

Coral Way Elementary: A Bilingual School

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## Introduction

Coral Way Elementary is one of the most unique schools in Dade County, the state of Florida, or maybe even the nation. In a city teeming with people of varying cultures and languages, it has found one of the most effective methods yet of teaching these people to communicate with each other. Coral Way is a bilingual school, the only one of its kind in the nation. Exactly what is a bilingual school? For that matter, what is a bilingual student? What is it trying to prove and, most important, is it succeeding? It is to answer these and other questions that this paper has been written.

Originally there were about 18,000 Cuban children enrolled in the public schools of Dade County, Florida.<sup>1</sup> Most of these Spanish-speaking people had come from Cuba and could not speak any English. This caused a definite communication problem in Miami, the main city in Dade County, between the Americans and the Cubans. Because these children and their parents could not speak English, they had a difficult time finding jobs, they had a hard time in school, and those settling in an English-speaking neighborhood found conditions strained there, also.

It was the job of the schools of Dade County to solve this problem of communication and help these children fit into this new culture smoothly and easily. Since there were few precedents to follow, many new methods sprang up and Miami seemed to become an experimental education center overnight.

One of the most commonly used and traditional solutions of fitting the Non-English Speaking Student into the classroom quickly and easily was the orientation method. In this method, a child is put in a regular classroom after only a short period of training in English. He is encouraged not to use his mother tongue and culture and accept those of the Americans.<sup>2</sup>

In 1962, the Ford Foundation came up with a new solution to this problem. A new theory had been brought up that

would teach the Non-English Speaking child not only his second language, English, but his mother tongue also. Under this theory, the English-speaking child would also be taught both his mother tongue and a second language.

The Ford Foundation offered a grant to whichever school in Dade County would try this bilingual program. After much discussion, Coral Way Elementary, an already established school under principal J. A. Logan, accepted this challenge. Although it supplied the money, the Ford Foundation did not dictate how the school should be set up. Therefore it was up to Mr. Logan and his consultants, Dr. Pauline Rojas and Ralph Robinett, to decide exactly what their program would be like.

The first thing they did was agree on some common goals and interests. First, what is a bilingual student? A bilingual child should be able to operate effectively in both his own language and in his second language when the situation demands it.<sup>3</sup> This means that he should understand the grammar, vocabulary, and culture of both languages and be able to express himself in both languages fluently. This idea was also stated in one of the Miami newspapers when it said that the objective of the bilingual school was "to make both native and foreign-born students more or less equally adept in two languages and at ease in two cultures."<sup>4</sup> Dr. Rojas, a veteran in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Puerto Rico, broadened the goals: "The over-all objective in the education of the bilingual child is his integration

into the main stream of American life."<sup>5</sup>

Three years later, Paul Bell, then the assistant in charge of the Ford Foundation Project, made a summation of the various opinions and goals. First, he stated, the child should achieve normally as in a monolingual school and learn a language also. Second, there should be approximately equal proficiency in both languages. Third, he should be able to operate in either culture easily and comfortably. Fourth, he should have an understanding of the symbolic nature of languages. Fifth, it was hoped that he would be more receptive of strange people and cultures. It was also predicted that he would have skills, abilities, and understanding which would greatly extend his vocational potential, especially in Miami. Lastly, but most important, it was hoped that through the bilingual program the student would "broaden his understanding of people and the world and be able to live a richer, fuller and more satisfying life."<sup>6</sup>

After the goals and principles were established, it was necessary to send out publicity on the changes in the school for the coming school year. The parents were informed through pamphlets, PTA programs and papers sent home about the coming innovations. Towards the end of the 1962-1963 school year, a letter was sent home to all parents whose children would be at Coral Way for the coming school year. At the bottom of this letter was a form in which the parents could either agree or not agree to permit their children to participate in this program. The majority of the parents were in favor

of this program and the children of those who weren't in favor of it were put in a traditional classroom. At the end of the first year, many of these children changed to the bilingual program so that now there is just one traditional classroom of eleven students. By the beginning of the 1967-1967 school year, even this one class will be abolished.

