

Reading 1:

In O. Garcia (ed.) *Bilingual Education*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991.

Bilingual Education: Politics or Pedagogy?

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Introduction

My first contact with bilingual education in the United States came in 1971, only three years after the passage of the first Bilingual Education Act, when I assumed a position as assistant principal for instruction in an urban elementary school. One of my major responsibilities was the supervision of the school's bilingual program.

My professional experience previous to bilingual education was similar to that of many Hispanics at the time. I had been a teacher of Spanish as a foreign language for five years. A veteran of one of the many blips in the US educational landscape: the foreign language in elementary schools (FLES) program implemented during the sixties. When bilingual education came upon the scene, everyone assumed that if you could teach a foreign language, or even if you were only a competent speaker of one, then you knew how to teach students in bilingual education. It was soon evident that we had much to learn.

In 1971 bilingual education was little more than an idea, a step-child of the Civil Rights Act. Bilingual programs were being implemented much quicker than materials were made available or teachers trained. And a knowledge base to support the instructional activities being initiated was practically non-existent. We operated more out of instinct than anything else, and everyone worked exceedingly hard trying to keep ahead of the demands presented by their classes. With characteristic bluntness Fishman & Lovas (1970) called attention to those very lacks in bilingual education: lack of funds, lack of trained personnel, and lack of evaluated programs.

The next few years were accompanied by growth in all areas of bilingual education. Early experimental efforts culminated in the passage of the 1974 Bilingual Education Act, the first one accompanied by a respectable budget, and consciously targeted to the needs of non-English

speaking students. By that time moneys for training had been made available and publishers were producing materials more or less suited to the needs of our students. The mood was optimistic, the energy level high. Barely four years later, and not too surprisingly, those early tentative efforts would be negatively evaluated in the AIR report which will be discussed below.

It is useful to remember that the late sixties and early seventies were a time of ferment for bilingual education when politicians spoke passionately about their hopes for children. Bilingual education was a friendly concept then. But it was also a time of struggle for those of us in the schools. Although bilingual education had existed in various guises throughout the country's history, and was alive and well in many parts of the world, we had no maps. (For a review of that history, see, for example, Heath, 1981; Keller & Van Hooft, 1982.) Our energy and commitment made up for our ignorance as we invented programs and curricula to respond to the new legislation. Under the current attacks from US English we tend to forget the hope and promise of those years. But the past remembered serves as context for the present. And understanding the historical context is particularly important in an area as young and conflicted as bilingual education.

In this chapter I will attempt to shed light on the persistent conflict over bilingual education through a comparison of the evolution of bilingual education policy at the federal level against the knowledge base on bilingualism and bilingual education. My focus will be on the relationship between these two strands of influence on bilingual education.

Bilingual Education: Policy

The early years

Perhaps the most important characteristic to remember about the 1968 Bilingual Education Act is what it was not. It was not a pedagogical

response to a previously documented problem but rather the result of political strategies designed to funnel federal poverty funds to the Southwest. This is not to say that children lacking English skills were not failing in the schools, but while the need existed, there was no great demand for the type of federal political intervention represented by the Bilingual Education Act. The problem remained at the local school and district levels.

In 1965 the Johnson administration, besieged by urban riots, sought to direct Federal funds to the poor in US cities. With the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965 Johnson succeeded not only in targeting money to the poor, but also in overcoming historical opposition to federal aid to education. Title I of the ESEA was the first attempt by Congress to pledge money for children of low-income families (Schneider, 1976).

The sweetener tossed for Hispanics into the 1968 Title VII Amendments to ESEA was not based on knowledge about language learning or bilingualism. The move has been attributed to Sen. Yarborough's (Democrat from Texas) interest in funneling a portion of the federal anti-poverty funds to the Southwest. He, and those who joined him in the effort, appealed to the needs of Mexican-Americans who were described as the second largest minority, very poor, and with a language deficiency (descriptors that unfortunately continue to haunt the program). Hispanic leaders were recruited to testify and they also described the great injustices suffered by this newly discovered 'culturally disadvantaged' group. A few experts were also called to testify, among them Joshua Fishman. Their combined effort resulted in the Title VII Amendments, the first categorical Federal law authorizing bilingual-bicultural educational programs (Betances *et al.*, 1981).

