

# Societal Relations

## Lesson #11: BILINGUAL EDUCATION: AN EXAMPLE OF DISCRIMINATION?

### TIME

Two class periods (20 minutes and 60 minutes) in addition to research time between class sessions.

### OTHER MATERIALS

Timer

### TEACHER PREPARATION

For more information on stereotypes and prejudice see the historical background sections in the lessons "'How to Handle Mexican Labor': An Exercise in Generalizations and Stereotypes" and "Do Photos Lie?"

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- 1) identify sources for research
- 2) select research information for use in a debate
- 3) organize research findings into a format applicable for use in preparing for a debate
- 4) evaluate information learned through research and debate to form a personal opinion about bilingual education

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

**Discrimination** - When we act out our prejudices we engage in discrimination, treating people differently based on unfair racial, religious, or ethnic stereotypes. Discrimination is the denial of justice prompted by prejudice.

The amount of discrimination a person displays may not always be proportional to the degree of prejudice he or she harbors. At times people who are not prejudiced will discriminate. Consider a white barber who is not prejudiced but knows that if he accepts African American customers his white customers will be offended and business will suffer. On the other hand people who are prejudiced will not discriminate at all under certain circumstances. This happens when law or custom forbids such behavior.

At different times and under different circumstances the same person may display different degrees of prejudice. Bigoted teachers are hardly likely to reveal their true feelings toward African American children while their parents are visiting the room. Similarly, white workers may display no prejudice toward African Americans on the job but may show pronounced discrimination if these co-workers move into their neighborhood.

**The Mexican Experience** - Discrimination against Hispanics has deep roots in the United

*The Mexican American Experience in Kansas* Traveling Resource Trunk  
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States. As soon as European Americans and Mexicans began to compete for the same land, discrimination and violence resulted. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, 1848, protected Mexicans' land and civil rights. These provisions were ignored as European Americans poured into the West, drawn by the California Gold Rush and the promise of new land. Many European Americans felt superior to Mexicans who lived in the region, and this prejudice became a convenient excuse to rob Mexicans of their land. Some Mexican families were reduced to poverty and took the most grueling jobs for the lowest wages just to survive.

Other Mexicans migrating to the United States in search of work also faced widespread discrimination. The European Americans wanted their labor but little else. Some towns passed ordinances outlawing Mexican fiestas. English became the official language of the new U.S. territory, which placed Mexicans at a greater disadvantage. Most laws were written only in English. It was even against the law to testify in court in Spanish. Most teachers spoke only English and many forbade schoolchildren to speak Spanish in the classroom. Segregated restaurants, stores, and ceremonies became the norm.

World War II was a turning point for many Hispanics; as many as half a million served in the armed forces. These war years broadened horizons, opened up jobs, and made Hispanics more self-aware. But prejudice persisted on the home front during the war years. Many soldiers returned home to face the same old discrimination.

Partly in response to discrimination, Mexican American veterans formed the G.I. Forum in 1948. This group urged its members to participate in politics and supported legal efforts on behalf of Hispanics fighting discrimination in jobs, housing, and education. The Community Service Organization (CSO) was formed to help encourage action from Spanish-speaking voters and push for civil rights. In 1960 the Mexican American Political Association began efforts to help elect Hispanics to state and local government. The 1960s witnessed a more militant Hispanic rights movement and created a new spirit of Chicano pride that promoted "Brown power to offset Anglo power."

**Education** - Education is a chief concern of Hispanics. Discrimination has often cheated Hispanic children of a decent education. After schools were desegregated beginning in the late 1950s, many districts with more Hispanic than white students continued to receive less money. Teachers in these districts received less pay and taught larger classes. Hispanic culture and history were not taught at all or were negatively portrayed. Spanish became forbidden in the classroom. Because they could not understand or speak English well, some students found themselves held back or placed in classes for the mentally retarded. Today fewer Hispanic than white or black students finish high school or enter college.

Perhaps the greatest problem these students face is the language barrier. For many Hispanics bilingual education is a civil rights issue. Even though the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo guaranteed Mexican Americans their constitutional rights these rights continue to be violated.

The push for bilingual education began with Miami's Cuban community in the early 1960s.

Cuban American parents believed that their children needed to be taught in Spanish so they would not fall behind while they were learning English.

Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 promised federal money for bilingual education. Hispanic organizations continued to apply pressure to ensure that schools complied with this act. Then in 1974 the Supreme Court ruled in *Lau v Nichols* that special education must be provided for children whose first language was not English. Other laws dealing with bilingual education were passed. School districts had to begin bilingual programs or lose federal funding.

Bilingual education continues to be a controversial issue. Should Spanish be kept as the first language, or should bilingual education merely be a bridge to learning in English? Some Hispanics fear that bilingual education will be used to keep their children in segregated schools or classes. Other critics of bilingual education believe that special bilingual programs and teachers cost too much money and that Hispanics must learn English just as earlier immigrants had to do.

Adapted from Brandon Miller, "Discrimination and Civil Rights," *Cobblestone* 10 (April 1989).

**For additional information see:**

*The Mexican Americans* by Julie Catalano, pages 64-65, included in this trunk.

