

The Experience of Puerto Ricans in United States Schools:
A Truly Bilingual One?

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Senior Thesis
Linguistics and Languages
December 7, 2001

1. Introduction

This thesis¹ investigates the experience of Puerto Rican students in bilingual or multicultural programs in United States schools, specifically focusing its attention on a multiracial high school in the Philadelphia Public School System. In addition to exploring the available literature and case studies on the subject of bilingual education and analyzing the existing research on the experience of Latino students in United States schools, this thesis examines the goals, efficacy, and productiveness of the multicultural education received by Puerto Rican students at Thomas A. Edison High School. Through a series of interviews with Puerto Rican students at this Philadelphia public high school, data was collected from student participants and graduates of the bilingual program at

¹ This thesis could not have been written without the help of many people to whom I owe my utmost gratitude. Many thanks to Ms. Betseida Ortiz for her help organizing, coordinating, and overseeing the interviewing process at Edison. I owe a big thanks to Antonio Moreda for his willingness and enthusiasm in accompanying me into Philadelphia to conduct interviews, and I extend my gratitude to the students who participated in the interviews, without whom I would have had no primary data and perspective. As my faculty advisor, Kari Swingle provided me with enormous amounts of assistance from the very beginning stages of topic development to the smallest editorial details of the final draft. I owe many thanks to Eva Travers for her educational expertise and her editorial wisdom as my second reader. Jason Burton proved to be an asset as a student reader and as yet another source of help in revising draft after draft. Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their amazing support and encouragement throughout the researching, writing, and editing process.

Edison, and their responses were used as a source of critical data with respect to the Puerto Rican experience and to the bilingual program's success. Besides giving a detailed account of the social and educational implications of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States (and more specifically at Thomas Edison High School) as well as conclusions from the research and data collected on bilingual education, this paper also adds a linguistic focus and examination of the issue by analyzing the language used by the student subjects and concentrating on their linguistic abilities and attitudes.

1.1 Current interest in bilingual education

Bilingual education has been a hot topic in political, social, and educational circles for at least the last twenty years, and it is no surprise considering the increasing number of non-English speaking immigrants entering this country with school-age children. Demographers in the early 1980s made the prediction that by the end of the century, Spanish-speaking persons would constitute the largest minority group in the United States (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981), and data from the 2000 census support this claim, placing the percentage of persons of Latino descent in the U.S. just above that of African Americans, the former largest minority group in the United States²

² This claim could be disputed based on the fact that the 2000 census allowed participants to report more than one race, making it difficult to directly compare results from prior censuses to this one. It is clear, however, that the number of Latinos and Spanish speakers in the U.S. has risen dramatically since the last census and that in some states Latinos and Spanish speakers are unequivocally the largest minority group.

(<http://www.census.gov/statab/www/part1a.html>). Census data from 1990 also reveal an enormous growth in the number of people classified as being in a linguistic minority (Faltis and Wolfe 1999: 13), and in fact, “[a]t least one in six adolescents attending a secondary school come from homes and communities in which a non-English language (most likely Spanish) is the dominant language” (Faltis and Wolfe 1999: 1).

With data like this, the U.S. is being forced to recognize the presence of non-English speaking students in the classroom. As the number of non-English speaking students and limited English proficient (LEP) students in United States schools increases, it seems that the need for quality bilingual education programs and policy all over the country becomes more urgent, as does the need for more explicit laws and legislation concerning language use and the implementation of bilingual education in schools. Current legislation provides funding for schools that choose to offer bilingual education programs to their students, but it leaves the actual implementation as well as the decision of what method should be used up to individual states and school districts. Consequently, there remains a lot of work to be done in the domain of bilingual education rights and policy in order to establish and implement legislation that will provide a level playing field for all students in the United States.

Puerto Rican students are a particularly interesting group to study with respect to bilingual education because of the uncommon immigration patterns and unique linguistic cultures that they experience. Both of these issues are factors in developing policy and

curriculum to offer quality education to Puerto Ricans learning English, and as such they will be explored in this paper. In addition, the linguistic, political, and historical dynamics between the United States and Puerto Rico have strong implications for the experience and success of Puerto Rican students in United States schools, and these too will be addressed. Finally, within the United States educational system, Puerto Rican students are among the lowest achieving of all minority groups, and consequently it is imperative that the Puerto Rican educational experience be explored and dissected so that they may have the same chances at success that other students are given.

1.2 Critical data

In the investigation of these issues in contemporary education of Puerto Rican students in the United States, Puerto Ricans students in Philadelphia were used as primary resources in the collection of data. Critical data for this thesis was obtained through a series of interviews with twelve students in the multicultural program at Thomas A. Edison High School, located in north Philadelphia. In the interviews, students were asked questions designed to solicit information on their educational experience and personal history, half of which were presented in English and the other half of which were posed in Spanish. The tape-recorded interviews were then transcribed and used as data both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The other source of critical data for this thesis, which served as a secondary resource of facts and information, was the vast array of literature available on the educational and historical experiences of Latino students³. Sources dealing with the historical relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, bilingual education in general and with specific reference to Latinos, and case studies of Latinos in U.S. schools were also consulted extensively in the development of this topic.

1.3 An overview

In the following section, I discuss the background information on this subject, dealing primarily with the relevant historical information. In addition to addressing the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico throughout recent history, I also discuss the origins and development of bilingual education in the United States. These histories provide a context in which to understand the implementation of bilingual programs throughout the country, and more specifically in the Philadelphia school where I interviewed students. In a look at previous literature on the subjects of bilingual education and the phenomenon of non-English speaking students in United States

³ In many cases, it was difficult to find literature specifically dealing with Puerto Rican students, so information on Latino students as a group was often used to make generalizations about the Puerto Rican population. Wherever possible, though, data dealing exclusively with Puerto Ricans was consulted and cited.

schools, I then focus both on the strategies and methods often used as well as on some of the case studies of Puerto Ricans in U.S. schools.

Once the background of history and theory are firmly established, I continue with a description and explanation of the experiment I conducted. After a discussion of the experiment set-up and a presentation of the data I obtained from student responses to the interview questions, I develop an analysis of the data and draw conclusions about the overall experience of Puerto Ricans in United States schools. Finally, I conclude my thesis with a short summary of results, an acknowledgment of some of the unanswered questions implied by the results, and a short discussion of how I might have altered my study in order to obtain alternate – and possibly better – results.

2. Background

2.1 Historical information

2.1.1 A brief history of the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico

Regardless of the ideological or political stance embraced, the history of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, for all intents and purposes, is and has been viewed by some as being equivalent to American history for the past century. This dependence of Puerto Rican history on the United States and its history has evolved as a result of the intertwined relationship of these two nations throughout this period of time (Nieto 2000: 6). The Spanish-American War, a conflict between the United States and Spain that ended

Spanish colonial rule in the Americas and resulted in U.S. acquisition of territories in the western Pacific and Latin America, had a decisive impact on the future of Puerto Rico and its people (<http://welcome.topuertorico.org/history4.shtml>). It was the end of this conflict in 1898 as well as its immediate and lasting effects on this small island in the Caribbean that predestined Puerto Rico's long and complicated involvement with the United States that continues into the present. In fact,

According to sociologist Clara Rodriguez (1991), since 1898 all Puerto Ricans can be considered to have been "born in the U.S.A." This is true whether they live in Puerto Rico or in the United States because they have been subject to U.S. policies as a result of the change in sovereignty from one colonial power, Spain, to another, the United States (Nieto 2000: 7).

For just over a century, then, Puerto Ricans and their nation have been under the control of the United States both politically and socially, despite several nominal changes in their status and association to the U.S.

History over the past century has seen many names for the relationship which exists between Puerto Rico and the United States, but regardless of its exact title, a "unique relation" certainly exists between these two nations (Nieto 2000: xi). When Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the U.S. in 1898, the island's colonial status barely changed, with the exception of the switch of the colonial power itself. Under the Foraker Law (or the Organic Act of 1900) though, the United States quickly moved to establish a civil government and free commerce with the island, and it decreed Puerto Rico as the first unincorporated territory of the United States. In 1917, the Jones Act provided that Puerto

Rico become a territory, “organized but unincorporated,” of the U.S., and Puerto Ricans were made U.S. citizens⁴ (<http://welcome.topuertorico.org/history5.shtml>). The official classification of Puerto Rico as a United States Commonwealth came in 1952, although this change in name, like the others before it, altered the form more than the substance of colonial rule, which still prevailed despite the seemingly official nominal changes (Duignan and Gann 1998: 69). Puerto Rico is still officially classified as a Commonwealth of the United States today, although the term “colony” often still seems more appropriate given the specific relationship and domination that the island experiences at the hand of the United States (Nieto 2000).

Since just about the beginning of the United States’ association and connection to Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans have been subject to U.S. laws and policies whether they live on the island or on the mainland (Nieto 2000: 7). This imposition of U.S. law and policy on the island of Puerto Rico has had an enormous political and economic effect on the island, its people, and its history. In addition to these concerns, there has also been a social aspect to the U.S.’s influence in Puerto Rico, as is evident in the education of Puerto Rican children, which has also been in the hands of U.S. policy makers for just over a century. In a brief history of Puerto Ricans in U.S. schools, Nieto 2000 points out that:

⁴ Sources actually differ on this point, some saying that U.S. citizenship for Puerto Rican natives was gained in 1917 (Nieto 2000) and others claiming it did not occur definitively until 1938 when the United

The colonial status of Puerto Rico implies that all Puerto Ricans, even those on the Island, have been educated in U.S.-controlled schools since 1898. The mandate by the U.S. Congress that Puerto Rican children learn English and the “American way of life” (Negrón de Montilla 1971; Osuna 1949) became apparent in schools on the Island soon after the takeover: U.S. ideals were, and continue to be, instilled through [a variety of methods] (Nieto 2000: 7).

The influence and effect of Puerto Rico’s colonial status is clear in this example, and there are many others that show similar patterns. During the first fifty years of U.S. control of the governmental, educational, and linguistic policies affecting Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico, the United States “attempted to undo 400 years of Spanish language and culture” (Manes and Wolfson 1985: 43). Through the influence of military governors and colonial educational officials, a relentless Americanization of the island began, and the use of Spanish was forbidden throughout the legal and educational systems. At the same time, the U.S. began what was to become a long history of economic exploitation of the island and its resources. Despite the attempts of Puerto Rican politicians and leaders to reduce the power of the U.S. in the affairs of the island, after over a hundred years of U.S. influence and control in Puerto Rico, the sad reality is that the island has come to depend on the United States for economic survival (Manes and Wolfson 1985: 44). Some critics of the relationship that the U.S. has fostered with respect to Puerto Rico go so far as to say that “Americans ha[ve] reduced the island to the status of a dependent country” (Duignan and Gann 1998: 69).

