well among Latinos in his reelection campaign last year, and more than 300,000 Los Angeles students are enrolled in bilingual education. Neither Gov. Pete Wilson nor Atty. Gen. Dan Lungren,

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the prospective GOP gubernatorial nominee, has taken a position on the measure; all the Democratic candidates for governor oppose it.

Reaction to the mayor's speech came quickly and was sharply divided.

Skid row activist Alice Callaghan, who helped spark Proposition 227 with a 1996 boycott protesting bilingual instruction at Los Angeles' Ninth Street School, commended the mayor.

"I know he has spent a very long time thinking about [the initiative] and talking to people on both sides of the issue," said Callaghan, who has regularly sent Riordan material on the matter and lobbied him despite their differences on a number of issues. "The mayor's support has always been important to us. . . . He is the first politician to be willing to stand side by side with our sweatshop workers—the only one."

'We Have Failed Our Children'

By contrast, Rafael Gonzalez, director of civic education for the National Assn. of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, was stunned.

"Oh my God, he did it!" Gonzalez exclaimed. "I really think it's a sad day when the mayor of one of the most diverse cities in the nation throws his support to an untested program that only seems to fan the air of divisiveness."

Said Stewart Kwoh, executive director of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center: "I thought it was an unfortunate statement, because I don't think his understanding is complete on the effect of the proposition."

As with many of his educational forays, Riordan framed his endorsement of Proposition 227 in both economic and moral terms. He described English as the "language of business, of jobs," and said children who do not speak it fluently will be at an economic disadvantage in an increasingly competitive society.

At the same time, he stressed that letting down children was a social failing that offended his conscience, which ultimately prompted him to publicly back the initiative and stump for it.

"We have failed our children," he said. "We can do it no longer."

Riordan's decision to endorse the initiative was reached after months of consideration. In February, he was on the verge of announcing a position, but was persuaded by aides to spend more time considering it. After conferring with aides and others, Riordan said he decided two weeks ago that he was unalterably opposed to bilingual education and that he felt obligated to speak out on the issue.

Even as he did, the mayor tried to stress his commitment to cultural and linguistic diversity. Riordan emphasized that language is an important aspect of cultural heritage, and said his support for the initiative was not intended to minimize that.

"But bilingual education is not about customs or



KEN LUBAS / Los Angeles Times

L.A. Mayor Richard Riordan answers questions after announcing support for Proposition 227.

traditions," he said. "It is about an experiment that has failed our children. . . . It is time to start giving our children the tools to compete, for today and tomorrow."

Although Riordan spoke with force and was interrupted several times by applause from an audience made up mostly of business executives, he refrained from disparaging the other side in the emotional, sometimes divisive debate.

"Reasonable people can disagree on this issue," Riordan said. "I'm not one to demonize people who disagree with me."

Riordan reiterated that sentiment later in the day, when asked whether he was worried that his support for the initiative would be construed as racist—a charge leveled at some of the proposition's backers. Riordan brusquely responded that he thought it was wrong for either side to demonize the other on such a charged and complicated topic.

Riordan's growing determination to play a role in the educational life of Los Angeles and California has created some friction with the local school board, whose members the mayor has criticized. That board unanimously voted to oppose the Unz initiative, but Riordan resisted taking a swipe at the school board

members Thursday. Still, district officials were sensitive to the mayor's announcement—even if some chose not to rise to the bait.

Reaction in L.A. Unified

A spokesman for Los Angeles L.A. Unified Supt. Ruben Zacarias, who learned of the mayor's endorsement Thursday morning, said he would refrain from taking a position on the Unz initiative because he is not an elected official.

A firm supporter of bilingual education, Zacarias has frequently said that its practice in Los Angeles schools needs to be improved by speeding up students' transition into English, which should generally occur by the third grade.

But spokesman Brad Sales took issue with the mayor's conclusion that bilingual education has failed.

"There are many fine bilingual programs in the district producing students going on to prestigious colleges and universities," he said.

School board member David Tokofsky saw the mayor's endorsement as "a bold move" that could not be attacked as an English-only stand.

