SESSION ONE

SOCIETAL AND POLICY CONTEXTS OF RESEARCH
WITH LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS

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Introduction

I have been asked to open this conference by talking about the broad contextual issues surrounding research with language minority students. I am very honored to do so. Before addressing the substance of the topic, I would like to comment on the debate that often crops up when the term *linguistic minority* is used: that is, the debate about the extent to which language is a central aspect of the problem faced by the minorities, as opposed to other presumably larger socio-cultural and non-linguistic factors. To me, this debate is so often put in "either-or" terms that it becomes exceedingly boring. There is a parallel in the domain of cognitive psychology - certainly a more manageable domain - in which scholars have debated whether language is central or not to mental processes. Scholars have gotten so embroiled in this debate that they have lost sight of the fundamental observation that there are mental processes, some of which centrally involve language, others which do not. The answer to the importance of language all has to do with where you look, and this *variation* of what you find depending on where you look turns out to be the most interesting part of the debate.

In the case of the role of language in defining linguistic minorities, it is a simple fact of life in these communities that language is a central aspect of the personal and collective identity. As students of the politics of language such as O'Barr have noted (O'Barr and O'Barr 1976), language may not be the deep cause of political processes, but they often serve an important symbolic role. It is undeniable that language -- both the ethnic language as well as English -- is an important symbol for most minority groups in this country. It is also undeniable that the intrusion of the

ethnic languages into the schools through bilingual education has served as the symbolic crux of an essentially political battle. Rather than denying the role of language in all of this, what we need to do is to understand what the nature of the role might be, and why it plays more of an important role in some groups and in certain circumstances than in others.

Back to the broader picture, in my talk today, I would like to do several things. First, I think it would be important to clarify what we mean by progress in research. Different understandings about what research is all about would result - I would like to argue - in very different outcomes when it comes to talking about the relationship between research and practice. Second, I would like to summarize some research findings that bear on the issue of bilingual education in the United States. I do so with an eye towards drawing some finer distinctions among different kinds of research. Third, I would like to point out promising areas for research, particularly of the collaborative sort - collaborative work among researchers of different disciplinary backgrounds as well as collaborative work between researchers and practitioners - which this conference is charged to generate.

Research: Theory and Practice

First, what makes research tick? How can we best describe this activity called research? The standard view of scientific progress is that there is some reality out there in the world, waiting to be discovered, described, and explained by the scientific procedures taught in graduate school. There is much talk among historians of science that this positivistic way of thinking is not the best way to describe even the most hardened of natural sciences. However, even in the softer social sciences, there is a persistent belief that progress comes from the gradual uncovering of facts.

I would like to debunk this myth by taking a brief detour through my favorite example, on the research on the idea of whether bilingualism is harmful or beneficial to mental development. It illustrates the biases that can be found cloaked and hidden in so-called "objective" science - particularly the biases generated by the larger concerns of society. Consider the following set of contrasting conclusions about the effects of bilingualism on child development. In 1952, a noted developmental psychologist, George Thompson, drew the following conclusion in his influential textbook on child psychology:

> There can be no doubt that the child reared in a bilingual
> environment is handicapped in his language growth. One
> can debate the issue as to whether speech facility in two
> languages is worth the consequent retardation in the
> common language of the realm. (p. 367)

Ten years later, in 1962, Elizabeth Peal and Wallace Lambert concluded their famous study of bilingual students in Montreal with the following remarks:

> [The bilingual youngster can be seen as someone] whose wider experiences in two cultures have given him advantages which a monolingual does not enjoy. Intellectually his experience with two language systems seems to have left him with a mental flexibility, a superiority in concept formation, a more diversified set of mental abilities....In contrast, the monolingual appears to have a more unitary structure of intelligence which he must use for all types of intellectual tasks. (p. 20)

No one likes contradictory conclusions, so they must be resolved. Why is bilingualism "bad" in some set of studies, and "good" in another set? When you look at the scientific literature, the common attribution for the difference is to *scientific methodology*. The studies that were summarized by George Thompson are often criticized for poor application of the scientific method. Peal and Lambert's study, and the many subsequent studies that support the conclusion about the positive effects of bilingualism on cognitive ability, are praised for having better method. The idea is that if you can only design better studies, the truth can be found about how bilingualism affects the mind.

This belief - which is the standard belief about the progress of science - only tells part of the story when you look at the societal context of the research. Where, for example, did the term "language handicap" come from? How did people like George Thompson, whom I just quoted from, arrive at the conclusions about the negative effects of bilingualism? Why were his conclusions contradicted by Peal and Lambert? The work that supposedly showed the negative effects of bilingualism - there are hundreds of them - can be traced back to the work conducted at the turn of the century with concern about the intelligence test scores of the so-called "new immigrants", arriving in the United States after about 1880. It is important, then, to find out who these new immigrants were, and how they were thought of by the society at large.

A capsule characterization of these new immigrants can be found in the Dillingham Commission's 1906 report, summarized by immigration historian Maldwyn Jones in the following way:

> This new immigration had consisted, the commission declared, largely of unskilled male laborers, a large proportion of whom had come to the United States not as permanent settlers but simply as transients. Almost entirely avoiding agriculture, they had flocked to the

industrial centers of the East and Middle West, where they had congregated together in sections apart from native Americans and the older immigrants to such an extent that assimilation had been slow. (Jones 1960, p. 178)

Francis Walker, president of MIT during the turn of the century, aside from being the leader of a prestigious technical institution, found the time in his busy schedule to utter these sympathetic words about the new immigrants:

These immigrants are beaten men from beaten races, representing the worst failures in the struggle for existence. Europe is allowing its slums and its most stagnant reservoirs of degraded peasantry to be drained off upon our soil. (quoted in Ayres 1909, p. 103)

A major concern during this period, among educators as well as among those advocating the restriction of immigration, was the low intelligence test scores of the new immigrant groups. Carl Brigham, in his 1923 book titled "A Study of American Intelligence", explained the low intelligence test scores of the new immigrants in the context of eugenics, and claimed that the decreasing scores were caused by the succeedingly larger proportion of new immigration from racial groups with bad genes.