It is difficult to describe the organization of this school for, since this program is so new and unique, it has had to be extremely flexible. Whenever a new approach comes up that sounds better than the present approach, the program is altered to include the new approach.

Originally only the first, second, and third grades were set up under the bilingual program. This was just for the first year, and each successive year the program was extended one grade, so that now it covers all six years. The first year there was staging, but in successive years only the first grade has been staged.<sup>7</sup> "Staging" involved adding additional time to the classes taught in the second language until the student is spending about half of his day either in his second-language class or in a mixed group. For instance, in the first grade, as it is in operation now, the second language period is in session for fifteen minutes a day, and dismissal time is 12 noon. From the fifth through the twelfth week, the periods last fifty minutes and dismissal time is 2:00. It is at this time that mixed grouping in physical education and music begin. From the 13th-24th week, the second-language periods last 1 1/2 hours.

During the last twelve weeks, weeks 25-36, the periods last 2 1/2 hours and dismissal time is at 3:00, which is in itself an innovation, since this is the only school in the county where first graders remain until 3:00.<sup>8</sup>

Since the organization changes each year, I will just discuss the organization as it was in the school year of 1966-1967. There is a partial system of team teaching in all grades and one class in the sixth grade is total team teaching. In the former, an English-speaking teacher works with a Spanish-speaking teacher in the room next to her, correlating the subjects so that the students learn the most possible. The sixth grade classroom is a self-contained classroom with a folding door which makes it possible to have the children joined or separated as teaching conditions permit. Besides this team-teaching, there are also many Spanish-speaking aides to step in and help a teacher or to relieve her for a minute if it is necessary. These aides have all had teaching experience, but many do not have a teaching certificate from the United States and so are not qualified as teachers.

This team-teaching method is begun in the second grade, where the child spends approximately half of the day in his vernacular class and half in his second-language class with lunch, group physical education and music in mixed grouping. There is one class consisting of a self-contained Bilingual Room in which the teacher is almost a perfect bilingual

herself. This was necessary due to the increased enrollment. Dismissal time for the second graders is also at 3:00, one hour earlier than second graders dismiss throughout the rest of the county.

It is in the third grade that the emphasis on learning through the language and not just learning the language itself really begins to show.<sup>9</sup> Here, the entire morning is spent in learning in the vernacular all of the basic subjects. Classes where English is the vernacular look like the traditional classes found everywhere else. However, after lunch the tables turn and the child learns the same material in his second language. The teacher of the second language may reinforce the lessons of the morning through games, practice, or drills, but it is done entirely in the second language. For the last hour there is mixed grouping for physical education and music.

In the fourth grade, there is increased mixed grouping. About two hours are spent in vernacular skills and 1 1/2 second language skills, and there is mixed grouping for lunch, social studies, science, health, art, music, and physical education. In this mixed grouping, the class is taught for three weeks of each grading period in English and for three weeks in Spanish.

In grade five, there is one team of teachers which operates as a mixed language group throughout the entire day. The other team operates in the vernacular for most



of the day with mixed grouping at lunch, physical education, and music and with about 1 1/2 hours spent in the second language.

In the sixth grade, which has just been added to the bilingual program this year, there is one team which operates as a mixed group throughout the day. This is the class which is taught as a complete team-teaching unit. The students can be separated for smaller grouping or it can be used as one large class. The other team in grade six is divided so that the students learn all their skills in the vernacular in the morning, have mixed grouping during physical education, music, and lunch and have their second language skills in the afternoon. It is at this time that they are reinforced in what they learned in the vernacular.

Throughout this program there is cross-grade grouping whenever possible in reading and arithmetic to give the student the best possible situation to use his abilities to the fullest.