States specifically grants it (<http://welcome.topuertorico.org/history5.shtml>).

In addition to the impact that the U.S. has on Puerto Rican schools and on the island in general, Puerto Rico also has an effect on the United States, due in large part to the unconventional immigration patterns of Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rican immigrants to the United States mainland are “a peculiar sort of immigrant” (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: xi) for several reasons. First of all, they are American citizens, so by this standard, they cannot be considered national immigrants to the United States because, unlike most other traditional immigrants who work to gain citizenship upon arrival to this country, they already enjoy the benefit of having citizenship. “Most often the term *migration* rather than *immigration* has been used to describe the Puerto Rican experience,” and still others use the term *[im]migration* for its obvious synthesis of these two ideas (Nieto 2000: 8). Whatever term is used, though, it is clear that Puerto Ricans (as United States citizens from birth), unlike most other groups of immigrants to the U.S., enjoy the ability to move freely between the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Despite their conformity to American standards on a national level as a result of their inherent citizenship, Puerto Ricans can certainly be considered immigrants linguistically because language, “not the small stretch of water that is the Caribbean,” is what most separates them from the rest of the United States; they enter the United States often speaking only Spanish and are confronted with the difficult transition to a monolingual English society (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: xi). As Spanish speakers in the monolingual English culture of the United States, Puerto Ricans are immediately

members of a minority, and as such, their rights and voices are often overlooked, especially with respect to education.

The other unique characteristic of Puerto Rican immigrants, which arises from the peculiar relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, is the cyclical immigration pattern adopted by many Puerto Ricans. Unlike traditional immigrants (like those from Europe or Asia) who leave home and never return, Puerto Ricans take advantage of their ability to freely move between the island and the mainland, meaning their immigration often takes on a fluid or cyclic characteristic (Nieto 2000). It is specifically this cyclical migration within their own country⁵ that makes the problem of Puerto Rican immigrants and immigration particularly distinctive, as well as complex. For a Puerto Rican child who is caught up in this circulatory migration, it becomes very difficult to learn language(s) as his existence is split between two monolingual cultures⁶, the United States and Puerto Rico, each of which has a distinct language and culture (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: xi)

Puerto Rico, and specifically Puerto Ricans in American schools, also present an interesting case in the study of immigration and its effects on educational practices in the United States. Since their debut on the mainland and in American schools well over a

⁵ As U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans are entitled to call the United States their own country as much as they are entitled to refer to Puerto Rico as such.

⁶ Although the U.S. attempted to Americanize the island upon its arrival and throughout history, Puerto Rico has maintained the almost exclusive use of Spanish all over the island.

century ago, Puerto Ricans have been one of the poorest achieving groups in the country as far as education is concerned. Nieto 2000 ponders this dilemma, saying:

...although Puerto Rican students have been attending schools in the continental United States for a significant part of this century, by and large they have not done well. Their achievement levels tend to hover around the lowest in the country, and the drop-out rate from high school tends to be among the highest of any group (Nieto 2000).

The poor performance of Puerto Ricans, who are reportedly the oldest and largest group of Spanish speakers on the east coast of the United States, in American schools over such an extended period of time leads rather naturally to the question, “What is the cause of this chronic underachievement?” (Manes and Wolfson 1985: 42). In order to answer that question, we must look at the education being offered to Puerto Ricans in the United States and ask how we can do better. As we do so, then, a critical look at bilingual education in the United States is in order.

2.2 A concise history and development of bilingual education in the U.S.

Before diving into a short history and development of bilingual education in the United States, it is important to understand what the term “bilingual education” means.

According to Blanc and Hamers 1989:

[B]ilingual education [is] the term used to describe a variety of educational programs involving two or more languages to varying degrees...and [one possible] definition [is limited] to describe *any system of school education in which, at a given moment in time and for a varying amount of time, simultaneously or consecutively, instruction is planned and given in at least two languages* (Blanc and Hamers 1989: 189).

This is a basic definition of bilingual education, and as such, it alludes to the enormous amount of variety that exists with respect to the degree to which each language is used and taught within the curricula that exist in schools and bilingual programs today and throughout history. Despite this variety, it is now possible to move onto a discussion of how these sorts of programs came into existence in the United States with this as a basic definition and understanding of bilingual education.

Bilingual education, in some form or another, has existed in the United States since the nation's founding fathers strolled the streets of budding U.S. cities, and logically so, considering that this country was once a place where anyone and everyone could come to live free of racial, religious, and linguistic prejudice and persecution. Unfortunately, as a funded and sponsored program of the government and a generalized policy of educational experts, formalized bilingual education has not existed for nearly as long. Even at the present moment in time, after years of lobbying and support for bilingual education in the form of research and legislation, it continues to struggle for its own existence, as well as for quality and quantity in implementation in many domains.

Bilingual education originated in the colonial era out of the desire and necessity of non-English speaking immigrants to educate their children and their communities (Crawford 1992: 10). As immigrants from Europe entered the United States, they often formed communities in which they continued to use their native tongue not only for

educational purposes, but also for daily life. Because many immigrants recognized the importance of maintaining their cultural and linguistic ties with the homeland, they often employed bilingual education in public schools, as well as private schools, cultural centers, and social organizations, as a means of transmission of language and culture (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez, 1981: 13). From early on, the native languages of immigrants were also passionately preserved through the church, which encompassed parochial schools and many other important social organizations.

Initially, a pluralism of sorts existed in the United States, and immigrants were slow to sever linguistic and cultural ties with the homeland. This nation was born multilingual and multicultural, despite the indisputable fact that English became accepted as a lingua franca (Crawford 1992: 18). It became obvious very early in the nation's history that English would be the predominant language of the central portion of North America, but knowledge of two or more languages remained important because of the many nationalities represented in the U.S. (Crawford 1992: 15). Thus, although the hegemony of the English language had been decided by the late seventeenth century, bilingualism was common among the working class as well as the educated in the early colonies (Crawford 1999).

Although the initial multilingualism of the United States seemed appropriate considering the population and its origins, English slowly but surely asserted itself as a common language, and as early as the 1750s, it began to act as a vehicle of assimilation

into the new American way of life. Interestingly, though, it did so without the help of a U.S. mandate designating it as the official language of the U.S. At that time, political leaders were of the opinion that a government should not mandate a person's language choice, and they felt that the ideas of political liberty should not be restricted to the English language (Crawford 1992: 21-22). In this way, the dominance of English and the monolingual culture of the United States that we are so accustomed to today were slow in coming. But come they did, and in doing so they accelerated and facilitated the movement to "Americanize."

From 1790 to 1815, the domain of English continued to expand at the expense of other languages (Crawford 1999). During this time, European military conflicts and efforts to slow emigration on the part of European nations made coming to the U.S. difficult, if not impossible. Consequently, immigration slowed during this period, and as it did, colonial languages like French, German, and Dutch declined. Without the influx of new speakers to these immigrant communities, ethnic schools began to offer English increasingly, either as a class or as the medium of instruction (Crawford 1999).

New waves of immigration in the 1830s brought the use of bilingual education back to the nation's ethnic communities, and with the expansion of non-English speaking enclaves, it seemed natural to educate children in their native languages. In many cases, though, the existence of these programs was merely a physical manifestation of the political pressure exerted by ethnic communities, and as such, these schools and

programs were often resisted. Bilingual education was likely to be accepted only where language minority groups had large amounts of political influence, and those areas with little or no support consistently rejected educational programs using native languages. With no official policy on language for the country or specifically regarding education, though, it was often the case that particular states would be willing to accept bilingual education, and by the end of the 19th century, about a dozen states had passed laws authorizing bilingual education. In many other states, local school boards provided classes in non-English languages even without explicit legal authorization (Crawford 1999).

Despite the original lack of animosity toward non-English languages in society and education (or the apparent lack thereof) and the prevalence of those languages in the U.S., there is no evidence that bilingual programs were either welcomed or supported by the community at large in the U.S. (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: 15). The appearance of popularity and success that bilingual education had seemed to have gained by the late 1800s was actually contradicted and denounced by the education establishment of the nineteenth century. This group asserted that “linguistic assimilation was the ultimate goal for immigrant students...[although] coercive means were seen as counterproductive” (Crawford 1999). Many of the states who adopted bilingual education strategies at this time did so as a means to an eventual end of complete assimilation on the part of the immigrants, who were hoping, on the contrary, that their

bilingual programs would succeed in maintaining their language and culture in a foreign land. In actuality, some historians maintain that these “bilingual programs were language programs offering little challenge to the melting pot theory of cultural assimilation” (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: 15).

In a nation founded on principles of tolerance, surprisingly little of it existed with respect to language, even in the early colonies. Measures to assimilate immigrants became increasingly coercive after the turn of the twentieth century, and Americanization campaigns arose in response to fears that new immigrants would threaten the dominance of English (Crawford 1992: 11). By the end of World War I, changing political winds caused all efforts at bilingual education to cease in public schools, due in large part to fears about the loyalty of non-English speakers in general and that of German Americans in particular (http://www.rethinkingschools.org/Archives/12_30/langhst.htm). As the United States emerged as a major world power, Americans asserted “the uniqueness of their democratic experience and of all things American, including...language” (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: 15) by enacting English-only instruction laws designed to “Americanize” stubborn immigrant groups. During the decades of the twenties, thirties, and forties, little interest existed in the domain of foreign languages, and their resurgence in 1945 was linked to efforts which focussed on assimilating immigrants who clung to their native tongue, not to a desire to promote the language and culture of foreign lands (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: 15). This resurgence also came at a time when the

U.S. was beginning to emerge and assert itself as an economic and industrial power whose ability to market its goods on an international level would be crucial in the ultimate development of its dominance and authority. In this way, multilingualism and the use of foreign languages in schools were accepted and slowly reincorporated into curricula because they were linked to the future well being of the nation, not because they enriched the cultural and linguistic fabric of our nation.

During this period of history, bilingualism was increasingly viewed as having a detrimental effect on a human being's intellectual and spiritual growth. In fact, the widespread belief from the early nineteenth century to about the 1960s was that:

If it were possible for a child to live in two languages at once equally well, so much the worse. His intellectual and spiritual growth would not thereby be doubled, but halved. Unity of mind and character would have great difficulty in asserting itself in such circumstances (Laurie 1890, cited in Wei 2000).

Ideas like this one of a professor at Cambridge University demonstrate the prevalent and commonly held belief that bilingualism acts as a disadvantage rather than an advantage to one's intellectual development (Wei 2000: 18). In a study of bilingualism conducted by the United States government in 1937, the idea that "America is a melting pot and that the history of its national development is the amalgamation of its people" and the notion that bilingualism is a handicap which can be solved by eradicating knowledge of a first language in favor of imparting English language skills are both adamantly proposed and recurrent throughout the study (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: 15).