However, this argument by the hereditarian psychologists fell into trouble from attacks from the camp of psychologists who believed that intelligence was determined by environmental factors. These psychologists who emphasized the environment argued that the more recent immigrants had lower intelligence test scores because of their "language handicap", i.e., because they did not speak English well. This is a complex and fascinating story that cannot be fully told today (see Hakuta 1986). My main point for today, though, is that the issue of "language handicap" became a critical bone of contention between the two camps. The hereditarians believed that there was no handicap, that the lower IQ's of the new immigrants reflected bad genes. The environmentalists believed that there was a language handicap.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this debate that raged between the 20's and 30's was that both camps truly believed that IQ test performance was a good measure of intelligence. What this meant was that they agreed that the new immigrants were not very smart, because that is what the test scores showed. They only disagreed as to the reason. For the hereditarian, it was bad genes. For the environmentalist, it was bad experience - most notably, bilingualism. This was the source of the belief, presumably based on objective research, that bilingualism retards mental development. The early research on bilingualism and its effect on mental development can only be understood in the context of the concern over immigration at

the turn of the century, in combination with the debate between the camps of psychologists with different explanations for their low IQ test scores.

As I mentioned earlier, this early research has often been criticized for poor methodology. The criticisms were of the predictable sort: you know, the way you are trained to attack studies on methodological grounds in graduate school - the "Doberman methodologist." For example, there was the criticism that when bilinguals were compared with monolinguals, the samples were not matched for their socioeconomic status, etc. Indeed, much of the current research still makes these standard criticisms of the old research, in terms of scientific methodology. If only the right procedures were used, they would argue, then the truth would emerge.

For me, these criticisms are misguided, because they fail to take the social context of research into account. The early research is remarkable for its focus almost exclusively on low social status immigrant groups. The more recent work, with positive findings regarding bilingualism, is remarkable for its focus on the bilingualism of middle class and prestige groups. To me, why negative findings turned into positive findings has more to do with the social status of who was being studied, rather than with scientific methodology.

So, if social science is not the systematic unpacking of truth, as myth would have it, what is it? I think that the best way to think of it as an activity somewhat akin to *bonsai* making. In research, as well as in *bonsai* making, I think that much of our activity consists of attempts to create for ourselves an image of the way the world works. The best way to describe the *bonsai* creator's activity is not as a total or perfect recreation of nature, but rather as his interpretation of what is important about nature and man's harmony with it. In this sense, as philosophers such as Nelson Goodman have pointed out, science is no different from art or many other creative human endeavors. There are, of course, differences in the tools used for the different crafts, and science has its own set of important rules, including replicability, control of variables, and obsession over the accuracy and nature of its instruments of measurement. But the point is that objectivity versus subjectivity is not the distinction of importance. Scientists, as members of society, are just as subject to the trends in society - not just the society of scholars but the political winds of society - as are the students, the practitioners, and (I might add) the funding agencies.

We often speak of "theory to practice," or the dialogue between researcher and practitioner. We often wonder whether this is a one-way street or a two-way street. Do researchers pay enough attention to the issues raised by practitioners? Are practitioners sufficiently aware of what research has to tell them? I would like to propose that these questions are fundamentally based on the misconception of research as having a monopoly to truth. They are based on the belief that *up there* is the *truth* - researchers have a direct line to it - and from *it* should be derived *practice*. But if we took seriously the belief that what researchers are doing is *bonsai* making, and furthermore that this is essentially the same as the activity engaged in by the

practitioners, the parents, and the children, then the task of thinking about the relationship of theory and practice becomes quite different. For what we now seek is an understanding of the process through which the different parties build their schemas about how the world works. Rather than an image of a street connecting theory and practice, what we have is something more of an exhibition hall with different *bonsai*, where a comparison and discussion of the different *bonsai* could take place.

What this view of research and practice implies is that the dialectic between researcher and practitioner itself might be a worthy topic of investigation. What are the characteristics of implicit schemas or theories that the different parties involved in the language minority child's education? These include the researcher, the superintendent, the principal, the supervisor of the bilingual program, the teacher, the aide, the resource specialist, the parent, and (last but not least) the student. What do these individuals use as the major variables in their theories? How is language - the ethnic languages as well as English - implicated in these implicit theories? What do they think of bilingual education? Of the commitment of society towards non-English languages? Of the commitment of the system towards minorities? Having identified these issues, the next step would be the incorporation of these findings into staff and parent development. For what we want are stronger implicit theories developed in all personnel involved in the child's development.

Research on Bilingual Education[1]

This motivates the second part of my talk this morning, on what we know from research related to bilingual education. What I think bilingual education lacks at present is a strong implicit theory on the part of teachers and staff. As an immediate example, take the shudders of fear that were raised by Education Secretary Bennett's criticisms of bilingual education last fall. The criticisms were without a doubt based on a poor understanding of bilingual education. His claims went against almost every known fact about bilingual education, including results from studies conducted under the auspices of his very own Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation. However, my personal experience was that the damage was done. An incredible amount of hand-holding had to be done with bilingual staff who were certain that their game had been exposed.

This fear, I am sure, was due in large part to the lack of a schema about bilingual education on the part of the staff. They did not, so to speak, have a *bonsai* of their profession - or at least a very pretty one - and felt defenseless. I suspect that in some cases, they suffered the sneaking suspicion that Bennett may be right, for after

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[1] This section was prepared in collaboration with Catherine Snow for the Committee on Education and Labor, U.S. House of Representatives, 99th Congress, 2nd Session, 1986.

all, he is an accomplished philosopher and the U.S. Secretary of Education. I can understand this fear, as I would be the first one to admit that I have great insecurities about my own shortcomings. Like almost every other academic with whom I have had the opportunity to lower our mutual defenses, such as over a late night beer at conferences, I have suffered - and continue to suffer - from the anxiety of being found out, that I know so little. Somehow, I am doing what I am doing because of luck, and it is best not to disturb that order. This fear is not uncommon, and I would venture a guess that anyone who really believes that they have earned and completely deserve the success they enjoy should have their head examined. I suspect that Mr. Bennett harped on the insecurities of many a bilingual teacher in this regard.

Research findings that help develop a schema for teachers to justify what they are doing go a long way to combat politically motivated criticisms. So now I would like to spend some time describing some of the research conclusions that can be drawn, and the possible implications for building a working schema about the development of the language minority student, from which we can build. An important preliminary distinction to be made about research on bilingualism and bilingual education is that it can be roughly divided into two types: *evaluation research* and *basic research*. Evaluation research has typically compared bilingual education to alternative forms of education, usually some form of submersion education with an ESL (English as a Second Language) component. Critics of bilingual education have used the rather equivocal conclusions from evaluation research to support their point.

