

Hidden Costs of Bilingual Education

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1. Introduction

This paper presents the cost of the alternatives to culturally appropriate education and some of the options that are available. I will explore three alternatives that I called minimal production, the welfare system and incarceration. I do not intend to deal with the students as commodities or present education only as a way to satisfy consumers' needs and contribute to the economic system; However, I will project the student's twenty years earnings. My data comes from the State of Arizona, but it could be modified to reflect the realities of different states, due to the similarities of political trends in the United States. I will present the racial distribution of the population, the incarceration rates for each group, and the most common offenses. Currently, in Arizona, there is an over-representation of minorities in the penal system. Also, recent changes in the law allow mandatory sentencing, and transfer of minors to adult facilities. Society is labeling children as deviants and putting them behind bars rather than giving adolescents equal access to education regardless of his or her linguistic and cultural background, despite this being a Democratic government whose slogan is "No Child Left Behind."

2. Factors which explain desertion

There are numerous contributing factors that help explain the desertion of bilingual children and the cultural diverse child. Some of them reside in teenagers themselves, some are institutional, and some are social. Teenagers start questioning the educational system in which their needs are not satisfied. Families pressed by economic needs encourage teenagers to work, because they see education as a very expensive commodity. Pressing economic needs impels them to earn a living instead of continuing their education. The exorbitant and rising costs of a college education and misinformation about the opportunities to succeed in college combine to present a bleak future for minority students. The lack of basic skills is another contributing factor. A typical bilingual student lags two years behind his or her classmates which imprint on them a label that in some cases is very difficult to overcome. Children know who are the good students and are the ones who lack behind. Teenagers feel the alienation and become truants. Truancy makes their stay at school even more difficult. While the students who come to class regularly gain knowledge, the youngsters who are truant fall farther behind, and the gap between their knowledge level and the ideal level becomes greater.

Other factors are institutional. For example: administrators and school personnel often regard Bilingual Education as expensive. There is a shortage of bilingual teachers that partially justifies the lack of implementation of bilingual programs. Bilingual teachers' stipends, bilingual textbooks, the student to teacher ratios, teacher assistants and the training of personnel to administer bilingual tests, are all perceived as burdens for districts which are overcrowded, poor and constantly providing services to minority population. To complicate matters even further, the intellectual exercise of what is the best approach to teaching in a bilingual setting leaves administrators paralyzed or unable to make decisions. The so-called lack of research for bilingual effective programs. The arguments such as bilingual programs isolate and segregate the bilingual population, learning of the language is more effective if the students are immersed in it, all these arguments contribute to keep bilingual programs banned in many districts.

There are also political factors such as Proposition 203 that outlaws bilingual education. Irrespective of the cause, the lack of effective bilingual and multicultural programs contributed to a

50% drop out rate among Hispanics at the high school level, a disproportionate representation of minorities in the juvenile system, increased taxpayer expenses, huge salary losses for the individual, and tax losses for the state.

The cost argument ignores the social costs that lack of culturally appropriate alternatives inflict on our society. The cost per student is kept to a minimum while the cost of the alternatives increases. Districts in Arizona receive stipends of approximately \$100 to \$300 per bilingual student yearly, in addition to the average \$2,500 dollars per pupil per year, a meager amount compared to the cost of the alternatives. The alternatives are varied and range from minimal production to a total net lost for society.

3. Minimal production

Median Income by Sex and Educational Attainment, 1997- 1998

Source: Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce

Note: These data include only full time, year-round workers older than 15

* This amount is obtained by subtracting Median - Median for a person who holds an associate degree.

This data represents the national median income. Arizona salaries are lower in comparison to the national averages.

** These amounts are net gains

Educational Attainment	Sex	Median	Net lost yearly*	Net lost in 20 years
Less than 9 th grade	M	\$19,380	\$20,894	\$768,606
	F	\$14,467	\$15,457	\$568,601
9 th - 12 th (no diploma)	M	\$23,958	\$16,316	\$600,200
	F	\$16,482	\$13,442	\$494,477
High School Degree	M	\$31,477	\$8,797	\$323,606
	F	\$22,780	\$7,144	\$262,799
Some college - no degree	M	\$36,934	\$3,340	\$122,865
	F	\$27,420	\$2,504	\$92,144
Associate degree	M	\$40,274	\$0	
	F	\$29,924	\$0	
Bachelors or more	M	\$56,524	\$16,250**	
	F	\$39,786	\$9,862**	

