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# Issues in Teacher Education for Bilingual Schools

## *Cuestiones fundamentales en la formación del profesorado para colegios bilingües*

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In many parts of the world, bilingual education is currently an important issue, but there is little consensus on what it means in practical terms, or how different languages can best be incorporated into the education system. Broadly speaking, in recent years bilingual education has been approached from two perspectives: supportive and additive. While the first usually indicates a form of support for students whose home language does not correspond to that of the majority of the speakers where they live, the second usually refers to programmes in which a second language is offered as an enhancement to education in the main local language. The first case would be very much that of immigrant students in a new country, the latter of students learning a foreign language –i.e. English– which is in constant demand in the labour market. Additionally, in many countries there is a third class of bilingual education: in areas where two or more languages co-exist in the same or similar situation, different combinations of these languages are used within the education system. This is the case in many parts of Spain, in Switzer-

land, or in other bilingual areas in certain parts of the world. Nevertheless, we can consider that the first two types are the most common.

The social, cultural and educational landscape of each area mean that every bilingual programme has its own unique features. The students' needs, the official curriculum, the funds available and, especially, the teachers themselves, all have a bearing on the practical implementation of bilingual education programmes. Generally, bilingual education receives only a limited amount of interest from the authorities, either because the target population is perceived to be marginal (paradoxically, pupils on bilingual programmes are often either underprivileged students in schools with overstretched resources, or wealthy students in private schools), or because funding for such programmes is limited. This means that the role of the teacher is even more crucial than would usually be the case, and that the need for appropriate teacher training is thus particularly acute. Above all, teachers need to receive support so that they become fully competent in both (or more) languages, on both a social and an academic level. They also need to be proficient in the culture associated with the target language, as well as in the local culture(s). Moreover, teaching in the students' first language is not the same as teaching in the students' second language. Teachers working in bilingual schools often have to adapt to teaching content courses such as science or history in a language in which the students are not academically proficient –or perhaps not even generally fluent. It is hardly necessary to say that this poses enormous challenges in terms of general didactics, teaching material, and pedagogical support.

All these issues lead to the need for us to focus on the role of the teachers and –especially– how they are educated, which is the leitmotiv for this monographic issue. The studies presented here shed light on numerous different aspects of the situation outlined above.

Starting from the perspective of education systems as a whole, it is evident that often educational administrators have provided limited or negligible special instruction to teachers who will be working in bilingual contexts. In this volume, Truscott de Mejía provides an overview of bilingual education in South America and explores the issue of how far teacher education enables practitioners to cope with tensions in their classroom practice, using evidence from the particular case of bilingual education in Colombia.

As we have mentioned, one of the variables affecting the quality of bilingual education is the actual course material and the kind of programme. In their article, Rachel Whittaker and Claire Acevedo describe a literacy development project which was devised specifically to boost learners' reading and writing skills in bilingual education. Their method, based on the analysis of the genres found in differ-

ent curricular content areas, offers teachers a detailed, explicit and practical way of supporting students' text comprehension and production.

Reflexive teacher education is at the centre of this volume, and forms the main topic of the next article, in which Ana Halbach reflects on the application of teacher education programmes in Alcalá. Her paper shows how the use of Action Research projects at the end of the Teacher Education Master's can have a positive impact on the student-teachers' awareness of bilingual education and its implementation, by focusing on the prospective teachers' own observations and reflections.

From a different perspective, Darío L. Banegas revises the role of dynamic programmes, an approach which also finds parallels in the paper by Stephan Breidbach and José Medina. Both articles look at the need to innovate as the circumstances and the implementation of different programmes evolve. As Breidbach and Medina state, teachers need to connect and believe in what they are teaching. Identity and teachers' perceptions, Banegas suggests, thus have a critical role in the way bilingual education is implemented in specific contexts.

As in many other aspects of language education, here too technology has affected how teacher education is implemented. In this sense, the study by Bueno Alastuey and García Esteban provides an analysis of a training programme through the TPACK framework (<http://www.tpack.org/>), in which the implementation of pedagogical knowledge is supported by technology (Mishra & Koehler, 2006)<sup>1</sup>.

Assessment is often a neglected areas in bilingual education. In her paper, Casal addresses the critical aspect of assessing what is learned in the classroom. This matter is especially important because most teachers graduate from university with little, if any, experience in language assessment. Since bilingual education is actually a a cross-curricular type of education, cooperation among teachers is a must. Unfortunately, getting teachers to work collectively represents a challenge for many schools. Casal's paper includes multifaceted instruments that address three basic components of Cooperative Learning: positive interdependence, individual accountability and social skills development.

This special issue concludes with a description of the "SciencePro" project by Barranco et al., which was designed to motivate and improve the attitudes of student-teachers towards the teaching of science in bilingual programmes during their out-of-college practice period. The intensive cooperation between the Faculty of Education and the primary schools involved in practical training placements

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<sup>1</sup> Mishra & Koehler (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. *Teachers College Record*, 108(6), 1017-1054.

provides exactly the kind of framework needed to prepare the next generation of bilingual teachers.

This monographic volume clearly brings out the importance of connecting theory and practice in schools of education all over the world. It also sheds light on how faculties currently approach the training of new teachers for bilingual education, and on some innovative practices that are likely to gain currency over the next few years. Overall, this volume is reader-friendly and will be of interest for researchers, administrators and practitioners involved in bilingual education at any level. The topics addressed in the different articles give a broad overview of the issues involved in preparing teachers for the new and fascinating challenge of educating bilingual children.