During the 1960s and 1970s, however, a political movement advocating language rights began in the United States, and a nationwide debate over bilingual education ensued. The demand for bilingual education came from many sources at a time when civil rights were one of the nation's primary concerns. In fact, "[t]he call for educational reform fit the mood of the 1960s and early 1970s, when the ideals of the New Frontier and Great Society seemed as yet untarnished, when educational expenditure in the United States had ballooned, and when there seemed to be no limit to what pedagogues, well supplied with funds, could accomplish for the betterment of mankind" (Duignan and Gann 1998: 235). The failure of English-only instruction could no longer be ignored, as limited English proficient (LEP) students in English-only classrooms were falling drastically behind in their academic studies and dropping out at alarming rates (http://www.rethinkingschools.org/Archives/12_30/langhst.htm). In addition to affirming a commitment to upgrade education for the poor and desegregate schools, both politicians and educators turned to compensatory bilingual education to uplift children of the non-English speakers and to "Americanize" immigrants.

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 – passed during an era of growing immigration and an energized civil rights awareness – was designed as a means of facilitating the learning of English by children with a different native language (Duignan and Gann 1998: 235). The act provided supplemental funding "for school districts interested in establishing programs to meet the 'special educational needs of large numbers of children

of limited English-speaking ability in the United States” (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: 18). Although funding was provided for programs, planning, developing teacher training, and programs operation, the goals and nature of the programs were varied: some focussed on transitional programs designed to teach students English as quickly as possible while others concentrated on learning English and maintaining the native language as well. Unfortunately, the overall lack of provision in the act for research and measurement of these programs made it impossible to determine their success, and consequently after the first five years of its implementation, little was known about what comprised successful programs and whether any progress had in fact been made in bilingual education.

With the first bilingual education act leaving much to be desired in the way of research and information on bilingual education and with the continuation of high drop-out rates and severe underachievement for language minority students, the Supreme Court stepped in with a landmark decision in the *Lau v. Nichols* case. This case constituted a major suit brought against the school district of San Francisco alleging discrimination against Chinese school children (Duignan and Gann 1998: 23). The court’s decision in the case asserted that non-English speaking or limited English proficient students have a right to an education in their native language, and it required schools to take “affirmative steps” to overcome language barriers faced by non-English speaking children. With the historic decisions that it made, this case paved the way for

Congress's approval of the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974, which immediately endorsed the principles established in *Lau vs. Nichols*.

Despite this and other acts passed by federal, state, and local governments, including revisions of existing acts and policies, there is still no federal mandate for bilingual education, and there is no particular methodology required in the education of LEP students. In addition to the lack of comprehensive policy and structure with respect to bilingual education, the government has also been lax in enforcing the provisions of the Bilingual Education Act, a reality which has further impeded the ability of bilingual education to make a difference in the poor performance of minority language groups (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: 22).

Although the United States has never designated English as the official language of this country, it is widely assumed that it is denoted as such because of the language's powerful and, until recently, uncontested status among U.S. citizens. For centuries, the vast majority of citizens have either spoken English as their native language or learned to speak English soon after immigrating here, and consequently, there was no serious competition or threat posed by another language (Crawford 1992: 9). Furthermore, it has always been (at least one of) the language(s) of the government, the court system, and many other administrative offices in this country. At the present, though, non-English languages (especially Spanish) are becoming more and more widely spoken in the United

States, and consequently the need for quality bilingual education is on the rise⁷. In fact, census figures from 1989 show that 13% of the school-age population (children 5 to 17 years old) spoke a language other than English at home (Brisk 1998: 5), and with the immigration patterns of the past decade, that figure has no doubt continued to increase.

The call for increasing numbers of bilingual education programs, then, became and continues to become louder as the number of foreign-born children unable to speak English rapidly increases in U.S. schools. With the alarming and chronic underachievement of many immigrant groups, the quality as well as the quantity of these programs is also called into question. The U.S. has come a long way since the days of the colonial era with respect to the development of bilingual education, but there is still a lot of work to be done. A look at research and strategies with respect to the many types of bilingual education is imperative in the initiative to understand what to expect for the future relationship between American schools, bilingual education, and non-English speaking students.

2.3 Previous literature

2.3.1 Research and data on bilingual education strategies and methods

⁷ It is important to note that this fact is arguable considering there are arguments both for and against bilingual education, as well as for other types of programs entirely, which must be taken into account before any decision on policy is made.

The debate and controversy that exist in the U.S. over bilingual education, and that have existed for hundreds of years, concern not only its form, but also its mere existence. Since its inception in the colonial era, bilingual education in the United States has taken on many different forms and to varying degrees of success. Before turning to the discussion of bilingual education strategies and methods and the data concerning their use, however, it is first and foremost imperative to have an understanding of who is considered bilingual. In the roughly 200 countries of the world, there are almost 6,000 languages spoken, and as a result one in three of the world's population routinely use two or more languages (Wei 2000: 5). "The word 'bilingual' primarily describes someone with the possession of two languages. It can, however, also be taken to include the many people in the world who have varying degrees of proficiency in and interchangeably use three, four or even more languages" (Wei 2000: 7). Although traditionally only full fluency in and/or native speaker possession of two or more languages was accepted as bilingualism, individuals with even a limited knowledge and ability in a second language are sometimes considered bilingual depending on the environment and context in which they live (Brisk 1998: xvi).

With this in mind, the idea behind bilingual education is that it uses two languages in the instruction of a curriculum in order to develop and cultivate the knowledge of those two languages, although to varying degrees. As the definition from Blanc and Hamers 1989 (for exact wording, see page 11) pointed out, bilingual education describes any

system of education “in which instruction is planned and given in at least two languages” for varying amounts of time. According to the U.S. government, a bilingual education program is designed for limited English proficient students, and it makes instructional use of both English and a student's native language, enabling the student to achieve English proficiency as well as academic mastery of subject matter content and higher order skills (<http://www.ecsu.ctstateu.edu/depts/edu/textbooks/bilingual.html>). As such, bilingual education, and the many forms⁸ that it has adopted over the years, can be divided into two main groups: compensatory bilingual education and quality or enrichment bilingual education (which I will refer to primarily as quality bilingual education henceforth). The following chart shows the major distinctions between these two sub-groups of bilingual education, breaking the comparison down into issues of policy, pedagogy, expected outcomes, and examples of specific programs.

(1) Table 1: Compensatory Education versus Quality Education (Brisk 1998: xix)

	<u>Compensatory Education</u>	<u>Quality Education</u>
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⁸ Although some of these forms and specific programs of bilingual education involve the almost exclusive use of English in the classroom, they are still classified under the heading “bilingual education” because they involve strategies used to teach English to non-native English speakers and limited English proficient students.

<i>Policy</i>	Choice of language for instruction	Right to a good education
<i>Pedagogy</i>	* Search for best model to teach English * Education is possible only in English	* Effective schools, advances in education * Language and culture are vehicles for education
<i>Expected Outcomes</i>	* English proficiency	* English proficiency * Academic achievement * Native language proficiency * Sociocultural integration
<i>Examples</i>	ESL, Immersion, TBE	Dual-language, two-way immersion, maintenance bilingual

Within the subgroups of compensatory and quality bilingual education, there are an incredible number of strategies and methods, each of which could be considered a specific program and all of which have a slightly different focus and aim. The prevailing approach governing the education of language minority students for decades, though, has been compensatory, meaning its goal is to teach students English as quickly as possible (Brisk 1998: xviii). In these sorts of programs, the native language of the LEP student is used merely as a crutch and a teaching aid in the larger goal of imposing English fluency or proficiency, and consequently, it is discounted and forgotten as soon as that goal is reached or as soon as English can be used as the medium of instruction. Most of the models used in compensatory education, then, involve either minimal use of the native language or none at all. Some of the most common programs used in compensatory (bilingual) education are: ESL, or English as a second language, in which students spend

most of the day in mainstream classrooms but also attend daily ESL classes; many types of immersion programs where minority language students are submerged in English-only classrooms and where their native languages are completely (or mostly) abandoned; and transitional bilingual education (TBE), in which the student's native language is used while they are learning English but abandoned once students are deemed capable of moving on to mainstream classes taught in English only. All these methods, as well as all the other programs under the subheading of compensatory education, are often called *subtractive* because the development of the second language is done at the expense of the first language (Brisk 1998: 22-24).

Quality bilingual education, on the other hand, seeks to educate students to their highest potential, and in doing so it maintains the use of the student's native language so that they can keep up academically while learning English. Some of the most common programs used in quality or enrichment bilingual education are: two-way bilingual education programs, in which the goal is developing fluency in two languages for language minority children and English speakers; two-way bilingual immersion which uses instruction in both languages to varying degrees over an extended period of time; and maintenance bilingual programs, which seek to maintain the student's native language while developing proficiency in the second language (Brisk 1998: 17). Strategies classified under the heading quality bilingual education are often called *additive* because they foster development in both the native language and the second

language and because they “aim at full education with development of a second language in order to function academically” (Brisk 1998: 24).

When evaluating the relative successes of these two basic paradigms of bilingual education, several large challenges arise. The first challenge is based on the fact that these two models have different goals and aims for their students, and consequently they focus on different aspects of education throughout the learning process. For example, subtractive programs emphasize English language development and measure success by how quickly students exit the programs, whereas additive models focus on dual language development and academic preparation, measuring success by the student’s achievement in school and in their languages (Brisk 1998: 24). This difference in goals and strategies between the two models makes it very difficult to make direct and concrete comparisons (Marcos and Rennie 1998). Furthermore, data available with respect to bilingual education show an enormous range of results. While some sources say that compensatory models are the best, others assert that the data available on this bilingual education strategy reveal not-so-promising results (Brisk 1998:xviii).

Overall, the data on these two basic models (and on virtually all the programs they employ) are mixed at best, leaving no obvious conclusion or evaluation from an objective standpoint. In fact, it often seems that it is actually an author’s view on the question of whether or not to offer bilingual education at all that drives their presentation of evidence, meaning it is difficult to encounter a comprehensive study on the subject.

Although some research reviews of bilingual programs have concludes that there is no difference between compensatory and quality strategies, others have reached the conclusion that one method is superior to the other (Marcos and Rennie 1998). Data presented one way to support compensatory education is often viewed by proponents of bilingual education as being unfair, poorly collected, and inconclusive, whereas as the opposite is true for data supporting quality bilingual education. It seems, then, that until more studies are designed and implemented and until people are ready to look at the debate from a purely objective standpoint, there will be no conclusive, objective, and completely comparative data on the issue of which strategy for bilingual education is the best.

