

LANGUAGES: WHY ONE IS NOT ENOUGH
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During the last two decades, U.S. public education policy has been the subject of unprecedented national discussion and debate. The discourse has been driven by concerns about the quality and equity of public school instruction and the steps necessary to improve both. Most of the discourse has focused on how to hold schools accountable for the quality and equity of reading and mathematics instruction, the primary focus of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Virtually none of the discussion about public education policy has addressed the development of student proficiency in multiple languages. Monolingualism in English is the *de facto* language education standard followed by most U.S. public schools. It is a *de facto* standard because the U.S., unlike many countries, does not have a national education policy. Education policies and standards are set by states subject to further elaboration by local education agencies.

While some of the debate over the quality of U.S. public education has referred to international comparisons, none of the comparisons have included language education and the development of multilingualism. At best, this omission reflects embarrassment that the United States places dead last among industrialized nations in helping students develop multilingual competencies. More likely, this omission is just another manifestation of national myopia about multilingualism and tenacious adherence to an English-only language educational standard.

The one-language U.S. education standard is not based on research, factual evidence or reason. Rather, it is the product of misconceptions, myths and emotions that are deeply rooted in our history – a history that with respect to language was quite brutal.

Slavery necessitated language control. Plantation owners forbade their slaves from speaking in their native languages because they could not understand the languages and feared slaves would communicate in them to plot revolts. While plantation owners insisted their slaves learn and speak their language, laws in the colonies and later in the states where slavery was legally recognized prohibited teaching slaves to read or write in any language to minimize the likelihood of organized mass rebellion. After the Civil War, many of the southern states enacted “Black Codes” which limited the educational available to freed slaves and their children.

U.S. territorial expansion, whether through diplomacy or by military action, was almost invariably accompanied by language restrictions on the people whose lands were seized. Schools – Indian Boarding Schools, “Mexican Schools” in the vast area of the Southwest ceded by Mexico after the U.S.- Mexican war, and public schools in Puerto Rico, Alaska, and Hawaii – were the institution which implemented language restrictions through English-only instruction. Children who persisted in speaking in their native language were often punished and teachers who used the vernacular of their students were frequently sanctioned, sometimes fired, and occasionally prosecuted.

While people of color were the early targets of language restrictions, World War I fanned fear of an “enemy within” -- German speaking Americans who constituted the largest immigrant group at the time, roughly equivalent in proportional size to our Hispanic immigrant community today. War-time hysteria forged a powerful new equation in our national consciousness: language equals loyalty. Patriotic Americans spoke English, and English only. Before the War, English-German bilingual programs were common in Midwestern public schools; after the War, bilingual instruction was virtually non-existent.

The teaching of modern foreign languages became a casualty of the hysteria occasioned by the First World War and the association of language and loyalty in American thought. Nebraska passed a post-Treaty of Versailles law making it a crime to teach a modern foreign language in public or private schools to any student who had not completed the 8th grade. Although the Nebraska law was ruled unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in the 1921 case of *Meyers v. Nebraska*, English-only was firmly established as the nation's *de facto* language education standard.

Why we need to raise U.S. language education standards

The fact that English is the most widely studied second language in the world is frequently cited to minimize or rationalize the failure of U.S. schools to teach students a language other than English. We often hear that “English is the language of science ...of international commerce ...of diplomacy ...of the internet.” The notion that “if they are learning our language, why do we need to learn theirs” is a costly lingua-centric conceit. It virtually guarantees that Americans will not comprehend people of other countries as well as they know us. This imbalance in knowledge and understanding grows more costly each year as globalization obscures national boundaries and technology amplifies the reach and impact of what previously was “local” activity.

Fareed Zakaria's 2008 best seller *The Post American World* addressed a reality which many find disorienting and some find distressing.

This is a book not about the decline of America but rather about the rise of everyone else.

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At the politico-military level, we remain in a single-superpower world. But in every other dimension – industrial, financial, educational, social, cultural – the distribution of power is shifting, moving away from American dominance. That does not mean we are entering an anti-American world. But we are moving into a post-American world, one defined and directed from many places and by many people.