"There's no question in my mind that the mayor loves children, and this is not an easy decision for him," Tokofsky said. "It pains him no end that children are not being given the chance his own children would have."

Despite being part of a unanimous school board vote opposing Unz, Tokofsky said he is troubled that the district's instructional staff has not produced empirical evidence that bilingual education works.

If the Unz initiative becomes law, he said, "Zacarias and the staff better have more than emotional responses to present to justify continuation of programs."

In the trenches, Riordan's stand brought sharply divided reactions following the lines of a November teachers union referendum that split 52% to 48% against the Unz initiative.

"Good," said Debby Eckstein, a non-bilingual teacher at Graham Elementary school in South-Cen-

tral Los Angeles, who fears she may be bumped into a summer teaching track by a less-experienced bilingual teacher. She said she would have to quit to be with her two children.

"If this passes, that's the only thing that is going to save my job," Eckstein said.

Other teachers and administrators criticized the mayor for acting without sufficient knowledge of bilingual education.

"Personally I am shocked, very disappointed, because Mr. Riordan's endorsement is based on misinformation," said Javier Miranda, principal of Florence Avenue School in South-Central and a longtime bilingual advocate.

"The assumption is that children in bilingual programs do not acquire English," Miranda said. "Yes, their English language development will be delayed, not because of the program itself, but because of the overall environment in which they live."

Additional Support

Although Riordan's endorsement highlighted the day's events surrounding Proposition 227, the initiative also picked up support from a group of Asian American elected officials in Orange County. Among those present were Garden Grove Councilman Ho Chung, Westminster Councilman Tony Lam and Fullerton Councilwoman Julie Sa.

"The education issue cannot be distorted by ethnic sensibilities or political opportunism," said Chung, who organized the news conference. "Children are our future. We have to educate them. We have to have one common language for everybody to be able to communicate."

Chung, a Korean immigrant who arrived in the United States 30 years ago with his four children, said his own children's experience in this country's education system convinced him that educating students in English as early as possible is key to their success.

Times staff writers Bettina Boxall and Tini Tran contributed to this article.

Richard Cohen

Immerse Them in English

Bill Clinton, meet the former Pearl Rosenberg.

Clinton, of course, is the very president who recently pronounced himself opposed to a California ballot initiative that would virtually end bilingual education.

The former Ms. Rosenberg is my mother. When she was just about 7 years old, a neighborhood kid marched her to the local public school and enrolled her in the first grade. She had been in this country maybe a month and spoke not one word of English.

This was December 1920, and the experience was either so awful or so routine that my mother can recall nothing about it. All she knows, she said in an exclusive telephone interview from her home in West Palm Beach, Fla., is that her mother—a non-English speaker 'til the day she died—was too afraid of the authorities to register her in school herself. So the neighbor, his name lost in the fog of history, substituted.

And all I know is that my mother speaks perfect English. So did her older brother and sister—and so, in my recollection, did every one of the one-time kids in the family who, terrified, took a horse and cart to Warsaw, a

train to Rotterdam and the boat to the United States. Some of the older ones wound up speaking with an accent, but it was faint, more interesting than annoying. As for my mother, with just a little effort she sounded—at least to me—like an old-time telephone operator. Number, please.

Now, it is important for columnists of any age to avoid the Sam Levinson Syndrome. Levinson was a comedian whose act consisted largely of saying how good things were in the old days—including the way his parents disciplined him: Slap! So I have been trying to figure out how my mother could be all that different from the many thousands of Hispanic kids who would no longer get bilingual education under Prop 227. I'm stumped. Aside from the difference in languages, a 7-year-old is still a 7-year-old.

In fact, the White House has been oozing ambiguity on this issue. While it does not much like Prop 227, it doesn't much like the present program, either. What it really doesn't like, it seems, is being caught between a popular referendum (nearly 70 percent approval in a recent Los Angeles Times poll) and the organized opposition. So while it has

pronounced the status quo unacceptable, it has expressed precisely the same verdict on what Prop 227 would require: one year of English immersion classes for non-English speakers under the age of 10.