Basic research has received less emphasis in the debate over bilingual education. Basic research focuses on the linguistic and psychological processes in the development of bilingual children. This research attempts to understand how children learn and develop at different rates and styles in their language and cognitive abilities. Basic researchers include psychologists, linguists, anthropologists, and sociologists who are not directly tied to the practice of bilingual education, even though quite often their research has been conducted in the context of bilingual education. It is my contention that the findings from basic research have been given insufficient consideration in the debate on bilingual education. The information contained in basic research findings is extremely valuable for policy considerations.

The importance of basic research is heightened by the fact that there are severe technical and conceptual problems in currently existing evaluation studies, indeed problems to such an extent that their utility for policy-making purposes is severely limited. Attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of bilingual education programs, such as the often-cited large-scale study by the American Institutes for Research (Danoff et al, 1977a, b, 1978) and the Baker and de Kanter (1981) synthesis of smaller evaluation studies, have been criticized by many researchers (McLaughlin 1985 provides an even-handed and thorough review of the criticisms). These studies generally concluded that when compared to alternative submersion programs, bilingual programs are no more effective in promoting English language (and occasionally other) skills.

The lack of positive evaluation results has led opponents of bilingual education to argue for alternative instructional methods. However, recent work re-analyzing even some of the original work used by Baker and De Kanter - I am thinking of the work by Anne Willig - suggests that in reality, bilingual education programs are effective, and that the effectiveness shows up best when the quality of the studies are best controlled. As Willig (1985) concluded in her review of this literature, "the overwhelming message derived from these data suggests that most research conclusions regarding the effectiveness of bilingual education reflect weaknesses of the research itself rather than effects of the actual programs" (1985:297).

Turning now to *basic* research, the second type of research to which I alluded earlier, although basic research has often been conducted outside the context of the American bilingual education classroom, I would like to argue that it has generated conclusions that have a direct bearing on the current policy debate on the effectiveness of bilingual education. Let me quickly go through some of them.

1. The nature of language proficiency.

People tend to think of language, like intelligence, as a single, simple, unitary capacity, easily measurable by a single test. However, recent research indicates that language is not a unitary skill, but rather a complex configuration of abilities. Most importantly, it seems that language used for conversational purposes is quite different from language used for school learning, and that the former develops earlier than the latter. In the context of bilingual education, this means that children become conversationally fluent in English before they develop the ability to use English in academic situations. Bilingual programs are commonly criticized for keeping students too long, even after their English is "adequate." English skill judged as "adequate" in an informal conversation, or even on a simple test, may not mean that the child's skills are adequate for understanding a teacher's explanation, for reading a textbook, or for writing a composition. This research then tells us that conversational adequacy is not the appropriate criterion for mainstreaming students. Thus, one major goal of bilingual education should be the development of *the full repertoire of linguistic skills in English,* in preparation for participation in mainstream classes.

2. The relationship of the two languages.

A major argument against bilingual education has been that it does not develop English rapidly enough *because* of its emphasis on the native language. However, the major premise of this argument - that the time spent in the classroom using the native language is wasted or lost - is overwhelmingly rejected by research. First, a strong native language foundation acts as a support in the learning of English, making it easier and faster. Second, most of the learning that goes on in the native language transfers readily to English. This is true for content areas like math, science, and

social studies, but also for skills in speaking, reading and writing. The implication of this finding is that time spent working and studying in the native language in bilingual classrooms is not time lost in developing the skills needed for school success. Becoming fluent in a second language does not necessarily mean losing the first language, nor does maintenance of the first language retard the development of the second language.

3. The relationship of language and general mental functioning.

There exists a persistent belief that for minority children, bilingualism confuses the mind and retards cognitive development. I discussed this belief earlier as being based on some early attempts to explain why immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were performing poorly on IQ tests. However, current research shows that there is no such thing as retardation caused by bilingualism; if anything, the development of a second language can have positive effects on thinking skills. The advantage of bilingual children over monolingual children in cognitive flexibility has been shown in a number of different studies, particularly in contexts of additive bilingualism where the second language is added while the native language is maintained. These findings suggest that there is no cognitive cost to the development of bilingualism in children, and very possibly bilingualism brings with it the added bonus of the enhancement of children's thinking skills.

4. The differences between individual children

Research cautions against attempting to formulate policy based on the observation of a limited number of children. There are, to be sure, documented cases of children who rapidly acquire a second language. However, the research shows these children to be the exception rather than the rule. There are tremendous variations across different children in the rate at which they learn the second language, and the process is not as painless as one would want to believe. The variation is due to a multitude of factors, including cultural background, the strength of the native language, home language environment, personality, attitude, and aptitude for learning languages. Bilingual education programs should have the flexibility to adjust to these large individual and cultural variations. Furthermore, educators should develop the expectation that it is not abnormal for some students to need bilingual instruction for relatively long periods of time, whereas others for whom all the individual and cultural factors support second language learning, may exit from bilingual programs quite quickly.

5. The optimal age for second language acquisition

Many people believe that only children can learn a second language quickly and easily, and that if children have not mastered the second language by early school years, they never will. This belief has been responsible for a sense of urgency in introducing English to non-English speaking children, and for worries about postponing children's exit from bilingual programs. However, the belief that children are fast and effortless second language learners is not support by research. Teenagers and adults are much more efficient learners than elementary school children, and middle schoolers are faster than elementary school children. Especially for primary grade children, it is important to realize that second language learning is likely to be a very slow process; but also that it can still be successful if started much later than age five or six. Bilingual programs should be designed with the expectation that young school age children learn second languages rather slowly, and will need several years of learning before their English is as good as that of children who have been speaking it since birth. At the same time, it should be recognized that starting to speak English even as late as high school is no barrier to learning to speak it very well.

6. Literacy

Perhaps the major task of schools is teaching children to read. Although reading scores for American children in general have improved during the last 15 years, the most recent results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that Hispanic children still lag far behind English-speaking children in reading achievement. Furthermore, the gap widens at higher grades; poor reading skills in late elementary and secondary school children mean that such children are having trouble in all their school subjects, since their ability to comprehend textbooks in science, math, social studies, and other areas is inadequate.

