

Combating Lingui-chauvinism: A Biracial, Bilingual Experiment in Ohio

by Fred M. Hechinger

Cincinnati
The visitor to the Fairview Elementary School in Cincinnati stopped a little black girl on her way to class. "Wie gehts heute?" ("How are you today?") he asked. Unruffled, the six-year-old answered in unimpeachable German: "Danke, sehr gut." ("Thanks, very well.")

The youngster was one of some 200 first- and second-graders enrolled in the country's first bilingual public-school program for English-speaking (monolingual) children, at the German-English Bilingual Alternative School, temporarily housed in Cincinnati's Fairview Elementary and Schiel Schools. (There are a few such private schools, among them New York's French-English Fleming School.) If all goes according to plan, these children will leave junior high school nine years from now, speaking both their native English and their acquired German fluently and, it is hoped, comprehending two cultures.

The experiment was conceived several years ago by Dr. Guy Stern, then chairman of the Department of German and currently dean of graduate studies at the University of Cincinnati. The program is predicated on the belief that every educated citizen of the modern world ought to be at home in at least one language other than his own. (In current usage, it must be stressed, Cincinnati's concept of bilingual education is, of course, quite the opposite of those bilingual classes intended to help Puerto Rican youngsters find their way to the mastery of English.)

"Ich bin ein Kind" ("I am a child"), announced Mrs. Margith Stern, Dr. Stern's wife and one of the program's creators and guardian angels, as she barged into the classroom. Howls of laughter. "Nein," shouted several children. "Du bist kein Kind. Du bist die Frau Stern." ("No. You are not a child. You are Mrs. Stern.")

Presiding over the class was Dieter Glaubke, an American teacher who holds a recent master's degree from the

University of Wisconsin and who recently taught in a West German public school. He was fiddling with a bunch of cards. "Herr Glaubke, bist Du fertig?" ("Mr. Glaubke, are you ready?") asked one of the children with mock impatience. "Nein, ich bin noch nicht fertig" ("No, I am not yet ready"), he replied.

The Cincinnati Board of Education agreed to its long-term commitment—at least nine years of bilingual education for the children who volunteered for the program—after studying experiments on

school system, which had resisted demands for busing and still faces litigation on the issue of more general integration, was to provide transportation for all bilingual pupils who live outside the area of the two schools. To underscore the biracial as well as the bilingual attraction, it must be mentioned that prior to the experiment, the participating schools, Fairview and Schiel, were, respectively, virtually all-white and all-black.

"The United States," said the pro-



Young bilinguists in action: "The program has been mapped out in minute detail."

a smaller scale, which showed that youngsters from white middle-class and black disadvantaged homes, when exposed to the new experience of German, performed equally well, regardless of the gap in their regular educational achievements. The logical assumption was that educational differences faded when both groups started from the same level of ignorance without built-in cultural advantages or handicaps.

The school board agreed, in inviting volunteers from the entire metropolitan area, that the racial composition of those enrolled would be as nearly balanced as possible. The only requirement was that parents seeking to enroll their children had to pledge personal cooperation and support. For its part, the city

spectus, "has tended to become lingui-chauvinistic and isolated from the cultural influences of the outside world. Valiant efforts to teach foreign languages on a broad scale have met with little success. . . ."

Indeed, the history of American public education shows a dogged determination—understandable in the interest of creating a cohesive nation—to wipe out the foreign-language heritage that immigrant children brought to school with them. But times have changed. American nationhood is no longer in question. The emphasis has shifted toward Americans' capacity to be influential in the world community.

The Cincinnati school authorities are committed to following up the German

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beginning—a nod to the city's sizable German-origin population—with a French bilingual school in September and a Spanish one the following year.

Pedagogically, the program has been mapped out in minute detail. The first three years are to be devoted to making the children operationally bilingual; teachers will achieve this goal by conducting 70 minutes of every day's classes—40 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes in the afternoon—entirely in German. Reading instruction, however, will proceed in traditional English, as will all the other early elementary-school subjects.

In the fourth grade, pupils will become part of a truly bilingual enterprise. Some subjects, ranging from music to mathematics and from physical education to geography, will be taught in German. Others, such as American history and government, will be conducted in English. As early as feasible, possibly in the seventh grade, there will be an exchange program. Talks are already underway with authorities in Hamburg.