Is there a better way to teach these kids? Maybe. But Clinton is representative of the sort of politician who is so beholden to teachers' unions or special interest groups that reform is not possible. As with affirmative action, a reaction and repugnance swells up from the ground—and it is only then that someone like the president suggests a middle course. It is often too late.

As it is now, non-English-speaking students are taught in their native language—and get English instruction for about half an hour a day. Since most of those kids return to a home where English is not spoken, many of them never learn to read or write in the language of Shakespeare—not to mention of General Motors and the rest of the country's businesses.

This is tragic for the kids and not, as some would argue, an expression of anti-immigrant sentiment. No one's advocating any silly English-only law (of the sort recently struck down in Arizona) by which, for instance, it

would be illegal for state officials to use a language other than English in the course of their official business. These laws can be an expression of both racist and xenophobic sentiment—sending a message to non-English speakers that they are not wanted.

But immersing kids in English is a different matter. It works, as generations of immigrants can testify. English fluency and literacy are absolutely essential for assimilation and success, which is why 50 percent of California's Hispanic population supports Prop 227.

Milan Kundera, the great Czech writer, has written his most recent book, "Identity: A Novel," in French, the language of his adopted country. Joseph Conrad started writing in his native Polish, but moved to English for such masterpieces as "Heart of Darkness." I do not suggest that ordinary people can duplicate that feat, but for a child, learning a language is a simple thing, an amazing process as natural as a sponge soaking up water. As my mother and millions of immigrants proved, all it takes for this kind of learning to proceed is for proponents of bilingual education to get out of the way.

The Washington Post

Voting on Bilingual Ed

LONG-STANDING AND widespread qualms about the state of bilingual education have broken the surface—as usual—in California. A ballot initiative is afoot to curtail sharply the conditions under which it can be offered. Proposition 227 would essentially eliminate the current elaborate structure, under which non-English-speaking students are taught academic subjects in their own language (in four-fifths of cases, Spanish) while studying English separately part of the day until they are ready to switch over. It would substitute a one-time intensive English-immersion program with a strict one-year time limit, though waivers would be available.

The stated purpose of the traditional approach to bilingual education has always been “mainstreaming”—getting students to the level of proficiency for all-day English as quickly as possible, then transferring them. But in practice, too many students are not tested and are left to stagnate in native-language classes for as long as five years. This cheats students of the intensive immersion they need for true fluency, and it frustrates parents who want their kids fully integrated into American culture. Much of the estimated 70 percent support for Proposition 227 is Latino.

The question of how best to help kids who come into the school system without language skills ought to be pedagogical, not political, and attempts to answer it with a blunt political instrument such as an initiative are inevitably clumsy. The new proposal, imposed as it would be at the state level, runs the risk of cutting too far the other way and ignoring kids’ or localities’ needs; this is the Clinton administration’s (rather lame) stated argument for announcing its opposition.

But as this suggests, the politics of bilingual education long since drifted from the strictly educational, and the run-up to the initiative (slated for the June 1 primary) is fogged with other issues. Among supporters, the drift has been toward related but separate goals such as maintaining native-language fluency and cultural awareness, not to mention the employment of native-language teachers. Among opponents, too often, the drift has been toward nativist politics and more general opposition to the spread of other languages than English.

Whatever one’s views on any of these goals, they should not interfere with what ought to be a community’s base-line civic obligation to help newly immigrant kids get the tools they need to function in America.

The Economist

AUGUST 30TH - SEPTEMBER 5TH 1997

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Bilingual education

Separate and unequal

LOS ANGELES

IN 1994 it was benefits for illegal immigrants. Two years later it was positive discrimination for racial minorities; a ban on this has just got past its final legal hurdles. Next year it will almost certainly be bilingual education, the system by which Latino children (and sometimes those of other races) are taught, at least in the early years, in their own language rather than English. Every election year Californians get a chance to tell their rulers what is on their minds, thanks to the system of citizen-inspired ballots; and what is on their minds, quite simply, is race.

So far, these ballot-inspired debates have proved disappointingly predictable. Is there any chance that bilingual education will be any better? Not at first sight. The man behind the campaign to scrap it is a Republican multi-millionaire, Ron Unz, and the usual ethnic activists are already lining up to impugn his motives. Theresa Bustillos, of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, dubs this the third in a row of anti-Latino measures.