...

[W]hat will it mean to live in a post-American world?

Zakaria's question does not admit to easy answers. But one thing is certain: multilingualism and the cultural understanding it makes possible will be essential for American children to be prepared for success in the 21st Century.

Today's one-language educational standard is an irrational impediment to U.S. economic development, innovation, and growth. It delimits the scale of trade – both in goods and ideas – and reduces the nation's productive potential. The one-language standard minimizes the likelihood that U.S. students will be able to meet the challenges and to seize the opportunities ahead. English proficiency is too low a bar for students who must compete and collaborate in a complex, dynamic, culturally and linguistically diverse global environment.

To appreciate the economic importance of multilingualism, one needs to look no farther than the “Google” icon on a computer desktop. Google began as a research project by two Stanford University graduate students in 1996. It was incorporated as a privately held company in 1998, and went public in 2004. Google's audacious mission was “*to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.*”

Google was designed to be a global company. As its corporate website noted, “*Diversity is our Business.*”

For Google to be competitive internationally, our products need to speak all the languages our users speak. With that in mind, we started the 40 Languages Initiative in May 2007, with the aim of getting

Google products into 40 languages, mapping to roughly 70 countries. This initiative will enable more than 99.3% of the Internet population to use Google's products.

The importance of multilingualism to the success of Google's search engine enterprise cannot be overstated; indeed, language is the machine-human interface. Engineers and mathematicians develop the algorithms that collect, sift and screen web content, but linguists and experts on a language and its cultural setting provide the machinery used to mine and refine the precious ore. Effective search engines require profound understanding of the nuances of language and the cultural complexities associated with its use.

Google's "40 Languages Initiative" succeeded. Now, more than one billion internet inquiries are performed by Google each day from users around the world, making Google the most ubiquitous internet search provider in the world. With a current market capitalization of more than \$400 billion and an annual profit margin of approximately 20 percent, Google proves that diversity is good business and that multilingualism can make a business great.

Our current one-language educational standard weakens national security, especially in an era of asymmetric and unconventional conflict. Hearts and minds are more cheaply and surely won with words than weapons. The awesome firepower of language rarely produces collateral damage, incites retribution, or fosters the enlistment of new foes. Multilingualism improves the quality of national intelligence and expands its reach and supplements military might with diplomatic prowess.

The *de facto* "English only" educational standard is not up to addressing the incredible challenges confronting our world. Climate change and global warming, the threats posed by nuclear weapons, and protecting the public from world-wide pandemics require international cooperation and collaboration. Whether our children learn other languages and understand other cultures will determine if they are able to collaborate on a global scale and the extent to which the United States is viewed as a world leader; it may also determine our very survival.

Movement beyond the current one-language educational standard is also important for the efficient functioning of our society in an era of dramatic demographic change. This change, a product of both immigration and structural demographic dynamics, is particularly evident in language. 55 million Americans – nearly 20 percent of our total population -- speak a language other than English at home. Of these people, 86 percent of whom were born in the United States, 37 million speak Spanish and 25 million are deemed limited in their English proficiency. Government programs and societal interests including education, health, justice, public safety, and social welfare depend on civic participation and effective communication between people and their government. For this large and growing segment of our population, communication must be multilingual if it is to be effective.

While multilingual communicative competencies and expanded cultural understanding would be the most obvious outcomes from raising U.S. language education standards, additional benefits would accrue to students. Modern brain imagining technology confirms what teachers and psychologists have reported for many years: multilingualism stimulates brain functions and boosts learning. Neuro scientists have documented that multilinguals have increased executive function and are less subject to distraction, have more creativity and problem solving capability, and record higher academic achievement. Researchers have also found that speaking more than one language promotes compassion and tolerance – important social behaviors. And there is abundant and consistent evidence that multilingualism delays age-related dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

All of the top performing nations on international education assessments provide instruction in two or more languages. Is this merely a coincidence or is there an element of causality? As the United States searches for ways to improve educational outcomes, it would be worthwhile to pursue the linkages between multilingualism, learning, and academic achievement.

