

Ericka's Topic Proposal and Why List

Why List

Why do so few schools endorse the importance of bilingual education? Because the schools do not feel learning a second language is important.

Why do some schools feel learning a second language is not important? Because they do not know the importance of other cultures.

Why do they not know the importance of other cultures? Because those in administrative positions and their teachers before them have not taught that importance.

Why haven't those in administrative positions stressed the importance of other cultures? Because they feel like those cultures have nothing to do with our own.

Why do they feel other cultures have nothing to do with our own? Because they think that because other cultures/languages are physically far from us it doesn't matter to our country.

Why do we think that because other cultures/languages are physically far from us that it does not matter to our country? Because that is how most of us have been socialized to think.

Why have many been socialized to think like that? Because many of those in positions of authority have been brought up along those same lines thinking no one's culture but their own matters.

Why have many of them been brought up to think only their culture matters? Because racist/ethnocentric attitudes produce those ideologies.

Why have racist/ethnocentric attitudes produced that? Because some people are ignorant.

Why aren't some people ignorant? Because they and other's are not educated enough or care enough to point those things out.

Topic Proposal

I think (and I really don't know yet) I will write about what I just laid out in the why list above. I would like to find out/write about why many people think bilingual education is not important enough to have it in primary schools. This is like a rough topic proposal because I still feel that even after writing this why list, I went all around in circles that

may not give me any grounds for argument in this paper. What does ANYONE think?? Oh, I forgot to mention (or I don't think I made it clear enough), but I think rather than focusing on the effects, I will "look backward" at the causes, and write on why things are like they are now.

Johnson, Ericka. n.d. 23 Jun 2005.

<<http://etec.hawaii.edu/~burniske/utopia98/student/causal/johnson/topic.html>>.

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Ericka's Final Draft

With continued diversity, stemming from immigration into the United States, the languages spoken here are continually transforming. Cultural misunderstandings and a lack of education on multi-lingualism have caused injustices inflicted on entire groups of people. Historical ideologies on what a "pure" American language should be has resulted in discriminatory "English Only" laws and other programs aimed at "cleansing" the American culture.

The language debate can perhaps be traced to John Adams' proposal to the Continental Congress in 1780. The nation at that time was very culturally diverse. "It was commonplace to hear as many as twenty languages spoken in daily life" (ACLU). Adams however, made a proposal to the Continental Congress that would significantly effect this diversity. His call to, "purify, develop, and dictate", usage of the English language would have placed stringent restriction on the employment of any other languages beside English. Another of our Founding Father's myopic views on language and culture, discriminated against the German immigrants in the United States at the time. Benjamin Franklin, in the middle 1700's, feared the German influence could, "supersede Anglo supremacy, not only in language, but in terms of culture and political values" (NCBE). Thomas Jefferson espoused similar worries in 1803, in regard to the French in the Louisiana Territories. The prevailing view each of these Founding Fathers held was fear, propelled only by opinions that the immigrants would not be able to understand, and therefore not promote, "American values".

The middle to late 1800's, saw other immigrant groups face like discrimination. The Know-Nothing Party, which was started in the 1850's, upheld anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant views. This ultimately led to language restrictions being placed on them. Due to English literary requirements, Chinese immigrants were, "attacked, barred from employment, disqualified from owning land, not allowed to vote" (NCBE). Laws restricting use of German in many public schools were also passed. One's culture and ideas becomes apparent through language. The distrustful leaders at the time though, were fearful of anything other than "pure American values", and language therefore became the avenue by which they chose to promote this purity. These historical efforts to "cleanse" the American language have no doubt contributed to feelings on language purification by politicians today.

The effect of our nation's history of cultural ignorance has led to the creation of proposals that are damaging to those not yet proficient in the English language. One of the more popular movements, reminiscent of Adams' proposal to the Continental Congress, is taking place in California with Proposition 227. Proposition 227, or the, "English for the Children" initiative requires that all children in public schools be taught primarily in English. The children who do not speak English would be placed in "English immersion" classes and have only one school year to year to learn the language. 180 days.

The effects of this program are very detrimental, culturally and socially. First those students who fail to pick up the language quickly enough will fall behind in class.

Dropping out would then be inevitable. Cultural identity loss is a significant factor as well. Assimilation statistics have been researched and the American Civil Liberties Union reports, "over 95 percent of first generation Mexican Americans are English proficient, and more than 50 percent of second generation Mexican Americans have lost their native tongue entirely".

When my good friend Josue lived, and attended kindergarten through third grade in El Paso, bilingual education was practically the norm, rather than the exception. When he moved to a school further from the border, he was told to speak only in English, and his lessons were taught only in English as well. Not only did Josue retain very little of his Spanish speaking abilities, but he is very embarrassed at the fact that he is Hispanic, yet knows very little Spanish. Josue feels as though he has in fact lost a little of his culture.

Besides having its impact in bilingual education, "English only" laws effect all of society in general. Basic services such as health and social welfare services provided only in English would make it very difficult for some to get what the need. Other services that are affected are job training, translation assistance in courts, voting assistance and ballots, driver's license exams, AIDS prevention education, 911 calls, and many more services. American society, in its desire to make "pure" its language and culture, does nothing more than to punish large groups of people.

In sum, our nation in its founding era became more and more culturally diverse as immigrants constantly entered the country. The rhetoric of the time by the Founding Fathers was based on American pride, and nationality. In espousing these beliefs however, a great portion of society was cut off. The prohibition of the speaking of foreign languages, was an idea many of the Founding Fathers desired. Although entirely undemocratic in nature, these ideas, stemming from a lack of information and understanding, have today led to social injustices on several minority groups. Bilingual education is slowly being done away with in several states, and many services that were formerly provided in multiple languages are being done away with as well; all in the name of American cultural "purification".

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