## VOCABULARY

- **Bilingual** = Speaking or writing two languages.
- **Discrimination** = The denial of opportunities and equal rights to individuals and groups because of prejudice or other arbitrary reasons.
- **Minority group** = A subordinate group whose members have significantly less control or power over their own lives than that held by the members of a dominant or majority group.
- **Prejudice** = A negative attitude toward an entire category of people, such as a racial or ethnic minority group.
- **Stereotype** = Unreliable generalizations about all members of a group that do not take into account individual differences within the group.

## ACTIVITY

Have the class debate the issue of discrimination using the question "**Is it discriminatory not to offer bilingual education?**" This lesson is structured to have no winner in the debate. If a competition is desired ask another class to watch the debate and vote on a winner.

To give the groups time to do their research consider scheduling "Day One" and "Day Two" several days or a week apart.

## DAY ONE - PREPARING FOR THE DEBATE

- 1) Have each student write a paragraph describing his/her opinion about and attitude toward bilingual education. Once all students have finished have them put their paragraphs away until a later time.

- 2) Divide the class into two groups. The debate question is, "**Is it discriminatory not to offer bilingual education?**" Assign a position, either pro or con, to each group. Explain to the groups that they will be responsible for:
  - representing one side of the question, pro or con
  - researching their side of the topic
  - preparing to debate their position
  - being aware of their opponents' potential arguments and be prepared to respond them
  - deciding which member(s) of their group will present their opening statement and follow up response.
  
- 3) Provide the groups time to meet, organize themselves and their approach to the debate, and begin their research.

#### BEFORE THE DEBATE

- 1) Each group needs to research its side of the debate question.

#### **"Is it discriminatory not to offer bilingual education?"**

Current information should be available through the library, teachers, parents, people within the school district such as the superintendent, or the National Association of Bilingual Education. In an election year it may be interesting to look at the position of presidential or congressional candidates. The amount of time provided for research will vary from class to class. Group members can determine who is responsible for various aspects of the research.

Once their research is complete the groups should meet to determine a strategy for presenting their positions. A spokesperson(s) should be chosen.

Each group will prepare an opening statement with supporting arguments. Each will be allowed approximately five minutes. Each group should also consider possible arguments to be made by the other group and prepare responses in advance to these arguments.

#### DAY TWO - THE DAY OF THE DEBATE

\*Use a timer to be sure that each side has an equal opportunity.

- 1) On the day of the debate have the class break into their respective groups. Decide which group will present its statement first.

Have a spokesperson from each side present the group's prepared statement, position, and supporting arguments without interruption. Allow a set amount of time (approximately five minutes) for each initial statement and supporting arguments.

- Each group should be prepared to listen and take notes on the other side's position and arguments.
- 2) Give each group time to review the statement and arguments presented by the opposing group and prepare a response to its position and arguments. (Allow approximately ten minutes.)
  - 3) Provide each group with time to respond to the other group's arguments (approximately ten minutes). The spokesperson(s) of each group should make this response.
  - 4) After the debate have each student write a paragraph describing his/her opinion about or attitude toward bilingual education.

Have the students compare the paragraphs they wrote at the beginning of this activity with those they wrote at the end. Ask them to discuss how their opinions are changed or unchanged, and why. Involve the class in a discussion about what they have learned and their individual ideas about bilingual education.

### **EXTENDED ACTIVITIES**

- 1) Have the class debate another issue or question such as Proposition 187 or "Should minority groups assimilate fully into 'mainstream America'?"
- 2) Have the students research the Declaration of Independence and their views about how it deals with or ignores the issue of discrimination. "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."
- 3) Invite a speaker to do a short presentation in a language other than English or show part of the Spanish section of the video *Hispanic Culture Series: Mexican People and Culture* included in this trunk. Afterward have students break into groups of four to discuss and write down their thoughts about being unable to understand what was being presented to them. Encourage them to write about their frustrations and any negative reactions they have. Next have them write down suggestions for making the presentation more meaningful. Have the students select one problem they encountered with the presentation and discuss it with the whole group. As a conclusion have them list three ways in which they could help a classmate or someone in their community overcome a language barrier. This activity will only work if none of the students understand the presentation or the Spanish video.
- 4) Have the class research an organization(s) working to eliminate discrimination toward Mexican Americans. The following are suggestions:
  - \* G.I. Forum = Formed in 1948 in Corpus Christi, Texas, when Mexican Americans were refused admittance into other veteran groups on an integrated basis.
  - \* CSO (Community Service Organization) = The formation of this organization in 1947 served as a base for future social, economic, and political activities. It formed a corporate body to bring about civic, educational, and political reform.
  - \* LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) = This organization was formed in

1929 to help Hispanics join America's mainstream.

\* MAPO (Mexican American Political Organization) = This organization came about because of the failure of the two political parties, the Democratic and Republican, to meet the needs of the Mexican American.

- 5) See the complementary lessons in this manual: "How to Handle Mexican Labor: An Exercise in Generalizations and Stereotypes," "Do Photos Lie?," and "Language Barriers."