Many factors contribute to children's being good or poor readers. One source of help to children's reading is the home; homes where children have access to time alone with adults, where literacy is modeled, displayed and valued, and where parents' attitudes emphasize learning and school achievement typically produce children who have little difficulty learning to read. For children whose homes do not provide this kind of support to literacy, learning to read is a difficult task, and one which can much better be started in the home language - the language the child knows best. Children whose homes support literacy acquisition will be able to learn to read in a second language with little trouble. Children whose homes can offer little support need the help of excellent schools, excellent teachers, and a reading program in the home language. The assumption - still not well substantiated by research - is that once the basic principles of reading are mastered in the home language, reading skills transfer quickly and easily to a second language.

7. Social interactional factors in second language acquisition

Obviously, having the opportunity to talk to a native speaker of English can only help in learning English. A criticism often leveled at bilingual programs is that they isolate non-English speaking children from the English speakers who should be their friends, and who should be helping them learn English. One needs to think more carefully, though, about the nature of the social interaction. It is not the case that merely playing with other children contributes much to the kind of language skills needed for school success. Young children can play, and have fun, and even 'talk' together with rather little solid knowledge of each other's language. Learning the English language skills needed for school success requires much more, for most children, than just the ability to find some English-speaking playmates.

Children, like adults, only interact with people they like or admire. If non-English speaking children in mainstream classrooms come from groups that are negatively stereotyped by the English speakers, they will not easily find English speaking playmates. A major factor in giving minority children access to social interactions with English speaking peers is upgrading the status of the minority group in the eyes of the majority. One way to do this is to recognize the value of the minority group's language and culture, for example, by using the language in the school and by hiring teachers and administrators from that ethnic background. A positive side effect of bilingual programs has been this kind of upgrading of previously stigmatized languages and cultures, as a result of making them official within the school.

Social interaction with English speakers can contribute to children's learning English. But just putting minority children in mainstream classrooms does not ensure interaction. Submersion in mainstream classrooms is most likely to result in rapid progress in English for children who do not come from negatively stereotyped minority groups, and for children who have strong language, literacy, and school-relevant skills in their native language. Other children need bilingual programs.

So, the general point about bilingual education research is that there are some very strong reasons why bilingual education should work. With the notable exception of the excellent volumes on language minorities produced by your Office of Bilingual Education in Sacramento, research findings have not been put together in a schema that can be useful for the practitioner.

A "Wish List" Research Agenda

Turning now to the third part of my talk, about the gaps in research, I would like to be brief, because filling in these gaps is the agenda for all of us over the next day and a half. I would, however, like to take advantage of being the first speaker of this meeting and to point out the general areas that I see as important. Here is my shopping list.

First, I would like to point to the paucity of studies in general involving language minorities other than Spanish, particularly those from Asian language backgrounds. As Lily Wong Fillmore has shown in her research, there is much reason to believe that conclusions should be tailored for different cultural and language groups.

Second, as a cognitive psychologist, I would like to advocate for the continued exploration of othe issue of academic learning and cognitive representation in language minority students. Data are still scarce, for example, on how skills and knowledge learned in one language are transferred to the other. Especially needed is research looking into transfer of reading skills from different languages to English.

Third, I would point to the issue of language proficiency assessment. We are in great need of proficiency measurement instruments that are sensitive to the different functions of use of language. Furthermore, I think that the kinds of tests needed are those that provide the teacher with diagnostic information on the strengths and weaknesses in the different functions, such that they can work with individual students. So many proficiency texts are used simply for accounting purposes - hindsight evaluations of whether students learned English, which are in turn used to serve political ends. Lost in all of this is the more important foresightful function of identifying and working on the strengths and weaknesses of individual students.

Fourth, I would suggest that we need to understand quite a bit more about the ubiquitous variable of "age," and what this means with respect to language learning, cognitive ability, cultural attitudes, academic achievement, and all of those varibles thought to be important in the lives of language minority students. Age is by itself a meaningless concept, yet it is used in debates about language minority students with great frequency. Our task should be to try and find a substitute for it as quickly as possible.

Fifth - and this is a big one - we need a better way of thinking about how community level characteristics are related to individual student performance. For example, community level characteristics include things such as whether the bilingualism is additive or subtractive, the availability of media in the non-English language, the symbolic status of the languages, and the mobility patterns of the community. More concretely, for example, it is fine to describe a linguistic minority group as "caste-like", as Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi (1986) have pointed out, but how

does this group level characteristic get communicated and expressed in the individual child?

Sixth, it is important to consider the impact that bilingual education for minority students might have on the education of majority students. With the current interest in the so-called two-way bilingual immersion programs, it would be important to consider how these programs are best implemented, depending on community, staff, and student characteristics.

Seventh, the importance of public opinions must be acknowledged, since the success of any program aimed towards the language minority population is going to be tied to public support. On what basis does the public create beliefs about bilingual education and language minorities? How do such attitudes change? How can the media be used to sell the programs to the public?

The final area is one that I already referred to at the beginning of my talk, when I was developing my so-called *bonsai* model of scientific progress. Namely, researchers, educators, policy makers, parents and students all have different implicit schemas about schooling, language, and their community. Systematic attempts to explore what these schemas might be, and how they are modified, should be of immense value in designing staff and parent development programs.

Some Practical Concerns

What are some of the practical concerns in implementing a research program that addresses such questions in a systematic manner? What I suggested in the first part of my talk was the vision of a bonsai exhibit. This would of course be accomplished through collaboration between researchers and LEP's in research projects from their inception. Increased contact through a common project is certain to increase the mutual appreciation of each other's points of view. Perhaps one arena in which this can be most useful is in the area of evaluation, which is also one of the weakest areas of research.

From a researcher's point of view, of greatest concern is the flow of talent within the research community. First of all, it is clear that research with linguistic minorities should involve a substantial number of members of minority groups. However, it is also clear that because of the competition from the private sector for talented minorities, the academic disciplines are having an increasingly difficult time attracting minorities. Who wants to risk four years of a demanding and poverty-stricken existence as a graduate student in order to face the low odds of finding a job upon graduation? The picture gets bleaker. It is the case, and I can attest to this from my own existence in several psychology departments of Ivy League institutions, that research related to applied areas carry very little academic prestige. Education-related

research is a second class citizen within the halls of academia. We need to be able to draw into this area of research all of the talent, both minority and non-majority, that the problem inherently deserves.