Other pressures also contributed to the acceptance of the Title VII Amendments. One was the presence of hundreds of immigrants from Cuba who saw themselves as only temporary residents of the United States. They were ready to leave as soon as Castro was chased away and were therefore eager to maintain their culture and their children's Spanish language skills. In 1963 the Ford Foundation had already helped Cuban refugees to set up an experimental program in bilingual education. The program was considered a success and provided a viable model for later efforts. Unlike later government funded

programs, the Dade County program was oriented toward enrichment instead of remediation (Hakuta, 1986).

The Civil Rights movement was also beginning to inspire demands for equal educational opportunity from other linguistic minorities, including Native Americans. Those pressures contributed to the extension of bilingual education beyond the original Hispanic target group. And from Alaska to the Mexico border, poor children from homes where English was not the dominant language became the beneficiaries. The nation's newspapers proclaimed that Public Law 90-247 would establish 'bilingual education programs for children of Indian, Puerto Rican and Mexican descent' (Schneider, 1976).

From its conception then, bilingual education was a political artifact; born not of knowledge, or even of expressed need, but of political maneuvering perhaps heavily laced with a sense of social responsibility. Such serendipitous beginnings had unintended consequences. Bilingual education rapidly became a rallying point for Hispanics. It was a cause that could, and did, unite Hispanic people across the country, across cultural, educational, and even class barriers. As a result, the political climate surrounding the Education Amendments of 1974 was drastically different.

Legal support

In 1974 the Supreme Court of the United States handed down its decision in the landmark *Lau vs. Nichols* case. In this decision the Court ruled that students were being denied equal educational opportunity when school officials took no steps whatever to help speakers of other languages (SOLs)¹ participate meaningfully in the school program. The decision came at a fortuitous time, in the midst of congressional hearings about bilingual education. Through this ruling the Court legitimized the need for bilingual instruction: '...there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful' (*Lau vs. Nichols*, 1974). Thus, through the Court's commonsensical decision Congress' previous political actions were translated into a pedagogical need.

The importance of this ruling was not lost on members of Congress who could now see them-

selves as being on the side of the law, and perhaps even ahead of it. It is likely that the court's resolute statement encouraged legislators to accept a requirement for native language instruction in the legislation. In addition, eligibility was broadened through elimination of the poverty requirement. For Hispanics the court's decision provided needed encouragement. Schneider (1976) found that non-English dominant populations exerted a significant influence in the passage of the 1974 Bilingual Education Act. They did this directly as lobbyists and active participants in the drafting of the legislation, and indirectly as constituents to senators such as Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and Alan Cranston of California, both from states with large SOLs populations and, therefore, strong advocates of the legislation. In contrast, Schneider found that public opinion had little influence on the passage of the law. But once again, four years later the climate was vastly different.

By 1978, the next reauthorization cycle, research on bilingual education had begun to accumulate and the findings were generally supportive of the programs (see, for example, Dulay & Burt, 1978 and Troike, 1978). Bolstered by this research, reauthorization should have been easily accomplished. However, critics had also found their voice and the 1978 hearings gave them a national forum. Noel Epstein's *Language, Ethnicity and the Schools* became a much cited source in the attacks on bilingual education. As a reporter for *The Washington Post*, Mr. Epstein's opinion was assured wide dissemination, even though his position was sharply criticized by some of the very people he had cited in his support. Fishman, for example, called it 'an ignorant critique...heaps bias upon bias, suspicion upon suspicion, misinterpretation upon misinterpretation...' (Fishman, 1978: 16). Albert Shanker, then president of the American Federation of Teachers, also had a ready soap-box from which to promulgate his opposition through his editorials and position papers, and he used them often to attack bilingual education.

The Congressional committee heard more substantial criticism from Malcolm Danoff, of the American Institute of Research (AIR). Under his direction, this organization had conducted a study which less than four years after its uncertain beginnings had concluded that Title VII did not appear to have a significant impact in meeting the goals of the legislation. Although the study was severely criticized on methodological

grounds by O'Malley (1978) and others, the findings received wide publicity from the press and became a rallying point for the opposition during the 1978 hearings. In spite of this formidable opposition, bilingual education was retained in language close to the original legislation.