Look a little closer, however, and the politics becomes more interesting. Mr Unz, who made his money in software, is a libertarian rather than a Buchananite, with an impeccable record on race relations; he

\$5,000 a year extra; and schools that provide bilingual teaching are eligible for a slew of federal and state grants.

Mr Unz regards bilingual education as the "single most bizarre and unsuccessful government programme in California today." He argues that only about 5% of children who enter the bilingual stream graduate into English-speaking classes each year—for all practical purposes bilingual is in fact monolingual education—and that huge numbers of children leave school unable to read or write in the official language of their adopted country. He also points out that the legislation sanctioning this gigantic programme expired a decade ago.

His objections to the programme run deeper, however. The American tradition has always been one of assimilation, he argues; now, thanks to the bilingual education movement, schools are deliberately leaving children imprisoned in the *barrio*.

was one of the most outspoken opponents of Proposition 187, which denied benefits to illegal immigrants. The co-chairman of his campaign, Gloria Matta Tuchman, is a Mexican-American teacher. The drive to gather the 433,000 signatures needed to put the measure on the ballot is being organised by Progressive Campaigns Inc, a left-leaning organisation that has previously lent its support to the minimum wage and the medical use of marijuana. As for the Republican Party, it is so terrified of further accusations of immigrant-bashing that it is refusing to touch the subject.

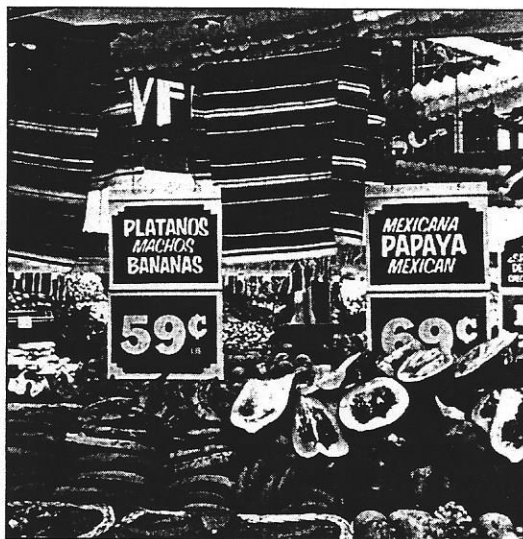
Mr Unz says that he first got interested in the subject in 1996, when he read accounts of a boycott of a school in LA's garment district organised by parents who were furious that their children were not learning any English. Last year a poll by the Center for Equal Opportunity, a think tank based in Washington, DC, found that 81% of Latino parents prefer their children to learn English as soon as possible. Most Latinos realise that English literacy is the

Mr Unz's ballot measure argues that the state should stop teaching non-English-speaking children in their native language, unless their parents specifically ask for it, and should instead give them a year of "sheltered English immersion"—with teachers using simple English—before putting them into mainstream classrooms. It also calls for an extra \$50m a year for the next ten years for adult literacy, an idea that has infuriated the nativist right.

Mr Unz's campaign has a good chance of success. Most Americans—including most immigrants—instinctively feel that the main job of schools is to ensure that children are proficient in the language of their adopted country. The majority of teachers, usually bastions of conservatism, are unhappy with bilingual education. Many blacks resent the fact that bilingual education diverts resources from their own children; hence the fruitless attempt to get

key to upward mobility—providers of English courses are the top advertisers on Spanish-language television—and worry that bilingual education is nothing more than a poverty trap. No wonder that Latino political leaders do not list defending bilingual education among their top five priorities.

Nonetheless, it is a vast industry in California. About 1.3m children—almost a quarter of California's school population—attend bilingual classes at a cost of more than \$300m a year. The schools have a huge financial incentive for maintaining the system. Bilingual teachers are paid up to



A world in two languages

"ebonics" classified as a distinct language.