The paradox is that bilingualism and the education of language minority students contains almost all of the classic issues that ivory tower academics have aspired to answer: the relationship of language and thought; the relationship of mind, language and culture; the nature of language acquisition; the social psychology of group relations. The list goes on and on. What I am saying is that this topic contains many of the major component themes of the social sciences that would make it an excellent arena under which different disciplines, different levels of analysis, and - most importantly for this conference - different perspectives of the researcher and practitioner, can be integrated. Hopefully, this conference will provide the spark necessary to ignite the mixture.

OPEN FORUM I

Facilitator: Ms. Lorenza Calvillo-Craig
(California Association of
Bilingual Education)

*"It is not simply a problem of 'minority' children,
but a question of how best to apply our talents,
skills, experience and research to broaden our
knowledge of how human beings learn."*

Following Professor Hakuta's talk, Ms. Calvillo-Craig initiated discussion by offering a few introductory remarks. She expressed particular appreciation for Dr. Hakuta's use of the concept of *interpretation* and added that in the course of this conference, participants need to address two important questions: "What is the interpretation of the University of California and what is the interpretation of the [education] profession itself." In addressing problems related to the schooling of language minority students, the issue is not simply the nature of the pupil. "It really is necessary to reconceptualize or at least to understand how the profession interprets itself" in regard to these matters. It is necessary that educational practitioners begin to rethink how they have conventionally viewed their profession and its role in public policy formation. It is important, most of all, that they recognize the changing parameters of their profession.

"The classic issues raised in Dr. Hakuta's talk represent the very basis for the assessment and examination of the problems that this conference is addressing," Ms. Calvillo-Craig said. These issues - the relationship between language, culture and thought; the nature of language acquisition; and the social psychology of group relations - "provide frameworks by which we can interpret the problems which American children are facing in the schools." In the broadest sense, these issues articulate the problem as a question of the human dynamic of learning. "It is not simply a problem of 'minority' children, but a question of how best to apply our talents, skills, experience and research to broaden our knowledge of how human beings learn."

The first question from the audience called for Dr. Hakuta's views about diagnostic information, about the validity of test scores and their applications for teachers. Dr. Hakuta replied that in his experience, this kind of testing has been conducted mostly by teachers and has been considered as disruptive to the class. The data is then packaged and sent over to the state for evaluation and finally comes out as a report. Yet all too often, teachers themselves do not have the opportunity to use the data as tools to evaluate individual students. "Because tests are designed to be useful at the *program* level, they are not usually used for *teaching* purposes, but for impersonal evaluation by counselors or administrators. Usually they show some very unexciting results, as these kinds of tests are likely to, and the press picks it up and someone writes an editorial. The impression is usually quite negative. It is not surprising, for this reason, that teachers are generally not interested in diagnostic testing, because they do not see any practical validity in it. After all, most of these tests were developed because these was a need for entry-exit criteria and for evaluation kinds of purposes, and they certainly do reflect that. They are certainly not designed for teaching purposes." Dr. Hakuta suggested that it would be advantageous to have tests that teachers can *use* to determine how individual students are doing - to ask, for example, how is this particular student performing in certain learning events, how well is this student using language interactively for learning purposes: "Teachers need tests that they themselves can use to assess the progress of their own students."

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Ms. Calvillo-Craig suggested, along these lines, that diagnostic tests are only as good as the people who use them. Researchers and practitioners are both well aware of the problems involving, for example, the validity and implications of IQ testing and any other kind of testing. Not only do we need to improve the test instrument to provide more helpful kinds of information, but we need to use the results toward more positive ends like designing more appropriate educational programs. Too often, diagnostic tests are used to invalidate current programs. There is a fundamental problem of interpretation, of judging what tests indeed measure and how should they be used. "What is needed, for people of good will, people who really do want to learn how to use a test for appropriate instructional purposes, is input on how to improve the testing instrument so that it really does give them information that is helpful."

Ms. Olivia Martinez (San Francisco Unified School District) at this point expressed concern that research studies in bilingual education rarely address the issue of implementation, of how to put current theory into practice in the classroom. She asked if Dr. Hakuta could suggest some ways - some components of a research design - that could contribute to the implementation of bilingual programs, particularly in situations involving more than one language group.

Dr. Hakuta answered, "In general, I think that educational research can be characterized as not being very process-oriented in terms of evaluation. On the contrary, educational administration has been somewhat more concerned with measures of *outcome* than with the actual *production* of a learning experience. Bringing these two approaches into a more complementary agenda may be important," Dr. Hakuta said. He added that perhaps there might be someone present that would be more qualified than he to speak to this issue. Ms. Calvillo-Craig suggested that the complexity lies in the fact that we are dealing with the application of research on a single school level, yet there is also the broader question of how research fits or does not fit in the context of national and state educational policy. There are presently no successful models at the state and national levels which have had a positive effect on policy formulation.

Professor Lily Wong Fillmore (School of Education, UC Berkeley) added that the evaluation of attempts at implementation is also problematic. She criticized research that purports to evaluate the effectiveness of bilingual educational programs. The findings of this research have often been accepted as gospel truth. In fact, however, "the bilingual programs that are assessed in these studies often are no different than the all-English programs with which they are compared. In these large-scale evaluation studies, comparing the effectiveness of bi-lingual programs with all-English programs, there is little actual use of the native language in those programs labeled 'bilingual.' Basically, they are comparing the same thing, with the result that the so-called bilingual programs do not look particularly effective." By these criteria, it is clear that it is not valid to assess bilingual education as ineffective. Dr. Fillmore maintained that the kind of research that needs to be done is a collaboration between the schools and the University, posing questions from the *practitioner's* perspective.

"The questions need to be asked from the perspective of the practitioner, because that is the only way that we can be sure that the answers are going to be useable and useful in the classroom."

"We need to ask: what works in the classroom and not such questions as: does bilingual education as a program type work as well as all-English programs, or English immersion, or intensive English programs. Rather, when a teacher gets a group of kids in his or her classroom and these kids do not speak English and they are from particular backgrounds, what kinds of instructional practices are most effective for those students in that classroom situation." In other words, we need to develop and apply the kinds of instructional practices that are most effective for particular groups of children in specific situations: "The questions need to be asked from the perspective of the practitioner, because that is the only way that we can be sure that

the answers are going to be useable and useful in the classroom."