This temporary reprieve masked the gradual erosion of support for bilingual education. The program, and its sister programs in the Great Society collective were not well received by politicians. Their political power depended on the disbursement of federal funds to their constituents. By circumventing traditional relationships through direct assignment of funds to the barrios and ghettos, the Great Society offended these politicians and generated hostility toward the programs (Piven & Cloward, 1971).

The Lau decision was followed by the creation of Lau Centers to provide technical assistance and support to school districts. These centers applied the Lau Guidelines which did not have the force of law but were implemented through the Department of Health, Education and Welfare's (now the Department of Education) monitoring responsibilities. The Lau Guidelines encouraged the use of the native language in the bilingual/bicultural education for SOLs. In 1980 the Guidelines were reviewed by the newly created Department of Education and its first Secretary, Shirley Hufstедler. Formal regulations, mandating bilingual instruction in any public school enrolling 20 or more speakers of a given language emerged from that review but were never implemented. They were withdrawn soon after President Reagan took office in 1980. His election also led to the softening of the government's advocacy role in civil rights and, therefore, the weakening of Title VI, the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974, which had provided legislative support for the Bilingual Education Act.

The drastic change in climate was heralded in an early address by President Reagan to the National League of Cities where he characterized bilingual programs as 'absolutely wrong and un-American' (Reagan, March 2, 1981). Instead of demands for compliance, the Reagan White House engaged in activities directed at discrediting bilingual education. In September 1981 the Baker/de Kanter report was issued to the press in draft form and before formal review. Although the authors claimed to have conducted an independent study, they acknowledged that it had been initiated 'at the request of the White House

Regulatory Analysis and Review Group for an assessment on the effectiveness of bilingual education' (Seidner & Seidner, 1982).

The report was roundly criticized on methodological grounds by many researchers, nonetheless it succeeded in gaining the attention of the media.

Increased opposition

The Bilingual Education Act was reauthorized most recently in 1988. Conflict over the relative emphasis on native-language instruction has been continuous since, in spite of its name, the Act did not originally require 'bilingual' instruction. In addition, although transitional goals have been emphasized, the possibility for other instructional programs has never been excluded. The requirement for native language instruction has nonetheless been maintained throughout, although lately portions of bilingual education funds have been set-aside for the implementation of competing instructional strategies advocated by its opponents.

Previous to the 1988 reauthorization, William Bennett, then Secretary of Education attempted to remove the specific reservation of funds for programs using the students' native language from the law altogether. His department cited the supposed ambiguity in research and evaluation reports as the reason to oppose continuation of that requirement. In an effort to clarify the issues, the House Committee on Education and Labor requested the Government Accounting Office (GAO) to conduct an independent review of the research evidence in bilingual education. Their review culminated in the GAO's *Bilingual Education: A New Look at the Research Evidence* (1987). In their summary analysis the GAO reports that:

The experts' view on the official statements...indicate that the department interpreted the research differently in several major ways. First, only 2 of the 10 experts agree with the department that there is insufficient evidence to support the law's requirement of the use of native language to the extent necessary to reach the objective of learning English. Second, 7 of the 10 believe that the department is incorrect in characterizing the evidence as showing the promise of teaching methods [such as immersion] that do not use native languages. Few agree with the department's suggestions that long-term school problems experienced by Hispanic youths are associated with native-

language instruction. Few agree with the department's general interpretation that evidence in this field is too ambiguous to permit conclusions. (GAO, 1987: 3)

Thus, the GAO comparison of statements by Department of Education officials with the research evidence suggests either that department officials were unfamiliar with or misinterpreted the evidence, or that, for their own reasons, they chose to misquote and misuse it. Mr Bennett, and other Reagan administration officials, succeeded, nevertheless, in shifting the policy debate. Discussions about the preferred goal for bilingual education pre-1980 addressed the relative value of maintaining the native language alongside English instruction vs. using the native language purely as a transitional stage (see, for example, Gonzalez, 1978, and Trueba, 1979). The debate has now shifted.