2.3.2 The case for and against bilingual education

The heated debate that surrounds the implementation and use of bilingual education in the United States is more deeply rooted than a simple comparison and objective evaluation of methods and strategies used. Beyond matters of form, strategy, and research evaluation, bilingual education has been controversial at its most basic level of existence from the start. With the persistent question of which bilingual education strategy is best in the classroom unanswered and the data on the subject revealing

overwhelmingly inconclusive results, supporters and critics resort to arguments over the mere existence of bilingual education programs⁹ in United States schools.

According to many authors and researchers, the controversy surrounding the existence of bilingual education in the United States has its roots in the history and ideology of this country. One of the reasons that bilingual education in all its forms has been debated “with such venom and ferocity in the United States context” has to do with a recurrence of xenophobia and paranoia with respect to the entrance and invasion of cultural and linguistic diversity (Brisk 1998: vii). While the same is true in many other countries of the world, they manage to restrict the racism against immigrants to issues not associated with bilingual education. This racism in the U.S., though, is strongly tied to bilingual education, most likely because bilingual programs in the U.S. have been government supported and implemented to a significant extent, while other countries continue to treat bilingual education as an isolated and experimental program (Brisk 1998: vii).

On the one hand, the case *for* bilingual education in U.S. schools focuses on three main arguments: (1) properly organized bilingual programs do work, and even unanalyzed bilingual programs appear to work at least as well as English-only programs; (2) educators and professionals reject many types of immersion programs, and the

⁹ In arguments over the existence of bilingual education, issues seem to focus mostly on the debate of whether or not to use Spanish (or the student’s native language) at all in the education of non-native

research does not show conclusive results that it is superior; and (3) maintenance of the student's native language will allow them access to a greater array of opportunities in life, including most notably cultural and employment opportunities (Krashen 1991). Supporters of bilingual education cite the importance of the student's native language in his/her educational experience, asserting that it supplies background knowledge and enhances the development of basic literacy (Krashen 1991).

Critics of bilingual education and organizations like the Center for Equal Opportunity (CEO), on the other hand, oppose key aspects of many bilingual education programs. In a description of bilingual programs, the CEO emphasizes that "students who don't speak English are locked away in special programs that try to maintain native languages rather than teach English, often without their parents consent" (Cromwell 1998). Other key arguments *against* bilingual education include assertions that: (1) bilingual education and programs don't work, and evidence for them is inconsistent and contradictory; (2) "immersion" is a superior alternative to bilingual education; and (3) bilingual education has been linked with bicultural education, which is seen as a critique and rejection of traditional American values as well as a further alienation of language minority students (Krashen 1991). Overall, supporters of bilingual education claim that it allows students to keep pace academically while gradually learning English, whereas critics say that students are too often left without adequate English skills or take too long to acquire them (Schnaiberg 1999).

English speakers or limited English proficient students. Supporters of bilingual education call for the use of the native language while critics prefer an all English (or English only) approach.

In addition to the array of conflicting arguments that exist in this controversial debate, it is also important to note the great differences between public and private school programs and the implications these differences have for the larger debate on the existence of bilingual education. An interesting paradox exists in the comparison of public to private school bilingual education. While it is accepted when private schools offer their students the chance to gain command of two languages in bilingual programs, when public schools implement similar programs, bilingual education becomes highly controversial (Brisk 1998: 1). Despite the fact that the elite have been educating their children in bilingual schools for decades because they see the mastery of two languages as a prerequisite to vocational and social success, the term *bilingual education* in the United States is most often associated with the compensatory urban education which is seen as catering to those “inferior” students whose native language is not English (Brisk 1998: xv). Those students learning a minority language (i.e. a non-English language), even in programs similar to those implemented for non-English speakers, are seen as enriching themselves and their educational and cultural experience. Students who natively speak a language other than English and enroll in bilingual programs to learn the U.S.’s “all but official” language, though, are seen as a drain on the economy, and their knowledge of another language is seen as a deficit to be overcome (Brisk 1998: viii). This paradox calls into question the arguments against bilingual education and suggests a prejudice against language minority students because it is certainly not the case that the

critics of bilingual education are looking to deny elite students their opportunity to learn a minority language and enrich their social and cultural opportunities.

In the overall debate and controversy surrounding the existence of bilingual education programs in the United States, an attempt to synthesize these arguments and obtain a hard and fast rule about the effectiveness and appropriateness of bilingual education is virtually impossible given the conflicting opinions of the opposing sides. Part of the reason these arguments continue to conflict so directly is the lack of conclusive evidence either for or against bilingual education, meaning until proof for either side is objectively collected and reported, it will be impossible to say whose arguments are more convincing – those in favor of bilingual education or those opposing it.

2.3.3 Case studies of Puerto Ricans in U.S. school

It is true that a small number of Puerto Rican students have fared very well academically in U.S. schools and that they express gratitude for the educational opportunities they were given – opportunities that they might never have had as working-class children in Puerto Rico (Hernández 1997, cited in Nieto 2000). But unfortunately, the great majority of Puerto Rican students are not so lucky. The academic experience of the majority of Puerto Rican students is dominated and characterized by low levels of academic achievement, severe ethnic isolation, and extremely high drop-out rates (Nieto 2000: 26). In fact, a study by The National Commission on Secondary Schooling for

Hispanics found that 45% of Mexican American and Puerto Rican students who enter high school never finish, a figure which is compared to a 17% drop-out rate for white youth (Darder et al. 1997: 87). Despite a substantial decrease in the nation's high school drop-out rate over the past four decades, Latinos have remained the group with the highest drop-out rate among all major racial groups, showing no drop in their annual high school drop-out rate (Nieto and Rivera 1993: 147). Not only do Latinos have higher drop-out rates than other racial groups, but they also tend to leave school earlier than any other major population group. According to the National Council of La Raza, almost 20 percent of Latino students leave school without a diploma by the age of 17, and in 1988, only 51 percent of all Latinos 25 years old and over were high school graduates, compared to 63 percent of African Americans and 78 percent of whites (Nieto and Rivera 1993:147).

While these statistics demonstrate the clear problem of drop-out rates among Latinos, the issues faced by those students who choose to remain in school also abound within the classroom. Puerto Ricans as a subgroup in the United States have fared worse than Whites and African Americans in educational outcomes, and compared to other Latino groups, they have consistently been among the worst achieving students (Nieto 2000: 11). Early literature taken from studies of Latino and Puerto Rican students actually makes frequent reference to the "Puerto Rican problem," and thus places the blame for academic underachievement on the background, culture, family, social class, and especially

language of Puerto Rican students (Nieto 2000: 13). However, many case studies of Latino students in U.S. schools describe the unnecessary classification of native Spanish speaking and Latino children as learning disabled or in need of special education when in fact the student's lack of success is based on the fact that they are forced to learn in a language that they do not yet understand, speak, or write. The National Center for Educational Statistics found that teachers failed to recognize the special language needs of many language minority students and that they also failed to identify and appropriately place students who rated themselves as having poor English proficiency for special language services (Faltis and Wolfe 1999: 39). This indicates that many minority language students are suffering in mainstream classes or being relegated to special education classes because of the failure of the teachers and the school to recognize their special needs. In this way, it is no surprise that these students are typical underachievers because they are improperly placed in classes which are either too difficult on the one hand or which insult their basic intelligence on the other.

Puerto Rican students, as well as Latino students in general, who have participated in case studies have repeatedly voiced their dissatisfaction with the school systems they have attended in the U.S. They describe teachers and classmates as being unsympathetic and uncaring, and they feel that standards are low as compared to educational expectations of Puerto Rican schools (Cafferty and Rivera-Martínez 1981: 82). Without teachers and peers who care about and challenge Puerto Rican students, they often feel

isolated and alone. This feeling of isolation is also compounded by feelings of ethnic alienation, which arise because of the distinct culture, language, and background of Puerto Ricans regardless of how long they have lived in the United States. Students also complain frequently of bad teacher attitudes toward Hispanic students because of the student's color, accent, and poor English skills (Duignan and Gann 1998: 234). In addition to contributing to psychological and developmental problems, these insecurities have a strong impact on the educational success (or lack thereof) of Puerto Rican students, which is mediocre at best.

The failure and overall poor achievement of Puerto Ricans in United States schools have been attributed to many different factors, and there are constantly new hypotheses being explored in the attempt to improve the educational success and experiences of these children. An investigation into the factors affecting Puerto Rican achievement in schools shows that “attempts to explain why ‘compared to Blacks and Whites, Hispanics enter school later, leave school earlier, and are less likely to complete high school, enter or complete college’ (National Council of La Raza, 1992: 2) traditionally blame language” (Zentella 1997: 262). According to many scholars and critics, poor language skills and lack of English have been labeled as a main cause of many of the problems experienced by Puerto Ricans on the mainland, including lack of political power and poor socio-economic status, in addition to meager academic achievement and high secondary school drop-out rates (Zentella 1997: 262). Other theories blame the educators in United States

schools for being unaware of their Puerto Rican students' history, experiences, dreams, and strengths, an ignorance which makes them unable to incorporate those factors in effectively teaching their students. Still others point out that:

...the major academic problem for U.S. Puerto Ricans is not that they possess a different language, culture, or cognitive or communicative style, but rather the nature of history, subjugation, and exploitation they have experienced together with their own responses to the treatment (Nieto 2000: 7).

Research and studies continue to be conducted in hopes of one day targeting and appropriately solving the problems of Puerto Rican students with respect to poor academic achievement and high drop-out rates. But as Valdès 2001 points out, "Placing blame is not simple. Structures of dominance in society interact with educational structures and...ideologies as well as with teachers' expectations and...students' perspectives about options and opportunities" (Valdès 2001: 4). So although there clearly cannot be one silver bullet solution to all the challenges and issues faced by Puerto Rican students in U.S. schools, there is hope that continued efforts to understand the sources of poor achievement on the part of Puerto Ricans will have a positive effect on their overall educational experience.

At the present, though, despite many attempted explanations and proposed solutions, Puerto Ricans continue to fare poorly in U.S. schools. Sadly, individual case studies of Puerto Ricans in United States schools, far from disputing the findings of national surveys and large-scale investigations into the success of Latinos in secondary schools in

the U.S., give a similar impression of the poor academic achievement and high drop-out rates that are most often associated with these students. Although a handful of the case studies available on Latino and Puerto Rican students in United States schools show positive learning experiences, most showcase the problems which typically plague these students' academic success, the most well documented of which are poor academic achievement, a sense of alienation and isolation, and a high drop-out rate.

