

Josue Lopez

I thought about coming up here and talking about the research that shows bilingual education is effective and that we need more than a 30 month period. But I decided against that for two reasons.

My first reason is that no doubt you all must have seen this data before. Research has been out there for a while. However, people have simply chosen to ignore it. Some districts, like those targeted by misinformed or simply cruel people like Special Masters and other higher-level policy makers, have had their bilingual programs demolished entirely, causing our emergent bilingual students to be set up for academic failure.

The second reason I chose to ignore it is because I think there is something else that is being destroyed here, something I need to focus on, and that is the culture of a people. At such a young age, we, as an educational institution, are stomping out any culture that these students come in with. Language is such a crucial part of culture. Not only will a bilingual program help your English acquisition, but it will also provide a voice for an entire people.

I acknowledge and promote Spanish literacy in my classroom and kids see and appreciate that. I have students who have high English reading levels who ask me if they can learn in Spanish as well. I have asked parents how they would feel about their child having that opportunity. I will quote parents here anonymously: Parent 1: "I feel it would be a wonderful experience to him. He will be challenged and exposed to another culture, so hopefully it will spark an interest in learning more about his peers' cultural background."

I could read you a few others, but I will just end with this one.

This parent, of, mind you, a 7 year old student: I will quote the parents writing: "I had asked her personally why she would like to be in a Spanish reading group and her words were 'I know I can benefit from learning Spanish and I want to because it's part of my culture.' Now she will be able to communicate with her grandmother when she comes from Puerto Rico. I too will apply myself in learning with her. She is so excited as well as her father. Thank you for the opportunity for her." End quote.

In conclusion, I see myself in my students as someone who struggled to learn English in this country. I see students who remind me of my little brother, of my cousins. These children might remind some of you all of yourself, of your children, of your nieces and nephews, of your grandchildren. These are just kids. What I am saying is not radical in any way, it is simply the truth. We need to stop this active cultural extinction.

I am not looking to compromise on this issue. I do not want a new arrivals program. I do not want a 30 month limitation on bilingual education. What I want is to give these kids the best opportunity to succeed. We know how to do that. We need bilingual education.