Ms. Calvillo-Craig added that the broad issues raised by Dr. Hakuta about individual differences underscore this perspective. "No matter what class size or composition or the unique needs of particular language groups, students always manifest individual differences in their learning. When researchers encounter a successful program, they invariably find that it involves teachers who have the ability to deal with individual differences, as a result of their commitment to students in general. We are beginning to see that what has always been implicit in a good instructional design is in fact good for all students, not just for a small group of minority children. Someone commented earlier about how important language is to a minority child. The point is that language is important to a human being. It is our connection to reality. It is how we articulate family and faith and love and fear. Language is important to everybody, not just minority children." An awareness of language as a critical element in all learning is key to a commitment to education. "And it is a commitment to education that we are talking about. It is not simply a narrow commitment to a small group of children."

Referring back to Dr. Fillmore's comments, Dr. Hakuta remarked that one has to look at why people have paid so much attention to, for example, the AERA reports of 1977 and 1978, as well as the Baker-Dekanter study. "Why were these studies conducted in the first place? Interestingly, the federal funding of bilingual education programs has proceeded from the concern whether bilingual education represents a better alternative to all-English language programs. This concern overrides any consideration of what the actual components or characteristics of these programs look like. Of course, the results of these assessments are mixed at best. Only recently have studies looked at program characteristics. Some of these have been quite crude attempts at examining program characteristics, but at least in these cases, they are not simply labeling programs as 'bilingual education' versus 'other' kinds of programs. And the process should have been the opposite, all along. That is, they should have first looked at program characteristics and then attempted to correlate effectiveness with particular characteristics. Otherwise, the whole process is irrational," Dr. Hakuta said. "Of course, we should also bear in mind the political charge these programs are always going to have associated with them."

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Without contradicting Dr. Hakuta, Dr. Diane August (Carnegie Foundation) suggested that perhaps his remarks need some qualification. "Of course we need to understand how program characteristics affect children. I think it is very important both for teachers and local administrators. But at another level, policy makers want to

know how their money is being spent. They want to know, for example, how effective are programs funded under Title VII. So I think we cannot avoid looking at how effective those programs are also, not just what program characteristics are important and effective in the education of children. Studies looking at the effectiveness of Title VII programs are going to continue to be an area of focus." A recent analysis of Title VII program effectiveness, for instance, was instrumental in showing that Title VII programs seem to be doing a good job at educating language minority children. "Now that does not mean all bilingual programs are the same," Dr. August suggested. "Yet it is important in terms of convincing policy makers, to be able to make this kind of point." In short, she urged, we must be concerned with the total picture of federally funded education programs.

Ms. Calvillo-Craig wondered whether this view begs the question of whether we will experiment, for instance, with different mathematics programs, or various kinds of evaluative research designs. The problem, she said, is that the underlying premise of the way these studies have been done in the past few years is that if "bilingual" programs can be shown to be ineffective, they can be eliminated. The attitude toward other academic subjects is far more flexible, with more room for experimentation with various curricula and program designs. "No one ever suggests, when you have a poor math program, that we should do away with math, and yet this kind of logic *is* applied to bilingual programs, as the underlying basis for evaluations of these programs." Given the pervasiveness of this strange logic, Ms. Calvillo-Craig said, "we need at some point to acknowledge the political context in which this discussion is occurring."

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Speaking more specifically of the context in which evaluation research is undertaken, Dr. Barry McLaughlin (Department of Psychology, UC Santa Cruz) compared the funding of evaluative research in the United States with that in Canada. "I think there is a basic problem in this country," he said, "which is the question of where the money has gone for research. In Canada, a lot of money has been given to people to do very good evaluative research - people who have very good academic backgrounds in evaluative research." Dr. McLaughlin stated that there are many qualified researchers in this country who would be more than willing to do this kind of research, if the money were available for it. "I think the critical issue is putting the money where our concerns are in this society... If we have the money for appropriate research, I think it will take place." Dr. Fillmore re-emphasized the idea that, given the opportunity for such research, it should be oriented toward the practitioner. It

should be based on the practitioner's experience and perspective: "What we need is a research effort that is focused on researchers' links to schools."

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In this regard, the issue of implementation remained in the forefront as a concern among the school practitioners present. As one noted: "Speaking as a practitioner, I really need to see some form of research on implementation programs. I tend to agree with Lily Wong Fillmore that *that* is where we need to focus. I have ninety teachers in my district and there are ninety different levels of implementation. I need to know which works best and I need the guidance of a research team to help me do that." Christine Smith (Oxford High School District) expressed a similar need for research input. "My concern is that, in my district, the definition of a linguistic minority does not reach far enough to meet the needs of many of the students who are appropriately part of that population. I refer specifically to the student who might be a second or third generation member of a bilingual home and who might be essentially handicapped in two languages." She said that she was not aware of any specific programs based on research that address the needs of those students and asked Dr. Hakuta what research has been done in this area.

Dr. Hakuta replied that research tends to be presented as though all the gaps are filled, yet in fact research often tends to replicate the gaps found in earlier work or contained in particular education programs under study. Too little attention has been paid, he said, to students who fall into the "bilingual special education" area, which represents a distinctive set of cognitive and language-related problems. "Certainly this is an area to which researchers have not paid sufficient attention. Yet it is a very important area that deserves greater attention." Dr. Hakuta characterized the students who fall into this category as "semi-lingual", and wondered if the practitioners present felt that the concept remains a viable one. Ms. Calvillo Craig felt that this last point was related to an earlier question raised, concerning whether we indeed have a national educational agenda in this area, as we do with science and math. She asked, "Would there be a national crisis in language development, if in fact all preparation and instructional training and design for teachers were geared to the issue of language acquisition and cognitive development? At the present time, I believe the focus is much too narrow, and the rhetoric speaks of language minority student populations and their special needs as if they were peculiarly non-human."

Another practitioner agreed that it is all too easy to take a group of students and identify them as a problem area and end up stereotyping them. He cautioned that it is important to keep in mind certain realities that we face as educational professionals. At the most basic level, for example, "we have a number of languages being spoken in a single classroom in many schools. The question is: what is the best

way to approach the instruction of these students?" At the same time, "another reality is that, when looking at implementation, the bottom line is: is the program working? The administrator wants to know: are we getting our dollar's worth?" The problem is that administrators often make decisions as policy makers on issues about which they are not sufficiently informed. They are not knowledgeable about bilingual education. We need to be able to inform them, to enable them to make better decisions. It is at this point that research can be most helpful.