3. The experiment/study

3.1 *The experiment set-up*

3.1.1 Thomas Alva Edison High School

In order to gain my own insight into the Puerto Rican experience from a primary source, I traveled into Philadelphia to conduct interviews with Puerto Rican students at Thomas A. Edison High School in north Philadelphia. Thomas Alva Edison High School – whose full name also includes the title John C. Fareira Skills Center – is a senior high school in the Philadelphia Public School System, and it is located at 151 West Luzerne Street in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The neighborhood and community surrounding the school is made up of a very large ethnic and multicultural population, a fact which greatly impacts the racial profile of the school. With a student body of close to 3000 that is made up of students who are 75% Latino, 20% Black, 5% Asian, and 1% White, Edison is the largest multicultural school in Philadelphia.

One of my primary reasons for choosing this school was based on its large Latino population, as well as its location in a predominantly Latino neighborhood. It was my hope that this atmosphere (i.e. a well established Latino community and a high school with a large percentage of Hispanic students) would make it easy for me to be in contact with students of Puerto Rican descent who had a variety of family backgrounds and situations. I hoped to find students who were not only first-generation, but also second and even third-generation immigrants, as well as students whose home lives differed with respect to the presence of parents and other relatives and the use of Spanish and/or English in the home. By having a group of Puerto Rican students whose personal and family lives varied, I expected that my sample would be more realistic and representative of Puerto Rican students overall. A varied sample of students, then, would allow me to ultimately attempt to make some kind of more general statement¹⁰ about the quality of education being received by Puerto Rican students in general at Thomas Edison High School.

The student body of Edison is divided into eight small learning communities, or SLC's, each of which serves between 300 and 400 students. By dividing the school into smaller groups, which are each served by a core group of teachers, it is the hope of the

¹⁰ Since the twelve students I interviewed did not constitute a random sample, it is not possible to fully generalize my results over the entire population of Latino and Puerto Rican students at Edison. I will, however, use my results from this group as an indication of the achievement and experience of at least a very small subset of Latinos at Edison.

administration that the student body will be better served both individually and as a whole (<http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/schools/edison/index.html>). In addition to programs which focus on college preparation, careers in technology and electronics, and business development, Edison also offers the multicultural program for students who are new to the English language.

The Multicultural small learning community works exclusively with non-native English speakers and limited English proficient students, and it “ensures that English language learners have an equal opportunity in academics, social interaction, and social involvement in all school settings.” According to the Program coordinator, the students in this program are highly motivated, and thanks to the benefit of bilingual and ESL classes, they are able to remain on track academically while they improve and hone their English skills.

From the available literature I have been able to access on Edison’s multicultural program, it seems that the goal of the program is to help students learn English as quickly as possible, but the highest value is placed on quality learning as opposed to compensatory learning. While students learn English, they are engaged by classes in their native language both so that they can remain on track as far as the curriculum is concerned and so that they are able to maintain their first language to a certain degree while in the process of learning a second. The ultimate goal of the program is for students to graduate into other SLC’s that the school offers and to integrate themselves

with native English-speakers in mainstream English classes. In this way, Edison's multicultural program appears to be a synthesis of several styles of bilingual education, and from the descriptions of the program, I surmise that it is a combination of transitional bilingual education and maintenance bilingual education. Despite the goals of integration into the mainstream curriculum and fast acquisition of the English language, the program also allows students to keep up academically with courses in Spanish and it places a heavy emphasis on the importance of languages, cultures, and histories of other countries.

Accordingly, another important focus of the Multicultural program is to help all students recognize and respect the many cultural traditions that are part of the American cultural fabric, and consequently, the teachers pledge themselves to the following goal:

It is our goal to develop an understanding and appreciation of students' own cultures and that of the larger community, to challenge bias regarding race, religion, gender, disabilities, sexual orientation and language. Our students will be able to work and live within their community, aware and proud of their own ethnic background and sensitive to those different from themselves.

Having developed the skills necessary to work, study, and live with peers and adults from a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds, many students who graduate from the Multicultural Program continue their education in a variety of ways, including attending technical schools or college (<http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/schools/edison/multi.html>).

3.1.2 The questionnaire and interviewing process

The set-up of the interviewing process provided that every student was asked a series of questions from a previously prepared questionnaire on the student's life and educational experience (see Appendices A and B for examples of the questionnaire in both English and Spanish). The interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, and native speakers were used as interviewers in both languages. I served as the native English-speaking interviewer, and Antonio Moreda, a junior at Swarthmore College, acted as the native Puerto Rican Spanish-speaking interviewer. Each student received half the questions in English and the other half in Spanish, and the whole group was divided into two smaller sub-sets which received opposite halves of the questionnaire in each language. Although all the questions from each interviewer were asked exclusively in the native language of the interviewer, students were clearly advised that they should feel comfortable to use whichever language allowed them to better answer the question because both interviewers understood and spoke both Spanish and English.

The specific distribution of questions in English and Spanish was motivated by a desire to gauge the students' abilities in both English and Spanish as well as to observe whether students were more able to articulate certain ideas in one language as opposed to the other. I was also interested to see how the students would answer (i.e. using what language) given different stimulus languages and whether their language ability in a given language correlated with their attitude about that language. My primary motivation behind using a native Puerto Rican Spanish speaker who would pose questions in Spanish

(as opposed to doing it myself) was to make students feel as comfortable as possible while they answered questions posed in Spanish. Not only would a Puerto Rican Spanish speaker have the same accent and vocabulary as the Puerto Rican students, but he would also have had many of the same cultural, linguistic, and educational experiences. Had I asked half the questions in Spanish myself after having posed other questions in English, the language of the students' responses would be affected by their knowledge that I am a native speaker of English, not Spanish.

All of the interviews were conducted in the classroom of Ms. Betseida Ortiz, room 203 of Thomas A. Edison High School. Interviews began at roughly 9:30 AM and continued until 11:45 AM on October 17, 2001 and October 25, 2001. During the interviews, the student and I sat at a desk at the front of Ms. Betseida Ortiz's, and the only other people in the room were students (waiting to be interviewed) and Ms. Ortiz, who was in and out during the interviews. The same was true of the interviews conducted by Antonio. At the beginning of each interview I received the students permission to record our conversation, and both Antonio and I began by introducing ourselves. I was also careful to explain the purpose of the interviews as data collection for my thesis on the experience of Puerto Rican (and Latino) students in United States schools. The fact that the students could answer in English or Spanish, regardless of the language in which the questions were posed, was also emphasized.

All the conversations were recorded, and the bulk of the questions came from the previously prepared questionnaire, although other questions were also asked based on responses from the students. Each portion of the interview lasted approximately ten minutes, and at the end the students were given a chance to ask questions or make additional comments. Despite my efforts to make the students comfortable and help them feel at ease during the interviewing process, the interactions between interviewer and student in both Spanish and English remained quite formal, and many of the students gave the impression of being rather intimidated.

3.1.3 The students (The interviewees)

During my visits to Thomas A. Edison High School, I interviewed a total of twelve students, each of whom received a variety of questions in English from a native English speaker and in Spanish from a native Spanish speaker. Although I had originally hoped and planned on interviewing only students who were Puerto Rican, the students who were available to be interviewed during my visits to Edison were not exclusively Puerto Rican. Regardless of their specific nationality, all the students were Latino and native Spanish-speaking, and each of them had some experience with the bilingual (multicultural) program at Edison. Upon later consideration, it seemed that having a mix of multicultural students from different Spanish-speaking countries while maintaining the use of a core group of Puerto Ricans would actually benefit my ability to evaluate the

experiences of Puerto Ricans, given the fact that I would have a point of reference (or several as it were) from which to make my evaluations.

From the group of twelve students interviewed, six identified themselves as Puerto Rican (one male and five females), and all six informed me that they had been born in Puerto Rico. Of the other six students, one was Nicaraguan, two were Dominican, and three were Colombian. Like the Puerto Rican students, all of these students (who I will refer to as a group using the title Latino) were born in their countries of origin, and none of them had been in the United States for more than 3 years. Within the group of Latino students, the breakdown of males to females was slightly more even, with two males and four females. Of the twelve students altogether, ten were currently enrolled in the bilingual (multicultural) program at Edison, and two had graduated to mainstream English classes. Of those two students (both of whom were Puerto Rican females), one had finished her ESL classes in Florida and had not directly experienced the classes of the multicultural program at Edison, although she was rather familiar with the program and many of its participants. The other multicultural graduate had taken bilingual classes exclusively within the Philadelphia public school system. Most of the students had only lived in the United States for between one and two years, but of the two students who had graduated from the bilingual program and were enrolled in mainstream English classes, one had been in the U.S. for seven years and the other for ten years.

Despite the variety with respect to the students' countries of origin and the amount of time they had been in the United States, there was very little variation in the ages of the students. Almost all the students reported that they were sixteen years old, and all but one were enrolled in eleventh grade. One female student was taking courses for eleventh and twelfth graders because she was hoping to graduate at the end of the semester, but all the other students were eleventh graders.

3.1.4 My expectations

It was my hope that conducting an experiment with Puerto Rican students at a public high school in Philadelphia would provide insight into the educational experience that Puerto Rican students in United States schools have in general. Using these students as a model, I was hoping to be able to generalize about the quality of bilingual and multicultural education being received by Puerto Ricans on the mainland, and specifically, I was interested in assessing the experience of Puerto Ricans at Thomas Edison High School. I was particularly interested in asking the students about their education and their opinions with respect to the quality of education that they are receiving in the United States. With this in mind, I asked students to characterize the education they were receiving presently and to identify and evaluate its goals.

Based on the history and case studies of Puerto Ricans in U.S. schools, it was my expectation that I would find at least some degree of dissatisfaction on the part of the

students with their U.S. educational experience, especially with respect to teachers and peers. Because the majority of the research completed on the experience of Latinos in United States schools has resulted in evidence of their poor academic performance as well as dissatisfaction with the U.S. educational system, I expected that my results would mirror, at least to some degree, those same findings.

I was also hoping to address the possible correlation between students' attitudes about English and their abilities in the language, expecting to find a strong correlation between negative attitudes and poor abilities with respect to English (and vice-versa). As for the response language of the students, I hypothesized that I would find a mixture of English and Spanish being used by all students regardless of the language of stimulus, although it seemed logical to assume that students whose English was not as advanced would use more Spanish in answering the English-stimulus questions. Accordingly, I expected students whose English was in its first stages of development to use Spanish as a crutch in the English question portion of the interviews, whereas I did not expect the students to use as much English (if any) in the Spanish portion of the interviews.

3.2 Range of data¹¹

¹¹ See Appendix C for selected student responses to specific questions and with respect to several of the most important subjects and trends in the overall data .