Immersion programs conducted solely in English for SOLs were endorsed particularly by William Bennett during his tenure as Secretary of Education (1985-1988). And although Canadian researchers had warned against the transfer of successful immersion Canadian programs to the different US context (Tucker, 1980), the 1988 BEA increased the funding set-aside for 'Special Alternative Instructional Programs' under which immersion programs are categorized. In addition, and perhaps most damaging, the 1988 Act required students to exit from BEA funded instructional programs at the end of three years, and under no circumstances may a student continue to be enrolled in such programs for more than five years.

Under the threat of total loss of support for bilingual education, the possibility of maintenance is no longer discussed, we now speak of immersion vs. transitional. Ironically, this shift has occurred while the proposed evidence supporting positive effects for both bilingualism and bilingual instruction continues to mount.

It is this contrast between public policies on bilingual education, and the research evidence that is of interest to this writer. In the following pages I will cite selected findings to document the evolving evidence favoring bilingual education and bilingualism against the policy backdrop of the last twenty-one years discussed above.

Bilingual Education: The Research

The research I will cite falls across three categories: research about bilingualism, research about

bilingual education, and research about the effects of bilingual education. The questions that guide me are: Is bilingualism an asset or a handicap? If an asset, is there reason to believe that bilingual education is an appropriate vehicle for instruction? If so, how do we know? This is not intended to be a full review of the literature regarding these broad topics, that task has been accomplished elsewhere (see, for example, Larter & Cheng, 1984). The purpose is, instead, to contrast the robustness of positive research findings against eroding government support.

Bilingualism: An asset or a handicap?

Most of the research conducted until the early sixties concluded that bilingualism was a language handicap. This research was sharply questioned in 1962 by Peal & Lambert. They reported that bilingual children performed better than monolinguals in a series of cognitive tests, when sex, age, and socioeconomic status were appropriately controlled. These researchers attributed the negative findings of earlier studies to the failure to differentiate degrees of bilingualism and to control for socioeconomic status.

Diaz (1985: 72) in a well-substantiated review intended as a plea of support for bilingual education in the Southwest United States lists a number of studies which show the advantages of bilingualism: '...in measures of conceptual development (Bain, 1974; Liedtke & Nelson, 1968), creativity (Torrance *et al.*, 1970), metalinguistic awareness (Cummins, 1978), semantic development (Ianco-Worrall, 1972) and analytical skills... (Ben-Zeev, 1977)'. Diaz (1985: 72) also reports that children with higher levels of bilingual proficiency perform at a higher level than their peers on measures of analogical reasoning and tests of spatial relations.

Kessler & Quinn (1987) have compared the performance of 6th grade bilingual children in a southwestern barrio school to private school Anglo children in the same grade in the northeast in the solution of science problems. In spite of the Anglo children's superior reading level (7.38 compared to 3.0) children from the barrios of San Antonio achieved higher scores in their ability to generate more (1,945 to 579) and higher quality (176 to 53) scientific hypotheses, to use more complex metaphors (26 to 19), and to produce more syntactically complex statements (182 to 130) while attempting to solve science problems.

Is bilingual education effective?

Assessing the effectiveness of bilingual education will always be a problem. The term 'bilingual education' has no specific definition. It tends to be applied to any program directed at SOLs. Some of these programs may use the native language very little, if at all. In addition, the transitional nature of bilingual schooling ensures frequent turn-over in student population and the accumulation, especially as students move up the grades, of students who may require a longer period of native language support. Those are also the students who are least likely to perform well in standardized tests.

Both the AIR study of 1974 and the Baker/de Kanter report of 1981 were criticized for the researchers' lack of discrimination among various programs purporting to be 'bilingual education'. Rigorous assessment of instruction would require careful attention to program content and structure, as well as to student population. But this has not been the case in most assessments of bilingual education.

Willig (1985) has conducted a 'partial replication' of the Baker/de Kanter review by using all but five of the original set of studies. The excluded studies were conducted on programs outside of the US or, in one case, outside of a regular public school setting. Willig also controlled for methodological inadequacies such as initial group differences in language dominance, in environmental language exposure, in need for the bilingual program, inappropriate comparisons with 'graduates' of bilingual programs, and differences, due to exiting of successful students and addition of newcomers, between pre- and post-test population. Willig found that participation in bilingual programs consistently produced small to moderate differences favoring bilingual education. Willig concluded that the predominance of inadequate research designs, and inappropriate comparisons of children in bilingual programs to children who were dissimilar in many crucial aspects, has done a disservice to bilingual education: 'In every instance where there did not appear to be crucial inequalities between experimental and comparison groups, children in bilingual programs averaged higher than the comparison children on criterion instruments' (Willig, 1985: 312).