"We have a number of languages being spoken in a single classroom in many schools. The question is: what is the best way to approach the instruction of these students?"

Dr. Jack Forbes (Department of Native American Studies, UC Davis), however, discussed a more general need to re-emphasize the political dimension of language policy and in doing so, broaden the parameters of this field of study. "If we look historically at the struggles of minority language groups, not only here but in Europe, in regard to language policy, we see that it is always political. It is fundamentally a political issue whether languages are taught in the schools or not, whether a country is bilingual or not, or whether people can vote in a particular language or not. These are always political questions, and I think educators need to be constantly aware that this is a fact of life. Going along with that, I think we have to do a different kind of research. We need to study the dominant Anglo-American culture so that we can understand the peculiar fear of other languages and ethnic groups that exists in this country. The United States is peculiar in respect to the degree that many people in the U.S. actually have a phobia, actually have a *fear* of other languages. I think that needs to be studied. I think that is more of a problem than the question of whether people are bilingual or not. We need to understand why that phenomenon exists in the United States."

There is in this regard a need to understand the politics of nationalism in the U.S. "The opposition to Spanish instruction, or to instruction in other languages, is characteristic of a dominant nationalism... It has to do with the symbols of nationality that have been established by a particular, numerically superior group in this country, whereby English has come to be identified with their possession of power... And as English is diminished, perhaps they see their share of power diminishing to some extent also." It is in this light, Dr. Forbes suggested, that we need to understand how and why political forces are mobilized and organized in a concerted effort to oppose bilingualism in the United States.

On a less theoretical, more practical level, Dr. Forbes continued, we need to be concerned with things like school board elections. "One of the reasons bilingual programs have a lot of trouble is that school board elections - I am suggesting this

theoretically - are not timed with gubernatorial or presidential elections and usually take place at times of 20-30% voter turnout. This does not happen by chance. I think if we timed them differently, we would get a lot more Spanish speaking and other minority language voters elected members of school boards, who would be bilingual themselves. That is just an illustration of where the language struggle is in terms of bilingual programs... And finally," Dr. Forbes concluded, "we must ask the question: how does our society reward the acquisition of skills in ethnic languages?" Dr. Forbes proposed several hypothetical policy decisions which the University of California and California State University systems could make, such as establishing certain campuses or medical schools as bilingual campuses. Such policies, he suggested, would both reflect and serve the changing demographic constituencies in the State of California. "In other words," he concluded, "we need to look not only at the public school end of the spectrum, but also at what follows - at the implications throughout the whole spectrum of our society."

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Returning to the subject of program implementation, Tim Allen (San Diego School District) questioned whether it is perhaps too simplistic to evaluate program effectiveness on its own terms, without considering the administrative context in which programs are necessarily carried out. "All of us who are practitioners have situations in which we know we are not doing the best type of thing - as a deep-down feeling - but because of policy and legal requirements, we feel this is the best we can do." Mr. Allen remarked that perhaps the researcher, coming from the outside and being concerned primarily with optimal efficiency, would not fully identify with this predicament, yet it is a daily fact of the practitioner's life. "While we are concerned about determining what program characteristics work well, we are also concerned about the things that do not work... How can research," Mr. Allen asked, "deal with this level of complexity in educational practice?

In responding to this question, Dr. Fillmore reflected on her experience in analyzing research data about language minority programs. She found that in many of these programs, the focus of attention was placed heavily on language. Similarly, she noted, "most of our discussion and questions this morning have focused on language. I think it is the wrong focus. We have defined the problems and educational needs of language minority students and minority kids in general, because this also encompasses those children who do not have any problem with other languages. They only speak English. There are black kids. There are third, fourth, and fifth generation Americans, kids who come from minority backgrounds. And when these kids get into school, their educational needs are almost entirely defined by the fact that they do not speak

English or that they come from minority backgrounds." As a result, Dr. Fillmore suggested, questions of the effectiveness of programs serving these children frequently become focused almost entirely on the issue of language itself.

> *"All of us who are practitioners have situations in which we know we are not doing the best type of thing... but because of policy and legal requirements, we feel this is the best we can do... How can research deal with this level of complexity in educational practice?"*

All too often, programs define the educational needs of these children solely in terms of their lack of competency in Standard English. Meanwhile, their more general education - teaching them the skills they need to play adult roles, or knowledge about the way the world works, about history, science and so on - is largely neglected in favor of an emphasis on their learning Standard English, which becomes the sole defining factor of their academic success or failure. "And we ask why these programs are not effective, why they have such a high dropout rate... I think one problem is that we are so focused on the question of language that we have forgotten that these kids need content."

Dr. John Wagner (Office of the President, UC) also addressed Tim Allen's question. Expressing concern that we find better solutions to the problem of implementation, he reaffirmed Mr. Allen's comments that dealing with the problem is by no means purely a logical process. It cannot simply be spelled out in discreet steps, to be rationally followed, then packaged and sent out to be used in a variety of circumstances. It is perhaps better viewed, Dr. Wagner suggested, as an interpretive process in which people work together to come to an mutual understanding of what takes place in various programs. "And the only way to provide more effective implementation is to expand the number of people actively involved in this building process, to expand the interpretive community of those concerned with these issues."

Dr. Wagner offered three suggestions for improving this process: two are related to university policy and one is related to school district policy. (1) Degree programs at the university could arrange for graduate students, as a routine part of their graduate training, to serve as interns in the schools. This policy would expose graduate students to a multiplicity of perspectives and experience among practitioners in the schools and would sensitize their research to the needs of the schools. (2) Graduate students could, along the same lines, present proposals and dissertations, to be reviewed by committees of practitioners in the schools. This activity could provide an educational experience for both students and practitioners. (3) The schools themselves could conduct in-service training for teachers, in which teachers can

collaborate with researchers on projects. Above all, these suggestions represent ways in which the university can participate in the implementation process.