A review and analysis of the interview tapes, the transcriptions, and the student responses revealed, much to my surprise, that none of my expectations were met. I expected students to feel comfortable and relaxed in their use of language, and I hoped that an explanation that the interviewers could understand both Spanish and English would suffice in accomplishing this goal¹². However, students answered almost exclusively in the stimulus language, even when they were having tremendous difficulty expressing their thoughts and ideas. All the students were also happy to be learning English and on a whole they thought that being bilingual would offer them lots of opportunities, a finding which went against my predictions. Most importantly, there was no correlation whatsoever between language attitudes and abilities, and of the twelve students interviewed, all of them were at least satisfied, if not quite pleased, with their education in this Philadelphia public high school.

3.2.1 Language ability and attitude

Despite my prediction, I found no consistent correlation between students' abilities in a given language and their attitudes and opinions of that language. While it seemed logical that students with advanced abilities in a language would have a positive attitude about that language, I was also expecting to see students with poor language abilities

¹² I also set up the experiment and the interviews as informally as possible and used a native Puerto Rican Spanish speaker in hopes that the students would be as relaxed as possible with their language use.

experiencing bad or negative attitudes. Even students who struggled to answer simple questions in English were happy to be learning it, and they often rated themselves as moderately good speakers in self-evaluations. Interestingly, although the better English speakers were also generally very positive about learning English, they did not necessarily rate themselves as high as I would have expected. Some of the students with clearly more advanced English skills actually rated themselves lower than students whose English was in its first stages of development. Regardless of the students' self evaluations (which made the students' acknowledgement of how much (or how little) work they had left to do on their English skills explicit) and my estimation of their ability in English, though, all the students were pleased to be learning the language and had a positive attitude about their learning experience and the language. Similarly, although not nearly as surprisingly, all the students also had positive attitudes about their native language, in which their abilities were understandably quite good.

3.2.2 Stimulus and response language

Although I expected some degree of variation in the language students chose to use in the interviews, I found virtually none at all. It was made clear before the interviews began that the students should feel free to answer in English or in Spanish, depending on how they felt most comfortable, but the students answered completely in the language that the interviewer used (the stimulus language) with few exceptions. Despite the

occasional use of a Spanish word or phrase during the section of the interview in which questions were posed in English, most students showed a strong resolve to use English and only English while they were being interviewed by me. Even though many students struggled to give me answers because they lacked the ability to articulate their ideas easily in English, every student made painstaking efforts not to use Spanish in my presence, a fact which actually hindered the quality of many of the answers I received. When students found themselves unable to articulate exactly what they were thinking in Spanish to me in English, they often gave up or used short one-word answers to suffice.

It was also true that while most of the answers I received during the English question portion of the interview were short, monosyllabic responses, Antonio was often able to elicit much more detailed answers in Spanish. Most of the students interviewed were much more comfortable in Spanish than in English, and consequently they were able to elaborate on their ideas and thoughts much more articulately when they were asked questions in Spanish by Antonio. For example, one of the female Puerto Rican students answered with a simple “yes” when asked if she was happy to be learning English during the English question half of the questionnaire, but when asked a similar question by Antonio, she elaborated at length about the economic and social benefits of being bilingual in the United States as well as in Puerto Rico. Overall it seemed that the stimulus language almost completely determined the students’ use of either Spanish or

English in their responses, and code switching within phrases or between sentences was extremely rare.

3.2.3 Opportunities, opportunities, opportunities

When asked about their experience in a United States school, almost all of the students cited the incredible opportunities offered to them by United States schools, leading me to believe that the fluid and cyclic immigration practices which we often see in effect in the present will continue with increasing regularity in the future as a result of Puerto Rican youth coming to the U.S. to get an education and to become bilingual before returning to the island to find a job and settle. When I asked some of the subjects why they had come to the U.S., most responded that they (or their parents in many cases) saw the United States as a land of opportunity, both educationally for school-aged children and economically for other (older) members of society. The subjects were also generally very pleased to be learning English, and there were a variety of reasons given for this. Some said that knowing English was necessary to live and work in the U.S., meaning their ability to speak English would allow them to fulfill the goal of living and working comfortably here. In fact, all but one student agreed that a knowledge of English is essential to live and work in the United States, whereas there was a mixed opinion of its necessity in the students' communities. Others were enthused about the idea of being

bilingual, especially with respect to the increased number and quality of opportunities for future employment, whether that employment was on the mainland or the island.

3.2.4 Student evaluation of U.S. education

It seems that regardless of the exact form of the bilingual education at Thomas Edison High School and its exact goal, the students were all excited about the prospects of becoming a bilingual speaker of Spanish and English, and they were very complimentary of their educational experience as a means to that end. They seemed to see being bilingual as an asset and advantage, even in a country which is very much monolingual. There was a constant emphasis on the part of the students placed on the opportunities that being bilingual would offer them in the world and also on the increased opportunities that education in the United States offered them. There was no animosity whatsoever toward the teachers, the school, or the United States in general for imposing the English language on all students in the U.S. (as well as on the students of Puerto Rico). Most of the students were very happy with their classes and their teachers, and when asked to compare a U.S. education to that of their native countries, the students often replied that the education in the U.S. was better. Asked to elaborate on this idea, the students cited more understanding teachers and a stronger commitment to answering students' questions and making sure they understand material before moving on. Even though one student said that the education in Columbia was more advanced and faster paced than that of the

U.S., he still felt sure that he was receiving the same or better quality education here. In an explanation of why he felt that way, he talked about the opportunity to go to college and receive scholarships in the U.S., chances that apparently don't exist with as much frequency in Columbia. Overall, students were happy with not only the education they were receiving towards the goal of bilingualism in Spanish and English, but they were also pleased with their classes and teachers.

In addition to being happy with their education in general and feeling like it was of a good quality, the majority of the students were happy with the level of the classes they were taking. All the students agreed that the classes they were taking and the education they were receiving were of the same quality and level as the classes and the education in the mainstream native-English speaker program. Many students also commented that they thought the level of expectations in U.S. schools was equal if not higher than that in Puerto Rico and in Latin American countries, and most of the students had come to the U.S. because of the many educational opportunities it would offer them.

Interestingly, the two female students (who had been in the United States for seven and ten years, respectively) who had graduated from bilingual programs into a completely separate SLC of the school which offered mainstream classes with native English speakers were an exception to the rule of students being completely happy with their education. Both these students said that they would have preferred in many ways to be back in the bilingual or multicultural program because they felt more of a sense of

unity between the students as well as the teachers. Both the students complained of feeling isolated in their classes conducted exclusively in English with students whose English was at a higher level. Neither of the students reported that they felt comfortable engaging themselves in discussions in their classes because they feared being made fun of by other students. They also felt that the teachers were less concerned and compassionate about their differences than the teachers of the multicultural program were. Despite this dissatisfaction with their classes, though, both of the students expressed the knowledge that they couldn't go back to the bilingual program because they had graduated and moved past it, and both were adamant about the fact that they just had to keep going in order to succeed.

3.2.5 Puerto Rican vs. Latino responses

It was interesting to note that there was no dramatic difference between the answers of Puerto Ricans and the responses of the other Latino students. Although I had expected to be able to use the Latino students as a comparison to the Puerto Rican students in emphasizing some of the specific issues faced by Puerto Ricans, there were no noticeable differences between the groups with respect to the content of responses dealing with issues of educational satisfaction.

3.2.6 Academic achievement

Most of the students expressed a desire to live and work in the United States in the future, meaning they placed a high value on their English education and on the ability to speak English well. Many students also said that they planned to go to college, but few had concrete ideas about what they wanted to study or where they wanted to go. When asked about their academic achievement in school, most of the students said that they were good students and that they received average to good grades. While some were clearly very highly motivated, most of the students displayed a rather ambivalent attitude about school. Although they clearly understood the importance of school, especially because they all emphasized the importance of learning to speak English, many of the students didn't want to seem overly enthusiastic or motivated.

4. Development of analysis

In general, I was not only surprised by my results and the responses I received from students because they didn't meet any of my expectations, but I was also quite puzzled because they deviated rather drastically from the norms of poor academic achievement and negative attitude of Puerto Rican and Latino students that are so firmly established in previous literature. Since most of my expectations and predictions were made based on this previous literature and the fact that Puerto Rican and Latino students have had traditionally poor experiences in United States schools, I was forced to work with hypotheses as to why I received the results I did in the development of my analysis.

Consequently, I have developed an analysis that does little more than speculate as to why the students responded as they did, although many of these speculations could be very accurate analyses of what I actually encountered with the students of Thomas Edison High School.

4.1 Discussion of language ability and attitude

Although I expected to find some correlation between the students' English language ability and their attitude with respect to (learning) English, I actually was not able to establish any correlation or connection along these lines, let alone the strong one that I expected to see. Even the students who had fairly poor English skills and were open about that fact in the interviews were still very happy to be learning English and thought that it was beneficial in their lives. A possible explanation for this is that the students might have been less sensitive about their English-speaking ability due to the fact that they were surrounded by other non-native speakers of English in ESL style classes who are also learning along with them and who have many of the same difficulties. Since they were not being regularly subjected to the ridicule of native English speakers in mainstream classes, the expression of their attitudes with respect to English and their evaluation of their abilities in English remained a fairly positive exercise. In the case of the two students who had graduated from ESL classes and who expressed themselves very well in English (by my estimation), both expressed the desire to return to ESL

classes because of the unity that they felt when they were surrounded by students having a similar experience. They both talked about the fact that they felt comfortable when they were surrounded by their peers who were also learning English, and I take this as evidence that the positive attitudes of students still in the multicultural program resulted mainly from this comfortable and unified environment.

4.2 Discussion of stimulus and response language

In looking at the students' use of language in answering the questions posed by both interviewers, it is interesting and important to note that the vast majority of the questions were answered by the students in the stimulus language, meaning the language in which the question was asked. In order to explain this unexpected phenomenon, several possibilities seem likely. First of all, these students may have felt pressured to answer the questions in the stimulus language because that is what is normally expected of them in a classroom setting, meaning they are expected to respond or speak in English when a teacher asks a question or makes a remark in English. Many of these students also commented on the fact that becoming bilingual is beneficial and positive in their lives because it allows them to speak with their neighbors and all the people in their community. Even the students who came from communities where Spanish was the dominant language suggested that it was necessary to know English in order to communicate with people in their communities as well as in this country. In this way,

these students are accustomed to accepting the burden of communication, and since they are used to communicating with people in whichever language is presented to them in the community as well as in school, it might have seemed most natural to them to respond in the language of the interviewer.

It is also possible that almost all the students answered my questions exclusively in English because they were skeptical of my ability to speak Spanish, especially because I did not speak to them in Spanish at any point during the interviews. If this was the case, the students may have doubted Antonio's English skills as well since he spoke to them exclusively in Spanish and never demonstrated his English abilities.