How to raise U.S. language education standards

A sure first step in raising U.S. standards for language education would be to re-examine and reform current policies and programs for the instruction of our large and growing population of children whose native language is other than English. In 2013, the Census Bureau's American Community Survey found that 11.7 million school-age (5-17) children lived in homes where a non-English language was spoken. Approximately 8.5 million of these children were native Spanish speakers.

Few U.S. schools make any effort to develop the languages children have learned at home if the language is other than English. We know that languages are like muscles; if they are not developed they atrophy. Our schools develop student English skills each year from pre-K through the 12th grade and further in college or university. Meanwhile, student native language skills other than English are usually ignored rather than developed by schools and waste away during their academic matriculation.

According to U.S. Education Department (USED) statistics, 4.4 million these non-English-background students were classified as English learners (ELs) in school year 2011-2012 meaning that they entered school with limited English proficiency. EL students make up the fastest growing segment of our student population and are projected by USED to comprise one-quarter of the nation's school enrollment in 2025.

While federal policies respecting the instruction of EL students may be well-intentioned, their impact is often less than benign. Civil rights law has focused on "overcoming" the language barrier EL students encounter in classrooms where English is the sole language of instruction. The emphasis too often has been on "remediating" student English language skill "deficiencies," rather than expanding the linguistic repertoire of school staff to promote more effective instruction and parental engagement.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 (the most recent version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) fortified the English-only bent of U.S. education in numerous ways, both symbolic and tangible. NCLB replaced the "Bilingual Education Act" with "Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students." NCLB and the Obama administration prioritized learning English by EL students through standardized test-based accountability systems to grade schools and evaluate teachers. NCLB also intensified the focus on the speed of student English acquisition to the detriment of other important educational objectives including student bilingual development. Maybe the most important lesson to be learned from the NCLB experience is the ineffectual nature of top-down federal education mandates; they rarely work.

During the last two decades, many local and state education agencies have raised their standards for language education and development without federal prodding or even federal support. Some examples:

North Carolina has a long history of providing "foreign language" instruction in many of its public schools. In 1997, the Collinswood Language Academy, a K-8 public school in a working-class section of Charlotte-Mecklenburg took language education to a new level when it inaugurated a dual language immersion program in English and Spanish. From the outset, Collinswood's magnet program (children are selected by a school district-wide lottery) was a two-way program enrolling approximately equal numbers of native-English and native-Spanish speaking students together in classrooms where equal time was devoted to content and language

instruction in both languages. Collinswood’s dual language program proved very successful as measured by student test scores, teacher observations, and parent feed-back.

In 2005, five North Carolina schools had implemented Collinswood-like dual language programs. By the end of the 2014-2015 school year, the number had grown to more than a hundred schools, and the state board of education committed to bringing at least one full dual-language immersion program that spans kindergarten through 12th grade to each of the state's 115 districts, and partnering with colleges and universities to develop the special cadre of bilingual, bi-literate educators—including teachers and administrators—that such programs demand. Research by Ginger Collier and Wayne Thomas showed that while all student groups benefitted from North Carolina dual language education, two groups of students -- English learners and African American students -- made the greatest gains.

In 2008, the Utah enacted legislation and funding for Utah schools to begin Dual Language Immersion programs in Chinese, French, and Spanish (German and Portuguese were subsequently added). In addition, then-Governor Jon Huntsman Jr. initiated a Governor’s Language Summit and the Governor’s World Language Council both with a goal to create a K-12 language roadmap for Utah that addressed the state’s needs for language skills in business, government, and education. In 2010, current Governor Gary Herbert and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Larry Shumway issued a challenge to Utah educators to implement one hundred Dual Language Immersion programs throughout Utah by 2015, with a goal of enrolling 30,000 Utah students. Due to the early success of the program and public demand, Governor Herbert and State Superintendent Shumway moved the target completion date to 2014, with a continuing goal to mainstream Dual Language Immersion programs throughout the entire Utah public school system. As of July, 2014, Utah had 118 Dual Language Immersions Schools: 33 Chinese, 14 French, 3 German, 6 Portuguese, and 63 Spanish.