If these plans sound wildly optimistic, they gain plausibility when one visits the classroom. The second-graders in Schiel School were off to a fine German start when they presented the day's *Wetterbericht* (weather report). Dr. Fritz Veidt (who has distinguished academic credentials and experience as an exchange teacher in Germany), amid gales of laughter, took a hand puppet out of his briefcase—shades of “Sesame Street”—to engage in what was an obviously familiar routine. The puppet, ignoring all admonitions, deliberately gave all the wrong answers—in German, of course.

Experts consider the program's deceptively easy approach—German Without Tears, so to speak—to be inherently dangerous as a pilot study. The fun-and-games air makes everything so attractive that school administrators in Cincinnati and elsewhere might easily be seduced into embracing it as an easy answer to tough problems, particularly integration.

Similar misreadings have doomed many other promising programs. An ob-

viously successful program is imitated, without full appreciation of its cost in talent and money. Without long-term commitment, without superior bilingual teachers, without meticulous preparation, copying a bilingual plan could be first-rate public relations but an invitation to educational disaster.

Perhaps even more remarkable than the children's initial progress has been the program's fallout for integration. The “Language Parents,” as the supporting P.T.A.s call themselves, have boasted not only of an almost total turnout but also of racial harmony. The group includes some white parents who, until only recently, stood in the forefront in the battle against busing. Now, many of these same parents register no objections to having their children bused to a school that, except for the mixed first and second grades, is still predominantly black.

Charles Lindberg, the school board's president, had been known for his lack of enthusiasm for busing; he now says, however: “I guess busing is okay if there is education at the end of the ride.” □

The Educator's Bookshelf

Inside Soviet Schools by Susan Jacoby (Hill and Wang, 256 pp., \$8.95) is a balanced, readable, charmingly personal account of education in the U.S.S.R. The author establishes balance by selecting topics that not only reveal the workings of nursery, elementary, and upper-grade schools, but also show how these institutions relate to family, politics, and the system's products. Jacoby sustains this analytical balance in a number of ways. For instance, she mentions that her ability to speak Russian helped her researches greatly. But she freely concedes that her grasp of Russian grammar may not be perfect, and cautions that even a two-year residence in the Soviet Union does not dispel sampling problems. She disproves the belief that Soviet schools are culturally monolithic or that they set more rigorous academic standards than their U.S. counterparts. She concludes by elaborating on the counterpoised themes of Soviet group orientation and U.S. individualism in children's upbringing. Stylistically uncomplicated, *Inside Soviet Schools* reads like a well-organized journal by an alert traveler.

The Early Childhood Educator at Work by Millie Almy (McGraw-Hill,

276 pp., \$8.95) deliberately emphasizes the intellectual rather than the social, emotional, or physical aspects of child development. Given this focus, Professor Almy's newest work is one of the most comprehensive, precise treatments of the subject in recent times. Its protagonist is the professional trained to direct, coordinate, or supervise schools or centers, to teach in colleges and universities, to serve in health and welfare agencies, commerce, industry, or the media. After outlining the scope of her field, Dr. Almy raises some persistent issues, among which is the nature of play. Moving next to specific programs and the need for working closely with parents, she discusses current research and ends with a view of the early-childhood educator's work that reflects her own depth of knowledge and profound humanism.

Unlearning the Lie: Sexism in Schools by Barbara Grizzuti Harrison (William Morrow, 176 pp., \$2.95) describes the attempts of parents and teachers at Brooklyn's Woodward School (kindergarten through eighth grade) to challenge the proposition that “women sense that men have a direct and purposeful connection with the world, while they

exist only in connection with men.” Troubled by this sex-role stereotyping, Woodward's Sex-Roles Committee examined the school curriculum, library, texts, accommodations, and parent-staff relations, questioned their appropriateness, and set about raising the consciousness of all concerned in order to give children more realistic appraisals of themselves. In this well-written account, Ms. Harrison relates how frank exchanges and concerted efforts generated programs and materials dedicated to “allowing all children to become fully human.” Robust narrative and a helpful bibliography ensure wide readership for this effective treatment of a most important topic.

Workyards: Playgrounds Planned for Adventure by Nancy Rudolph (Teachers College Press, 66 pp., \$5.95) illustrates through text and photographs the oft-forgotten fact that children at play “create their own world and re-create the world around them.” Don't expect slides and swings, though. These playgrounds, snapped in the U.S., England, Israel, Sweden, and Turkey, sometimes look more like bomb-craters or junk yards than the conventionally equipped mini-parks of our youth. Study the children's faces, however, and decide for yourself how the kids like the workyards Ms. Rudolph shows us. JOHN CALAM