Researchers have also been criticized for limiting their criteria to those easily measured through standardized achievement tests. Paulston (1980a), for example, noted that the 1976 dropout

rate for Native Americans in Chicago public schools was 95% while it was only 11% in the bilingual-bicultural Little Big Horn School in Chicago. She argued for the use of broader criteria and longitudinal studies to determine a program's success. Also excluded from the criteria used to evaluate bilingual education is the value of bilingual competence which is added to an individual's linguistic repertoire. In studies of 4th and 5th grade bilingual children, Hakuta (forthcoming) found that the translation skills of these young students, were comparable to those of foreign language adult students. Hakuta suggests that the students' translation skills are related to a variety of metalinguistic skills.

In spite of the scarcity of rigorous, comprehensive studies, the experts judging the available data for the GAO report did conclude that the data favored programs using native language instruction. They were also clear in stating that there were no data to support the assertion that bilingual education was impeding the educational progress of Hispanic students.

Is there evidence for positive outcomes?

The notion that bilingualism impedes the educational achievement of Hispanic students is also belied by data from the National Center of Education Statistics' 'High School and Beyond' study. Fernandez & Nielsen (1986) found that exposure to Spanish during upbringing was not a handicap but an asset, greater Spanish proficiency was associated with greater achievement in both verbal and nonverbal tests.

Data is also available regarding differences in aspirations. One might infer that students with higher aspirations are likely to also achieve at a higher level. This was the position taken by Nielsen & Lerner (1982) in an analysis of language skills as they affected the school achievement of high school seniors. These researchers considered three measures of school achievement: educational aspirations, grade point average, and age. They found ability and socioeconomic status to be the strongest determinants for achievement, effects that are well substantiated in the literature. However, they also found that Hispanicity was the third strongest determinant of aspirations. That is, among the group of bilinguals, those who used Spanish more often also had higher aspirations. Conversely, English proficiency had no significant effect on these students' aspirations.

Along a similar vein, García (1981) also found positive associations with bilingualism among

Latinos. He found that when Spanish dominant homes enhanced the Spanish fluency of children, the offspring developed higher levels of self-esteem, more ambitious economic plans, greater assuredness of achieving such plans, greater locus of control, and higher grades in college. The research evidence thus tends to favor Spanish language maintenance. The benefits of bilingualism are now widely recognized and they appear to accrue not just to advantaged populations, but also to the children of the barrio. Over and over we find that native language competence appears to contribute, rather than detract, from academic achievement. There does not appear to be any evidence to the contrary.

So, how has this recent, and consistently positive research knowledge influenced policy-makers? Not much.

Social Science Research and Government Policy

Hakuta notes that 'bilingual education has received a disproportionate amount of public horn-locking by politicians, educators, and ordinary citizens alike' (1986: 206). This has been true even though in its richest year (1984) the bilingual education budget was less than one percent of the total United States federal education budget. He ascribes this mismatch between funding level and the amount of controversy generated to the emotional loading of the issues represented by bilingual education.

And this is the real battle for bilingual education advocates. After 21 years we now have the research to support our instinctive beliefs. We can now argue with a measure of confidence about the benefits of bilingual education. Through the years we have become more knowledgeable about effective instructional strategies and even about language assessment, although we still have much to learn about both. In spite of all this progress, the battle has become more, rather than less, difficult.

The conflictive situation of bilingual education contrasts sharply with the easy acceptance of educational funding for other federal programs, for example, for the gifted and talented. The allocation of special funding for this population was probably as much a creature of the political climate as was the original allocation of moneys for bilingual education. However, unlike bilingual education, programs for the gifted and talented have never received judicial support or the support of research in the social sciences

resulting in the positive findings reviewed above, nor do programs for the gifted and talented have the obvious potential for satisfying a national need such as that for increased language fluency. Programs targeted for the gifted and talented have not been proven effective against any criteria. And yet, funding for these programs continues to be accepted by the public and our legislators without question.