In 2011, the Governor of Delaware announced a ten-year “World Language Immersion” initiative to prepare a “Globally Competitive Delaware Workforce.” Last year, 11 dual language programs were operating in state schools, 4 in Chinese and 7 in Spanish. The initiative continues to grow in this small state.

In 2014 Indiana established a funded Dual Language Immersion Pilot Program to provide grants to school corporations and charter schools that establish dual language immersion programs in Chinese, Spanish, French, or any other language approved by the state department of education. Funding for the pilot program was increased for school year 2015-2016.

Also in 2014, Wyoming enacted legislation providing grants to state schools “to initiate Dual Language Immersion Programs” during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years.

Twenty elementary schools in Georgia will provide dual language immersion programs in school year 2015-2016. Spanish is the second language offered in most schools, but Chinese, French, and German is offered in a handful of dual language programs.

In 2014, Minnesota enacted a Learning for English Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act to reform instructional programs for the state’s 65,000+ EL students. A central premise of the LEAPS Act is that state schools had been looking at language from the wrong end of the telescope; instead of recognizing the value of the languages children learn at home, most schools see home languages other than English as an impediment to learning.

A large and growing number of local education agencies in other states including Alaska, California, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, New Mexico, New York, Oregon and Texas offer dual language education programs, usually

in elementary schools, in Spanish and a number of other frequently spoken languages. Indeed, dual language instructional programs can now be found in a majority of states.

Federal Role Respecting Language Education

As discussed above, multilingualism advances multiple economic, social and strategic national interests. Additionally, ensuring that our growing population of non-English-language-background students -- whose presence in U.S. schools is directly attributable to actions of the federal government respecting territorial annexation, immigration and refugee policies, and the conduct of diplomacy and war -- receive equal educational opportunities is a settled matter of civil rights law.

Aside from top-down educational mandates which have proven generally ineffective and even counter-productive, what then can and should the federal government do to elevate U.S. language education standards? Plenty! The transformation of American schools from monolingual to multilingual is a very large-scale endeavor that will require substantial resources and many years of consistent effort.

U.S. teacher preparation programs must be fundamentally revamped so that teachers are helped to recognize the value of students' home languages and cultures, and to learn how they can be harnessed in everyday classroom instruction to benefit all students. At the same time, our current 3+ million teacher workforce needs intensive professional development for these same purposes. Patterns of teacher interaction with students and parents must change to facilitate language education and cultural understanding which is broader, deeper, and higher.

Instructional specialists need to be trained or retrained on the linkages between content learning and language development. Tearing down the "silos" which confine educators and diminish their efficacy will take time, patience, persistence and the pursuit of new ways of thinking, teaching, collaborating and learning.

Effectively raising U.S. language education standards will require an expanded vision of school leadership. Administrators will be called upon to engage the communities they serve in new and unfamiliar ways, and to draw upon community resources that are currently often ignored. So also, school leaders will be required to expand and re-conceptualize instructional programs and the measurement of student and school success.

Because we measure that which we deem important, school assessments will need to be developed to chart the progress of dual or multiple language development. This undertaking will provide a side benefit: it will sensitize test developers and users to the intrinsic importance of language in academic assessments. As a result, educators, parents, and policy-makers will develop a more accurate and comprehensive appreciation of the quality of instruction and academic progress.

Finally, schools will need to be supplied with additional texts and instructional materials. Some texts and materials in languages other than English are currently available, but others will need to be developed or adapted from those of other countries. The process of instructional material acquisition and development, like that of assessment development, will prove salubrious as it will foster our understanding of how other nations approach education.

Can the United States actually do all of this and raise our standards for language education beyond the current level of English-only? Yes! The proof consists in the record of other nations -- nations with fewer linguistic resources and far less material wealth -- which have already done so. The energy, knowledge, leadership and passion of dual language educators can make it happen!

