

THE FRONT LINE

Lorelei Kinder

Brought to California as a baby 23 years ago from Mexico, Tomas is a handsome, articulate young man, English fluent with a slight accent. A high school graduate with sixth grade reading and writing skills, Tomas frankly admits he is a product of bilingual education consigned to the minimum wage economy. He spends spare time helping qualify the "English for the Children" initiative authored by Silicon Valley entrepreneur Ron Unz and Santa Ana's extraordinary bilingual teacher Gloria Matta Tuchman. He does not realize it, but Tomas has joined a new coalition. Everytime he answers the Skid Row "English for the Children" headquarters telephones, he adds to that coalition.

Tomas cannot believe so many care about people like him. "When I tell them I cannot spell very well, they [the callers] slow down and help me out. It took a long time for me to ask them, to admit I was unable to spell names like Eugene and even cities like Sunnyvale. But now I do; it is another way for me to learn."

Hungarian-born Magda is another new coalition member. "I was dumped into an English speaking class-

room," she says. "In six months I was able to help Momma and Poppa learn English. Why are we denying children the opportunity I had?"

A *San Francisco Chronicle* report of an "English for the Children" news conference told of coalition member Bok Pon, a California Republican Party vice chairman: "In thickly accented English, Pon said anything other than total English immersion is a disservice to children ... 'I've been cheat-



ed. ..They didn't have bilingual education when I went to school, but they put all the Chinese speakers in a class together. All day we spoke Chinese. I failed in college because my English was not good enough. What happened to me I don't want to happen to others."

Initiative volunteers range from the doctor in the exclusive residential enclave of Hillsborough to the Boyle Heights truck driver; from the Los Angeles Unified teacher to the Arcadia homemaker.

And it all worries Carlos Munoz of UC Berkeley's Ethnic Studies department. "Backers of the English for the Children initiative are sadly out of touch," he says, citing "economic realities" that "make it imperative that bilingual education ... expand" But Santa Barbara's Louis Villanueva knows better. "Bilingual education fosters insecurity and low self-confidence and is a prescription for failure for the Hispanic youth," he says. "When they cannot speak English well, they do not join Scouts, the school band They do not feel accepted as part of our city or country. That is why few Latinos (14 percent) took the SAT test for college in 1996 in comparison to 47 percent of Asians. Asians have no bilingual programs, so learn English quickly and become part of the community."

The new coalition, extending its roots throughout California, is growing rapidly. Like waves of spring wildflowers, first buds are visible from Shasta to San Diego. And the liberals are sowing their weeds: the coalition is "racist," out-of-step, ignorant and arrogant. They know the coalition threatens their America where Papa Government knows best. The coalition proposes that *all* children have a chance to succeed; not just those of the liberal, governing, education elite. Tomas, Magda, Bok and Louis are the future. Let's join them. **CPR**

“ebonics,” which sparked national criticism when the Oakland Unified School District was exposed using it. But ebonics is a state-wide program designed by Education Department bureaucrats and was never limited to Oakland. A Department-published ebonics handbook is currently used by districts in Berkeley, Compton, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Bernardino, and Stockton.

ONE PAGE of the ebonics handbook is titled “Kill These Myths,” and lists this statement as a myth: “Standard English is the correct way to speak at all times.” Later the handbook defines ebonics as a separate “black language” and says children should be taught the appropriate time and place to use ebonics. “Michael Jackson dances” is portrayed as “one” way to convey this thought. “Michael Jackson be dancing” is listed as an alternative! When I fired off a letter to the Assembly Education committee’s Democrat chairman, Kerry Mazzoni, requesting that she hold a hearing on the Education Department’s role in promoting a program the Ku Klux Klan would be proud of, she sent back a three-page letter justifying ebonics. “The program,” Mazzoni wrote, “recognizes the unique language background of many of the [Oakland] district’s students while transitioning them to standard English,” which, of course, never happens.

The news on the math front is not much better. Almost all math books approved by the state Curriculum Commission teach “new new” math, despite legislation requiring all math texts to teach “basic computational skills.” The fuzzy math cadres hold that we should not be obsessed with multiplication tables, algebra formulas, drill exercises, etc., because we should allow our children to compose their own mathematical formulas

freely. After all, as with whole language, if given enough creative space, students will learn on their own! This is bunk, but hey, the books have pretty pictures, the kids think they’re fun, so why not? California’s approved math books *do* conform to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics standards which, incredibly, attack the “longstanding preoccupation with computational and other traditional skills,” the focus of traditional math texts.

On March 22, just minutes before the state Curriculum Commission voted on a new series of math books, Democrat Speaker Cruz Bustamante removed me from the Commission, thereby eliminating any opposition to the feel good math juggernaut. All the trendy math books were then approved, insuring our children yet another generation of texts so weak on computation skills they will leave many students unable to work even at a fast food place where they must at least be able to count hamburgers!

What is most shocking about the textbook adoption process is that several traditional math publishers, such as Saxon, have provided the Curriculum Commission with reams of research showing dramatic gains in math performance wherever its books are used. No “new new” math publisher has ever provided any field data of this sort. Incredibly, even though Saxon is probably the most successful math book in the country, it is not on California’s “approved” textbook list. Not surprisingly, most of California’s high-performing private schools (and home schoolers) use reading and math books also not on the state’s “approved” list.

So, if reading and math basics are not taught in our schools, what is? What the education establishment *does* push, next time.

CPR

ACADEME

Barry’s Potemkin Village

CSU: plagued by high student attrition, deferred maintenance, loss of experienced faculty, and administrative bloat — no wonder it’s hailed as one of the nation’s ‘best.’

R I C H A R D F E R R I E R

CSU DIVERSITY Czar Barry Munitz is leaving his post in Long Beach to ascend a new throne high over the Sepulveda Pass as president of the Getty Trust, and the accolades

Richard Ferrier, a member of the Thomas Aquinas College faculty, is CPR’s Higher Education correspondent.

for his term as chancellor are pouring in from the lap-dog press all over the state, amplified by Munitz’ own self-adulation. “I wouldn’t have gone to another university, because I was already at the best university in the country,” he told AP’s Larry Gerber. Pete Wilson has joined the chorus, claiming that, “Barry leaves the CSU system in solid shape after making it one of the