A third possibility has to do with the sociolinguistics of code switching, the phenomenon whereby a speaker uses more than one language (or code) within a sentence or between sentences. These students may not have felt comfortable using both Spanish and English interchangeably in their responses because they were aware that there is, to a certain extent, a societal taboo on relaxed, easy-going code switching. Many people (mostly monolingual Americans who believe English should be the only and official language of the U.S.) resent that non-English speakers engage in non-English conversation in their presence or even at all, and the phenomenon of code switching is no better. Because these students don't want others to have a negative opinion of them, they might be careful not to code-switch in certain situations and contexts, and especially not in the presence of strangers. Since Antonio and I were strangers to all of these students,

they might have been extra careful not to code-switch on that basis, meaning they maintained the (almost) exclusive use of the interviewer's language. Overall, it is impossible to say which one of these explanations best accounts for the recorded result that all the students answered the questions almost exclusively in the stimulus language, and in fact, it may even be the case that a combination of some or all of these factors was at work.

Unlike the exclusive use of the stimulus language, the finding that students were more able to articulate their ideas in Spanish as opposed to English was no real surprise. As far as the short and simple use of English is concerned, it is probable that the fact that these students are still learning the language and that they are still enrolled in ESL classes made them less confident in their ability to elaborate answers in English. It is also very difficult to be analytical and comparative in a language in which you are not completely comfortable; therefore, it is understandable that answers in English were often very short and simple. In Spanish, however, students took advantage of the fact that they both completely understood the question and had the linguistic skills to express their thoughts and feelings, so it is no surprise that the responses to the Spanish stimulus questions were often more detailed and comprehensive. The length and detail of student responses in Spanish may have also been aided by the fact that students were talking with a native Spanish speaker who had experienced many of the same things as they had. This

similarity could have helped students feel more at ease and willing to express their feelings and thoughts.

4.3 Discussion of abounding opportunities

When students spoke of why they came to the U.S. with their families, they mentioned the opportunities offered by this country almost without fail. Not only did they see the U.S. as a land of economic opportunity, but also as a land of educational opportunity. These abounding opportunities were also frequently mentioned when students were asked to compare the education in the U.S. to the education in their native country. It seemed strange to me that these students would have such a well-developed notion of all these different types of opportunity, and consequently, I had not expected them to talk so unanimously or extensively about them. In explaining this response, I must acknowledge the fact that the U.S. is much richer than any of the students' native countries, and in many cases it is probably also more developed. Because of the extremely high standard of living in this country – among other things that act as signs of this country's development and money – it is possible that these students are very aware of the increased opportunities that living in this country will provide them with. It is also possible that the idea of the opportunities to be found in the U.S. originates with the parents and family of the students, who continue to adhere to ideas to which immigrants of the distant past clung – the idea that the United States is a land of opportunity.

4.4 Discussion of student evaluation of U.S. education

The lack of critical feedback from the students regarding the quality of their education was also rather a rather surprising result. Although the previous literature and historical relationship with the United States and Puerto Rico had led me to believe that I would find some degree of dissatisfaction with the U.S. educational system and its (bilingual) programs on the part of these students, everyone who was interviewed felt that they were receiving a good education. The students expressed the sense that they were receiving the same quality education as mainstream English students, and they were all very satisfied overall with the education being provided by their school, the multicultural program, and their teachers. Students even went so far as to specifically praise the sympathetic, understanding, and patient nature of their teachers. Many of the students rated the education they were receiving in the U.S. as better than the education in their native country, and they cited the many opportunities that they had in U.S. schools (like the opportunity to become bilingual and go to college) as evidence.

There are several possible reasons why I might have found this lack of critical feedback. It is a strong possibility that these students are too young and have had too little educational experience to be critical of the education they are receiving in the United States. Without having someone normally (or even ever) question the quality of their education or ask them to reflect critically on their educational experiences in the

U.S., these students had probably never thought to compare their education to anyone else's, let alone to question its quality and worth. For many of the students, their education in the United States (sometimes even more specifically, within the Philadelphia public school system) was the only one they could really remember and recall, making it extremely difficult to be analytical and comparative in rating and evaluating their education.

It is also possible that talking to them about their education and its value in the school setting was intimidating and frightening to some extent. Especially because a teacher was present at times during the interviews, a classroom at the school was admittedly not the best possible place to hold the interviews. Students may have felt uncomfortable talking about a poor experience or unsatisfactory class or teacher because they felt like they were being somehow monitored by a school official or teacher. In general, the fact the students were not totally at ease in the setting where the interviews took place may have had some effect on the responses I received.

In all fairness to the teachers and administration of Thomas A. Edison High School, I must also consider the possibility that these Puerto Rican and Latino students are receiving a very high quality education of which they can be proud. From the responses I received, the classes appeared challenging, the teachers seemed sympathetic and understanding, and the program appeared almost too good to be true. If the students are receiving the education that is proposed by the mission statement of the Multicultural

program, then it seems most likely that this is the case, meaning these students should feel very privileged to be offered such a wonderful opportunity. Not only are they being offered what most would consider a quality, as opposed to a compensatory, education, they are also being given the opportunity to study their own native language and culture as well as English and many other cultures of the world, an exercise which broadens their horizons and their tolerance.

4.5 Discussion of Puerto Rican vs. Latino responses

Although the Puerto Rican experience is certainly distinct from the Colombian or Dominican experience, or from any Latino experience for that matter, based on the intimate history that exists between the United States and the island, my results showed no indication of this difference. The responses of Puerto Ricans and Latinos were all but identical in contexts dealing with educational satisfaction and achievement. To explain this unexpected result, I hypothesize that the questions I asked the students were not specific enough to elicit the differences that are often noted in literature about the educational experiences of Puerto Ricans versus that of other Latino students. For the most part, I asked very simple questions, and the students' responses were also simple (for various reasons stated above), meaning it would have been difficult to encounter the cultural and historical nuances that separate the experiences of these students in their responses to the questions.

4.6 Discussion of academic achievement

In addition to the fact that students were satisfied on a whole with their educational experiences, it was also interesting, given the current data available, that all the students interviewed identified themselves as moderate to good students, with the majority emphasizing that they achieved good grades and that they worked hard. From the trends of academic achievement revealed in countless studies and surveys, I would have expected to find more students who were struggling with their classes and maybe even a student or two who had considered dropping out of high school. However, my observations were quite the opposite.

The fact that severe underachievement and high drop-out rates were far from the observations I made at Edison has several possible explanations. The first, and most probable in my opinion, explanation is that it is unrealistic to judge the academic success and achievement of students based solely on their own personal evaluations of their work in school. It is very possible that interviewees were uncomfortable or embarrassed telling me that they were poor students, especially when I had already explained to them that I was looking to characterize and identify the experience of Puerto Ricans in United States schools. Knowing that I was going to draw conclusions about the achievement of Puerto Ricans in general from what they answered, students might have felt pressured to tell me that they were good students. The fact that most students were willing to identify

themselves as good students but that they did not want to demonstrate an overwhelming enjoyment or motivation with respect to school work leads me to believe that the majority of the students were “playing it cool” and projecting an image of the successful, but popular student. It is also a distinct possibility that all the students interviewed were in fact good students with uncharacteristic motivation to graduate and succeed. As I discussed above, the program at Edison seems to offer students a high quality education that allows them to continue studying their own language and culture as they work to learn English in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. This approach and bilingual education strategy may lead to the production of more successful students with more positive attitudes, a phenomenon which was certainly observed to an extent in the students’ responses should we choose to accept them as honest and valid evaluations.

5. Summary of results and conclusions

The in-depth analysis of the history of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, the discussion of the evolution of bilingual education, and the look at case studies of Puerto Ricans in schools in the U.S. would seem to suggest that the educational experience of Puerto Rican students in U.S. schools is far from a positive one. Most of the available literature on the subject of Puerto Rican students in United States schools is very clear in its assessment of Puerto Ricans as one of the poorest achieving groups in the country with one of the highest high school drop-out rates. Not only are Puerto Ricans

generally considered underachievers, they are also characterized as being unhappy and unsatisfied with the education they are receiving. Many resent learning English and have poor attitudes about school because of reports of unsympathetic teachers and peers, as well as isolating classes and curriculum.

Despite these trends and the expectations they evoke, I found that Puerto Rican students at Thomas Alva Edison High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania were generally very pleased with the education they were receiving. In addition to their satisfaction with their classes, teachers, and education on a more general level, the vast majority also reported that they were experiencing academic success and that they had not only plans of finishing high school, but also of continuing with higher education in many cases. Despite my linguistic hypothesis that students with poor English abilities and skills would have negative attitudes about learning the English language, there was no correlation found between ability and attitude. In fact, regardless of the students' abilities in English, they were all very pleased, and even excited, to be learning English. In general, the students I interviewed were pleased with their education, satisfied with their classes, teachers, and peers, and achieving at least a moderate level of academic success.

The fact that these students and their responses deviate so drastically from the norms established in previous literature has lead me to hypothesize and conclude one of three things, or most logically, a combination of the three. First of all, I have concluded that

Thomas A. Edison High School must be doing something right with its implementation and administration of their multicultural program. Not only do students seem happy and well adjusted, but they also seemed able to keep up academically with other native English-speaking students while they were learning English in separate classes designed for their skill level and ability. An assessment of Edison's teachers by these students revealed that they were caring, sympathetic, and committed to the task of teaching these students to their highest potential. If these students and their responses to my inquiries about their education are any indication of the larger Puerto Rican and Latino population at Edison, it is clear that the high school and its use of a specialized bilingual education program for non-native speakers of English and limited English proficient students have effectively targeted at least some of the issues concerning the appropriate education of these students. Even if these students represent a small minority or sub-set of the larger Latino population, I must acknowledge that the school has done something right in making their educational experiences positive and productive by their evaluation.

It is also possible that the trends of poor achievement, high drop-out rates, and disaffected attitudes of Puerto Rican and Latino students (those same trends that fill accounts of the educational experiences of these students over the past twenty years) are a thing of the past. Changing trends in the achievement and attitudes of Puerto Rican and Latino students could be affecting the results that I collected, meaning that the deviation

from the norms established in previous literature is something that will be seen again and again as more studies on this subject are conducted and analyzed in the future.

While I would love to believe that these are the only explanations to the incredible deviation from the previous literature and research, I must consider the possibility (or conclusion) that the students who were presented to me as interviewees were hand-chosen because they were good students with positive educational experiences. Since the teacher at Edison who assisted me in organizing the interviews was aware that I would be asking students about their educational experiences, she might have (consciously or unconsciously) wanted to portray a positive image of her school and its students. In doing so, it would have been logical for her to isolate those students she knew were high achievers and enthusiastic learners. But in reality, even if these students are the only ones with positive attitudes and the only ones doing well in the program, some credit must still be offered to Thomas Edison High School for its efforts and accomplishments as well as those of its students in the multicultural program.