This school is not a school for extremely bright students alone. The extremely dull students were excluded from this program because it was not felt that they could keep up with the class.<sup>10</sup> However, the rest of the students range anywhere from low normal to extremely bright.

It is thought that this type of school would operate best where at least half of the pupils at all elementary grade levels are Non-English-Mother-Tongue Speakers. This will help develop bilingualism in both the English mother

tongue and the Non-English-Mother-Tongue Student.<sup>11</sup> Actually, it was estimated by the assistant principal at Coral Way, Mrs. Betty Adams, that this year there are about 500 Cubans to 400 Americans, or a 60:40 ratio.

There are also a few special classes set up for students who are new in the bilingual program. These students receive staged instruction in their second language until they are able to fit into a regular classroom.

It is obvious that even the best group of teachers could not step into this bilingual program without any preparation. Therefore, a workshop was held early in the summer of 1963 for all the teachers who would be working at Coral Way that fall. Each teacher hired was a native-speaker of the language she would be speaking. Many of the Spanish-speaking women had been teachers in Cuba. Since they were not qualified as full teachers, many were used as aides until they got their certification from the University of Miami.

A program like this requires a great deal of cooperation and planning among the faculty and the administration. Therefore, besides the faculty meetings there is a daily planning period lasting one hour, for each team. Here teachers get together with their teammate and decide what materials should be presented in the vernacular classes and what methods should be used to reinforce the learning.

"Miami is the only place in the United States where there is a large-scale program teaching the native language to children who already speak it." This is a unique

situation where Cuban children are taught Spanish as well as English. This created a unique situation at Coral Way, for there were no adequate materials written for this type of teaching. It was necessary to write a new series of readers, which they promptly did. It was named the Miami Linguistic Readers, and consists of pupils' books, "big books", seatwork booklets and teachers' manuals. It is published by D.C. Heath & Co. <sup>13</sup>

Is this unusual school succeeding in its tasks of equipping its students for a place in both the Cuban and American cultures? After observing at Coral Way on November 23, I say a definite yes. According to Mr. Logan, the principal, the students are doing better than their equivalents at Dade County's monolingual schools. When I walked into the various classes, it was impossible for my untrained ear to tell if the children were Cubans or Americans. There seemed to be little trace of any accent anywhere. The students are also able to go from one language to another at the snap of a finger. They speak Spanish to their Spanish teachers and English to the Americans, just as they are accustomed to doing in class.

Coral Way Elementary is helping to produce more tolerant and capable citizens for the city of Miami, Florida. In a world as small as ours is, bilingual citizens are invaluable. It is hoped that the ideas, programs and goals of the Coral Way Elementary School will be taken up by schools throughout the state, nation, and even the world.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Herbert W. Way & M. N. Hardin, "Estamos Orgullos de Estar Juntos," YEA Journal (April, 1966), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> A. B. Gaarder, "Teaching the Bilingual Child; Research Development & Policy," Modern Language Journal, 49 (March, 1965) p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Pauline M. Rojas, "Instructional Materials & Aids to Facilitate Teaching the Bilingual Child," Modern Language Journal, 49, p. 237.

<sup>4</sup> "First Bilingual School to Open," The Miami News, April 19, 1963.

<sup>5</sup> Rojas, p. 237.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Bell, "The Bilingual School," Reading and Inquiry (1965), p. 272.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>8</sup> "Coral way Bilingual School Project, 1965-1966," p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> "Educational Appreciation," WOKT Editorial Broadcast, Nov. 8, 1966.

<sup>10</sup> "Miami Experiments with Two-Language Elementary School," The Sunday Oregonian, April 19, 1963.

<sup>11</sup> Gaarder, p. 168.

<sup>12</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Dade County's Bilingual School Programs," Florida School Bulletin (June, 1966), p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Paul W. Bell. "The Education of the Spanish Speaking Child in Florida", Speech delivered on Mar. 19, 1966 to the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages Convention, pp. 8-9.

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