It is ironic that the conflict over bilingual education occurs side by side a gathering tide of concern over US students' lack of competence in foreign languages. In November of 1980 the Presidential Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies, appointed by President Carter, described the national state of incompetence in foreign languages as 'scandalous'. The need for foreign language education appears to be a cause everyone can comfortably espouse. Even the former Secretary of Education, William Bennett, in spite of his aversion to bilingual education, included two years of foreign language in his proposed model high school.

What are we to make of these conflicting positions? Steve Muller, commenting on the Presidential Commission's report, notes that bilingualism in the US has seldom been a learned achievement, more often it has been a stigma of recent immigration. He argues that inspiring greater national receptivity to the languages of other people will require a persistent assault on the American consciousness (Muller, 1980). But resistance to foreign languages is selective.

Lambert & Taylor (1986) found that citizens of the majority culture tend to be favorably disposed towards the maintenance of heritage cultures and languages for all ethnic groups. But their generosity stops at the schoolhouse door since they also consider instruction in languages other than English inappropriate in the public school setting. However, this same group of parents considers bilingualism developed through schooling as a social, intellectual, and career advantage for their own children. They want their children to achieve skills in another language and become bilingual, but they do not endorse native language instruction for language minority students. These students, they believe, should be taught in English, though they might want to maintain their language in informal settings. The less successful white, working class parents, tend to reject the preservation of heritage cultures and languages in or out of school. However, they also see

advantages for their children if their children become bilingual.

The negative associations that tend to accompany bilingual education may also reflect early identification of the program with poverty and educational deficiency. Those labels served a convenient purpose, they made the program possible, but they have also contributed to the confusion of language difference with language deficiency. Students who may, in fact, be competent in two languages, continue to be described as language deficient.

These conflicting values are reflected in public policy. In Arizona, for example, bilingual education programs are at best, transitional. SOLs are expected to receive only minimal instruction in their native language before being mainstreamed into English only classrooms. While these children are being encouraged to forget their mother tongue, recent legislation demands that other Arizona children begin to learn a second language in the elementary school. Thus we may shortly find classrooms where students are being alienated from their native language adjacent to those where their age-mates are struggling to learn a second language.

Hakuta (1986) argues for dissolution of this paradox of admiration for school-attained bilingualism on the one hand, and scorn and shame for home-brewed immigrant bilingualism on the other. He proposes the development of all students, including monolingual English-speakers, as functional bilinguals by substituting linguistic, cognitive, and enrichment purposes for current compensatory goals. This writer shares his opinion that there are only two possible solutions to the conflict over bilingual education. Advocates will either have to convince the general public of the pedagogical value of bilingualism, or they must manage to dilute the identification of bilingual education with ethnicity, poverty and compensatory education. This could be achieved through programs that integrate monolingual English speakers with SOLs in mutually productive instructional relationships.

The intimate connection between bilingual education and foreign language competence has also been noted by prestigious organizations: the Carnegie Corporation, through its Presidential Report (Pifer, 1979), and in a joint report, the Academy for Educational Development and the Hazen Foundation (AED & E.W. Hazen Foundation, 1982). All have endorsed the value of bilingual education, and its potential for comple-

menting a national effort at advancing foreign language competence in the nation.

In spite of such strong and prestigious endorsement, and of the commonsensical notion of connecting two national issues of pedagogical significance, bilingual education continues to be treated as a threat. The lack of influence of relevant scientific data to the debate is particularly surprising in a country that prides itself on its positivism.

The contrast between the scientific/pedagogical argument and public policies puts in question the relevance of the social sciences to the conduct of public policy. In so doing the question of how to preserve the benefits of bilingual education for the increasing number of SOLs remains. The pedagogical avenue appears to be weak in relation to the emotional loading of the concept. If so, only the political avenue remains. This will

require a united flexing of the emerging minority voting muscle and appeals to the interests of liberal monolingual populations. Bilingual education as a remedial program will not survive. Its only hope is in the embracing of those who understand that language competence of whatever variety is not a deficiency but an advantage.

Note

1. I consider the acronym LEP offensive because 'limited' puts a negative cast on the linguistic skills of these students and it calls to mind a historically oppressed population. I have therefore adopted 'speakers of other languages' as a more descriptive and accurate way to identify these children. The phrase results in a much more positive acronym as well: SOLs.

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