If I could do this experiment again, there are several things I would change in hopes of achieving the most realistic and representative data possible. First, I would be sure to conduct the interviews outside the school setting at a place where the students could feel at ease and in control. There is certainly a certain power dynamic that exists between an interviewer and an interviewee, and I was aware during my interviews that this dynamic might have been having a negative effect on the comfort and relaxation levels of the

students. By conducting the experiment outside the school setting and in the community where the students lived, the power dynamic would shift because the student would be in a place where they could feel both comfortable and in control. I would also be interested to see what the effects of having both interviewers use both English and Spanish to some extent would be. Not only would that method rule out the possibility that the students answered all questions in the stimulus language because they were skeptical of the interviewer's ability in the other language, but it would also allow me to make better predictions overall about the motivation behind the students' use of language. With a second chance and a new experiment, I would not only contact the teachers and administrators of the school to find out about the academic achievement of Puerto Rican and Latino students, but I would talk to them about Edison's bilingual (multicultural) program to find out what it was attempting to do and how it proposed to do that. I would also access statistics on graduation and high school drop-out rates for Puerto Ricans and Latinos within the Philadelphia public school system. In this way, I would be able to either verify or refute the self evaluations of the students and make a concrete comparison between Puerto Rican students at Edison and those who have participated in national and state surveys. Finally, I would be sure to use a random sample of Puerto Rican students, and I would interview as many students as possible in the effort of producing reliable and applicable data.

In the development of this thesis, the experiment, and the analysis of the two, there are several questions which remain stubbornly unanswered. What, if anything, is Thomas Edison High School doing differently in its multicultural program that allows Puerto Rican and Latino students to have positive attitudes and be motivated achievers? Can the historical, cultural, and linguistic differences of immigrant children (and specifically Puerto Rican children) be effectively used in the classroom to improve their educational experiences? If so, should bilingual education in some form be the way to go? Finally, most importantly, what is the real experience of Puerto Rican students in U.S. schools? Is it the overwhelmingly negative experience found in books, articles, and case studies of the not so distant past on Puerto Rican students in the United States? Could my data and results represent a new trend, or at least a surprising and pleasant anomaly, in the achievement and experience of Puerto Ricans in United States schools? In the end, despite the trends that previous research and literature demonstrate and imply, I am left with drastically deviant data and only hypotheses and suggestions as to why my results did not conform to the previous findings. These questions, then, will be left to the researchers of the future who share my curiosity and intrigue for Puerto Ricans in the United States, bilingual education, and the interaction of the two.

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Appendix A

Thesis questionnaire
October 17, 2001

1. How long have you and your family lived in the United States?
2. How long have you gone to this school?
3. Do you still have relatives in Puerto Rico? Do you visit them often?
4. Would you consider yourself an English-dominant or a Spanish-dominant speaker?
Or do you speak both languages equally well?
5. What language do you speak at home and with relatives primarily?
6. What language do you use when speaking with your friends?
7. Are you happy to be learning English? How is it beneficial or detrimental to you life?
8. Do you feel that a working knowledge of English is necessary to live and work in the United States? Is it necessary to know English to live in your neighborhood and community?
9. How is someone who speaks only English viewed in your community?
10. Do you plan on living and working in the United States? What do you hope to do?
11. If you plan on returning to Puerto Rico to live and work in the future, for what reason did you come to the United States for your education?
12. Are you happy with your education? Why or why not?
13. Are you currently working in a bilingual program at your school (the multicultural program)? If so, what is its goal? Is it working?
14. Give me an idea of what a normal day is like for you.
15. When did you begin learning English? Where? In what setting?
16. Is there any sort of emphasis on Puerto Rican culture or history in your classes? Do you feel that you are learning about you and your culture at school? Would you like to?
17. Which language – Spanish or English – do you use more comfortably? Give me a number from one to ten (where ten represents fluency) to indicate your ability in Spanish and English.
18. Do you feel like you are receiving the same quality education as those students in the mainstream native-English-speaker programs? Why or why not?
19. Comments? Questions?

Appendix B

Thesis questionnaire (Spanish)

October 17, 2001

1. ¿Hace cuánto tiempo vive usted y su familia en los Estados Unidos?
2. ¿Hace cuánto tiempo asiste a esta escuela?
3. ¿Ya tiene parientes en Puerto Rico? ¿Los visita a menudo?
4. ¿Con cuál lengua se considera usted dominante – inglés o español? ¿O piensa que habla las dos lenguas de la misma facilidad?
5. ¿Qué lengua se usa en su casa y con sus parientes – específicamente con su madre y su padre?
6. ¿Qué lengua se usa entre amigos?
7. ¿Está contento(a) de estar aprendiendo inglés? ¿Cómo le ayuda el aprendizaje de inglés? ¿Cómo le daña a usted el mismo aprendizaje?
8. ¿Es necesario saber entender, hablar, y escribir inglés para vivir y trabajar en los Estados Unidos? ¿Es necesario para vivir y trabajar en su municipio y comunidad?
9. ¿Qué piensa su comunidad de una persona que hable solamente inglés? ¿De una persona que hable solamente español? ¿Hay una cierta opinión en cuanto a la capacidad de hablar y entender español en su comunidad? ¿Hay una cierta opinión en esta ciudad y este país en cuanto al español?
10. ¿Quiere vivir y trabajar en los Estados Unidos en el futuro? ¿Qué intenta hacer?
11. Si intenta volver a Puerto Rico para vivir y trabajar en el futuro, ¿por qué vino a los Estados Unidos para su educación?
12. ¿Está contento(a) con su educación? ¿Por qué sí o por qué no?
13. ¿Está matriculado(a) en un programa bilingüe al presente? ¿Cuál es el objeto del programa? ¿Funciona?
14. Dame una idea de cómo pasa un día normal para usted.

15. ¿Cuándo empezó a aprender inglés? ¿Dónde? ¿En qué entorno?
16. ¿Hay algún énfasis sobre la cultura y la historia de Puerto Rico en sus clases? ¿En su opinión, está aprendiendo de su cultura y de si mismo(a)? ¿Quiere?
17. ¿Cuál lengua – español o inglés – usa más confortablemente? Dame un número de uno a diez (cuando diez representa la capacidad de hablar con fluidez) para indicar su capacidad de español y de inglés.
18. ¿Cree que recibe una educación de la misma cuallidad que reciben los estudiantes en clases para hablantes indígenas de inglés? Por qué sí o por qué no?
19. Comentarios, preguntas.

Appendix C

Selected student responses by subject

(AD = interviewer [English], XX = interviewee)

Language ability and attitude

This is an example of a response I was given by a Puerto Rican student who had told me previously in the interview that he was happy to be learning English and that he would rate himself as speaking English and Spanish equally well.

AD: How about when you're speaking with your friends? (asking what language he speaks when talking to his friends)

LG: Um, ah, I speak to some of them in English and to some of them in Spanish.

AD: The ones that you speak to in English, is that because they only speak English?

LG: No, ju-uh, because they wanna learn ah more fas Engelsih and they like to practice on they English.

Although LG spoke English rather well, there were still some things that he found difficult to say, as is evident in this example. In comparison to his ability in Spanish, which was demonstrated in the Spanish portion of the interview, he was much better able to express his ideas, and he often spoke for a much longer amount of time in response to each question. Despite the obvious difference between his abilities and the difficulties LG had in English though, he displayed an overwhelmingly positive attitude about learning English.

Stimulus and response language

In talking with one Puerto Rican girl, I was aware of the fact that she was making a very conscious effort to use English in my presence. Many of her responses are structured syntactically like Spanish, but she uses English words. The following questions and responses from the interview present this commitment to use English.

AD: How old are you?

TF: I have a um sixteen years. (In Spanish, the expression to give your age is “Tengo ___ años” which translates literally to “I have ___ years.”)

AD: When do you go [to visit your family]?

TF: Um, en este, en este, you can repeat me? (“Este” is a word often used as a disfluency in Spanish, and it is equivalent to the English “um.” The syntactic structure of TF’s phrase follows a literal translation of the Spanish phrase for “Can you repeat [that] for me?”)

Despite the fact that TF was clearly not comfortable in English and that she often used direct translations from Spanish to English to answer my questions, she was very careful to use English almost exclusively in my presence. She would often pause for a long time before giving me her responses even though she clearly understood the questions because she was formulating how to respond in English instead of Spanish.

I also noticed that many students would be conscious of using an American accent when they pronounced their own names and the name “Puerto Rico” in the English portion of the interview. One Puerto Rican girl even used not only an Americanized pronunciation, but also an Americanized version of her name. In the Spanish portion of the interview, though, they would pronounce their names and the island’s name with a much more traditional pronunciation.

Opportunities, opportunities, opportunities

When asking a student from the Dominican Republic why she had come to the United States, she, like many of the other students, made reference to the opportunities of this country as well as to the better life that can be found here.

AD: Why did you decide to come here from the Dominican Republic?

CR: Because my ma lived here an life here is better

AD: In what ways?

CR: Um, well um this country have more money and [mumbles] I’m here looking for a better life.

Like many of the other students, CR was also pleased with the educational opportunities she had been given in U.S. schools, specifically the opportunity to learn English and become bilingual.

In talking to a student from Columbia, I asked him about why he and his family chose to come to the United States, and he responded that the education here is better than that in Columbia because there are more educational opportunities.

AD: How about you, why did you decide to come?

RL: Um, maybe for a student, study.

AD: Okay, to study. And do you think the education here is...

RL: It is better.

AD: How come?

RL: Um, maybe more opportunities.

AD: What kind of opportunities do you think?

RL: The college, the scholarships, the sports.

The economic and educational opportunities of the United States were often primary reasons for the students' presence in the U.S. and its schools.

Student evaluation of U.S. education

This is a portion of one of the interviews in which a student from the Dominican Republic talks about her education in the United States. She specifically compares it to that of the Dominican Republic and explains how her education is better here.

AD: Do you feel like you're happy with your education?

RS: Yeah.

AD: Is it better here than it is in the Dominican Republic?

RS: Yeah.

AD: In what ways?

RS: In every way. It's better.

AD: Can you tell me what specifically is better?

RS: Um, you become bilingual...and they give you easier classes [laughs].

AD: Easier classes? Now how is that a better education?

RS: Easier in the way that, um, in a way. Um, it's the same, but they explain you I think better, and I think it's easier.

AD: So it's easier because they explain it better?

RS: Yeah.

AD: And you feel like you're learning more?

RS: Yeah.

Like many other students, RS felt that the teachers in the U.S. take more time to explain material and as a result, the students are better able to learn it. She, as well as many others, was very satisfied with her educational experience, and she planned on going to college and medical school.