> *"The only way to provide more effective implementation is to expand the number of people actively involved in this building process, to expand the interpretive community of those concerned with these issues."*

Dr. Hakuta responded particularly to Dr. Wagner's third suggestion, concerning in-service workshops for teachers. He referred to a project on which he is currently working in the New Haven public schools. "Through extensive interviews with teachers at all grade levels, the project is attempting both to develop an implicit theory about bilingualism in children, and to systematize the interpretive process that teachers undergo in thinking about themselves as teachers - that is, in developing their self-images as teachers in bilingual education. Also, one researcher has been going through, grade by grade, starting with kindergarten and working upward, talking with teachers about what they consider to be important issues to examine in the general research area, which has to do with how children in the first and second grades transfer skills from their first language to English. And we have come up with some really good ideas, just by talking with teachers in a kind of grass roots search of topics," Dr. Hakuta said. "One of the ideas we came up with (and I am really excited about it; this had just not occurred to me) is that teachers, from about the third grade began to tell us about the importance of having kids who work as translators in their classrooms to help them along in their teaching. And they also point out that there is an indication that these children are in heavy demand to act as translators for their parents. They turn out to be children with very good abilities in translating, and yet they turn out to be really poor readers, as well. It is a paradox, there, and raises the issue of what it is that translation skills imply. But the teachers consider this to be a very important positive aspect of these kids' abilities, that at least should be looked at and highlighted."

This kind of situation has the benefit, Dr. Hakuta maintained, of both adding to our knowledge of what the average person's conception of what bilingualism means and producing new understanding of some of the positive aspects of bilingualism. It focuses our attention on certain critical questions that are both theoretically and practically significant. Dr. Hakuta suggested that there may be a number of opportunities like this particular situation: opportunities by which researchers and practitioners can truly contribute to each other, with ideas being research-generated at the grass roots level as a result of contact and interaction between researchers and practitioners. "I think that the sheer number of hours spent together in the same room - pure contact hours - have this beneficial effect on both research and educational practice."

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Dr. Chung Hoang Chuong (Department of Ethnic Studies, UC Berkeley) raised the next question, concerning the problems faced by recent immigrants from Southeast Asia. Since many of these people are preliterate, he was concerned whether their educational situation, as compared with that of Hispanic students, for instance, was entirely comparable. He wondered if the transfer of the communicative skills that are effective in their own traditions into the reading and speaking skills valued in the United States can be achieved through educational methods comparable those used among Hispanic bilingual students. Different communicative strategies may be needed, for example, for them to learn a new, alphabetic language such as English. In short, he wondered, "Are our present bilingual education methodologies useful for the pre-literate student of English?"

Dr. Hakuta replied that this issue clearly deserves to be near the top of any research agenda that we undertake. There has been, up to now, very little research on the learning of non-alphabetic languages, on what the learning skills are in non-alphabetic language acquisition, as compared with the skills essential to learning alphabetic languages. We know very little about what is entailed in the transfer from one of these sets of skills to the other. While there has been some work exploring these issues at the level of orthography, we know very little about the higher level cognitive processes involved. These are empirical questions, Dr. Hakuta said, which need more attention and publicity to stimulate research in this area.

"Are our present bilingual education methodologies useful for the pre-literate students of English?"

Dr. Francisco Samaniego (Department of Statistics, UC Davis) at this point referred back to an earlier question regarding the issue of measuring proficiency. "Working in the mathematical sciences," Dr. Samaniego commented, "I have had the opportunity to participate in developing diagnostic instruments that were geared to get at the 'anatomy' of mathematical skills. For example, in testing for entrance into a calculus series or a statistics program at our campus, we have diagnostic instruments that identify the strengths and weaknesses of candidates. These are not used for placement or for tracking. They are rather used as diagnostic instruments which enable us as teachers to follow the students' weak areas and build strengths in these areas of weakness... I feel that this could serve as a model for addressing, in a broad curricular fashion, the problems of language minority students generally: that is, rather

than focusing on placement and tracking, to focus on diagnostics and followup." In this connection, Dr. Samaniego alluded specifically to a monograph by Professor Richard Figueroa. "It is," he said, "perhaps the definitive work to date on testing Hispanic children. It addresses the basic issue of testing, and this is, I think, an issue on which we need to expand our attention. It is an issue that can provide greater avenues for growth in the minority student population."

Dr. Keith Pailthorpe (California Postsecondary Education Commission) mentioned another study which addressed a critical issue involving the schooling of language minority youth. This research, conducted by Professor Spencer Kagan (UC Riverside), dealt with approach to classroom socialization and practice which emphasized a *cooperative* learning process among the students, rather than the competitive one that usually prevails in U.S. classrooms. He was impressed with this scheme, yet had not heard anything about how widely it has been used. He asked if anyone present could provide more information on this kind of research.

> *"This kind of activity is a prime example of the kind of cooperative work between researchers and practitioners that can be so useful in improving the education of language minority children."*

Dr. Guillermo Lopez responded to Dr. Pailthorpe's question and agreed that the work on cooperative learning was truly of crucial significance. Dr. Lopez reported that in a recent volume published by the State Department of Education, *Beyond Language: Sociocultural Factors Impacting Upon the Education of Language Minority Students*, there is a chapter which provides an overview of the cooperative learning model. The chapter contains a great deal of data and information about its application and effect in the schools. He added that Dr. Kagan, making use of this model, has also developed programs for training teachers and is currently working with teams of teachers, administrators and researchers from a number of schools in the Riverside area. "This kind of activity," Dr. Lopez suggested, "is a prime example of the kind of cooperative work between researchers and practitioners that can be so useful in improving the education of language minority children."

Dr. Lopez then closed the conference's first session with a few summary remarks. Among the issues most repeatedly mentioned, he noted, was the difficult issue of program implementation. "What are - what can be - the characteristics of effective intervention? What is it about particular curricular designs that make them effective?" Another topic that seemed to generate concern is the question of what is being implemented or evaluated in various programs. If there is an exclusive focus on language development, then any attempt at implementation or evaluation tends to be incomplete and incomprehensive. "When a student is assessed throughout his or her

public schooling," Dr. Lopez commented, "it represents a comprehensive assessment in a number of content areas. These are all aligned to language acquisition, but language itself is not the only concern. It remains important, however, insofar as it effects the student's mastery of subject matter." In the evaluation of programs that affect language minority children, then, the questions to ask are: is the design comprehensive, and is it being implemented as designed? Dr. Lopez concluded that in the course of the conference, there will be ample opportunity to return to these themes and explore them more fully.

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<u>Footnote</u>: This section was prepared in collaboration with Catherine Snow for the Committee on Education and Labor, U. S. House of Representatives, 99th Congress, 2nd Session, 1986.