The teenager usually finds a job earning minimum wage or a slightly higher hourly wage. However, the young person makes a salary below poverty level and condemns his family to poverty. The buying power of this individual is minimum. They not only limited to buy material objects, but also it is difficult for them to re-enroll in educational programs. If the individual is a male, he will make \$19,380 yearly, a male with a community college degree will make \$40,274. Therefore, society

loses an average of \$20,894 per male annually. If a female makes \$14,467 yearly, a female with a community college degree will make \$29,942, causing society to lose an average of \$15,457 per female annually. Furthermore, the individual increases in salary only correspond to inflationary factors. Thus, real wages remain at the same level for the remainder of the individual's working life, on average 20 years. If a person loses \$20,894 a year for twenty years the total loss for that person at an interest rate of 6% will be \$768,606. If the interest is 4%, the net loss will be \$622,181. The net loss increases if we consider professionals who make better salaries, such as lawyers, computer specialists or doctors. These represent huge losses in a state where the dropout rate is more than 50% of the student population. The first alternative in which the adolescent is out of trouble and working for a living still produces enormous losses at the personal and a community level in the long run as well as in the short run.

4. Welfare system

The second best alternative is where the person seeks public assistance and becomes dependent on the welfare system. Society loses a net amount even though the majority of the cases that cash benefits for teenagers are tightly linked to school attendance. If teenagers do not attend school regularly, they are removed from the programs. Teenager girls who become parents are more likely to become long term welfare recipients than any other group. In Arizona the average help received by a family is \$347 while the national average Aid to Families with dependent Children is \$389 a month, according to U. S Department of Health and Human services. Arizona has one of the highest teenage birth rates of the nation surpassed only by New Mexico, Texas and Mississippi. Arizona spends \$3.5 million during 2002 on welfare programs promoting sexual abstinence.

If the youngster lives at home, welfare represents the second best alternative. This case is still favorable because public assistance is cheaper than incarceration. Some of the job training programs offer teenagers the opportunity to participate in life skill training programs and parenting programs where teens are able to obtain their General Education Degree, and work in a skill that make them more marketable. If the individual is placed in a group home, the average cost of this alternative is about a \$100 per day per individual. The cost increases if the individual becomes sick or is chemically dependent. In that event, the individual receives medical services, which are usually covered by taxpayers.

5. Total loss for the taxpayers

The youngster's lack of skills with which to enter the job world or complete high school forces minority youth into criminal activity. Discouraged by the lack of job opportunities, and the lack of vocational training, minority youth find desperate alternatives that are unfavorable to the community. Maricopa County Juvenile Court Center Annual Report (1999) recommended early education and community support to curb future delinquency.

The distribution of the Arizona population is 29% Hispanic, 58% Anglo, 4% African American, 2% Asian/ Pacific Islander and 1% other. According to the 1999 Annual Report of the Maricopa County Juvenile Court Center, juvenile offenders' ethnicity for the county were distributed as follows: 50% Anglo, 37% Hispanic, 9% blacks, 3% American Indian and 1% other. In relative terms, the representation of Hispanics in the juvenile facilities corresponds to a 127% over their percentage of the population. Black representation constitutes an astonishing 225% and the representation of Native Americans is at 150% of their representation in the general population. There were 33,542 juveniles in Maricopa County for the year 1999 at a cost of approximately \$100 per day, and the daily cost for the county was \$3,354,200. This amount excludes the cost of juveniles that were transferred to Adult Court. According to the Juvenile Records (1994) the transfers' distribution as well shows a great disparity between the percentage of the population and the distribution in the juvenile system. In 1994

Anglos made up 37% of those transferred to the adult system, while Hispanics constituted 44% and African Americans formed 14% of those transfers.

Ethnicity (1999)	Percentage of population in Arizona	Juvenile Offenders %	Juvenile Offenders Number
Anglo	58	50	(16,695)
Hispanic	29	37	(12,505)
Black	4	9	(3,032)
American Indian	2	3	(912)
Asian/ Pacific Islands	1	0.7	(149)
Other	6	1	(214)

The Report of the Commission on Juvenile Justice of the Arizona Supreme Court, 1993, stated that prevention and early intervention are the most cost-effective approaches to dealing with juveniles at risk. The report pointed to several influences among them: the environment, social conditions, economic status, family, schools and peers. It also recommended the funding of culturally sensitive programs that strengthen this vulnerable sector of the population. Some of the school-based programs suggested were: law related programs, truancy programs and alternatives to traditional learning environments.