Even bilingual education's supporters admit that the current system is a mess. The California legislature has been trying to do something about it for years, but has been paralysed by infighting. Every year children from ethnic minorities are railroaded into bilingual classes even if they speak English at home. The shortage of bilingual teachers is so severe in places such as Los Angeles that emergency teachers are being recruited whose only credentials are their ability to speak a language other than English. Latino schoolchildren—the programme's main clients—have the lowest test scores of any ethnic group in the state, and the highest school drop-out rate. "The trouble with bilingual education is that it's expensive and it doesn't work," says Joel Kotkin of Pepperdine University. "Apart from that, it's fine."

Los Angeles Times

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 9, 1997

Campaign Targets Bilingual Education

■ Former gubernatorial candidate Ron Unz and teacher Gloria Matta Tuchman unveil petition drive for 1998 initiative.

By AMY PYLE
TIMES EDUCATION WRITER

A campaign to end bilingual education in California was being launched inside a skid row day-care center Tuesday morning, but the phalanx of television cameras did not interrupt Jose Negrete's construction of an intricate Lego pirate cove.

As former gubernatorial candidate Ron Unz and English-only teacher Gloria Matta Tuchman described their quest for a spring 1998 statewide initiative—which was cleared last week by the state attorney general, enabling a signature drive to begin today—the 10-year-old sorted through a peg-legged pirate, a skeleton, a treasure chest and, of course, the plank.

Although Jose was oblivious to the speechmaking, he was actually an inspiration for the initiative, as one of 80 Spanish-speaking children held out of Ninth Street School by their parents last year after administrators refused to move them into all-English classes.

The Times' coverage of the two-week boycott piqued the interest of software entrepreneur Unz, who decided to renew his fight against bilingual education. "Our initiative ensures that the parents get their wish," Unz said.

Jose's role in what could become a historic moment in California educational history began in February 1995,



IRIS SCHNEIDER / Los Angeles Times

Teacher Gloria Matta Tuchman, left, with children at day-care center.

when he was a third-grader in a bilingual class, taught mostly in Spanish. Thanks to the boycott, by September he was attending a fourth-grade class taught entirely in English.

"At first, I didn't understand what the teacher was telling me," he said in clear but accented English.

Was it scary? "Yes. Then I started learning, little by little."

The value of English is crystal clear to Jose. "When you get big, if you go to work and they talk to you in English and you don't understand them, they can fire you."

Now, a quarter of California's public school students are eligible for bilingual classes. Nearly half the Los Angeles Unified School District students are eligible.

annually into regular classes. "That's a 95% failure rate," he said.

Bilingual advocates, poised to battle the measure, say Unz has misinterpreted the data. The 5% "transition rate" is based on all bilingual education students, most of whom are only beginning a three- to seven-year transition to all-English classes.

The impact on bilingual students could be devastating, said Joseph Jaramillo, staff attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. "It would send many California schools into crisis because they would be stripped of the very tools necessary to bring children into the mainstream."

MALDEF is watching the initiative carefully, Jaramillo said, because of its potential for tapping into the same immigrant-bashing that helped pass Proposition 187.

But Republican Unz, who opposed bilingual education when he ran against Gov. Pete Wilson in the primary in 1994, said he wants to avoid becoming another magnet for anti-immigrant rage. He notes that he campaigned against Proposition 187 and that some conservatives already have distanced themselves from his initiative because it would add \$50 million a year to programs that teach English to adults interested in becoming English tutors.

Unz sought out Matta Tuchman to lend classroom reality to his campaign. Matta Tuchman has long opposed bilingual education and teaches an English immersion first-grade class in Santa Ana.

She has challenged bilingual education for decades but had virtually sworn off spending time on the cause until she received Unz's phone call. "After a while you feel like a broken record," she said. "Isn't anybody listening?"

Dubbed "English for the Children," Unz's initiative would require that all public school instruction be conducted in English unless a parent can prove a child would learn faster through an alternative—possibly bilingual—technique. Under current state laws, roughly the opposite is true: non-English-speaking children are to be placed in some form of bilingual education unless parents request English-only instruction.

The initiative provides for one year of immersion in English before students are mainstreamed.

Unz said his proposal was prompted by public opinion polls showing that Latino parents want their children in English-only programs and by statistics indicating that bilingual programs graduate only 5% of their children