Some of the recommendations to implement law-related programs and after-school programs were followed by several districts, but the punishments for juveniles were modified in favor of stiffer mandatory sentences, automatic transfer to adult jails and permanency of juvenile records. Thus, instead of helping teenagers to make better decisions, society is punishing them more vigorously and keeping them locked up for a longer time. For example, in 1993 little attention was given to minor offenders. The juvenile system concentrated on the age group between 15 and 17 years who were chronic offenders. Today the situation has changed.

Juvenile laws were modified in November 1996 by popular vote. They became effective July 21, 1997. Penalties are stiffer than they have ever been before. Juveniles are being transferred in record numbers to adult jails. Juveniles who commit serious or repetitive crimes are treated as adults. After two offenses the juvenile, 14 years or older, faces mandatory sentences. This despite research which shows that the severity of the punishment does not deter adults or juveniles from committing further crimes. Juveniles do not have a clear understanding of the consequences that their acts could bring. Furthermore, the juvenile justice system lacks a provider network capable of delivering cross-cultural services.

There were more than 5,314 juveniles involved in 1996 with the juvenile system. The daily cost to maintain a juvenile was approximately \$92 to \$120 in the year 2002. The number of referrals increases every year due to the increase in population. In 2001, 35 kids were transferred to the adult system and 340 went directly to the adult system. The most common offenses in 1999 were shoplifting (4,168), curfew violations(4,018), violations of probation (2,981) and truancy (2,743).

On any given day in Maricopa County there are 4,700 probationers and 3,700 pending cases, according to Probation Services. Probationers are supervised by their parents and are required to wear an electronic monitoring units, called anklets. This unit operates 24 hours a day providing information to the police about the whereabouts of the probationers.

6. Alternative for the juveniles without legal resident status

These alternatives are valid for any youngsters who hold resident status. The problems of the bilingual students do not stop with a legal system that incarcerates children eight years old or older. If the youngsters do not hold a legal resident status, the age of incarceration goes down to 18 months. They do not need to perform a wrongful act. They are incarcerated because of their lack of documentation. They are held by the Immigration and Naturalization Service without legal representation or parental notification. According to the Human Rights Watch Report 1998, "Treatment of minors in INS custody raised human rights concerns, as the rights of hundreds of detained children in Arizona and California were violated." The INS blatantly refuses to comply with international law. It intentionally does not inform detained children of their legal rights and allows minors to appear unrepresented before the court. Minors' petitions for asylum are purposefully ignored. They are put in facilities next to criminals. The INS incarcerated 4,600 minors last year.

7. Conclusion

Public schools were created in the 19th century to provide for equal opportunity which has not been achieved. The ideal of Americanization and the formation of one culture has contributed to the genocides and negation of cultural heritage which have resulted in the annihilation of Native American cultures, separate but equal doctrines and the creation of the other in a Democratic society. Today at least in theory, globalization highly values instant communication, international and multicultural education. The United States will benefit greatly if its citizens learn to appreciate the immense contribution that heritage languages and different cultures bring to society by creating cultural appropriate alternatives in education. Alienation of the multicultural students leaves communities with a 50% drop out rate that translates into huge loses in the present as well as in the long run.

The incarceration approach substitute to bilingual education is a revolving door. It does not take into account the suffering or the traumas to which minors are subjected or addresses the problem that the lack of skills that generate most of the problems. This approach also drains the taxpayers, thus they are paying more than a \$100 a day to incarcerate an adolescent, when the cost of keeping them in school is about \$10 a day. Is the elimination of cultural appropriate alternatives serving the communities?

The substitutes available currently to bilingual and multicultural education are doomed to failure, because they do not take into consideration the suffering or the traumas to which minors are subjected to. Is this system waiting to replicate the Puerto Rican experience were the rate of illiteracy skyrocketed between 1909 and 1949, when according to Jim Crawford, students were leaving school before completing third grade or the Situation in Rough Rock in 1966 when the annual per capita income was \$85?

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