Joshua A. Fishman

ETHNOCULTURAL DIMENSIONS IN THE ACQUISITION AND RETENTION OF BILITERACY

Although most of us have lost the innocence of nineteenth century educators and social reformers who believed that widespread literacy itself would automatically usher in a better world, we all—professional teachers and professional students alike—still tend to believe in literacy. Indeed, Stahl has catalogued twelve very common intellectual assumptions, nay, convictions, concerning the benefits of literacy, among them being refinement of language, widening of interest, learning through indirect experience, changing perceptions of reality, acquiring deeper understanding of human nature, and gaining greater perspective on one's self.[1] Not being unduly influenced by the pragmatic philosophy of the New World, Stahl—a product of Central European literary idealism—does not mention the economic benefits from literacy that most Americans would immediately specify. However, be we idealists or pragmatists, we tend to agree that literacy is a good thing and that there should be more of it; that is, that its level should be raised and its distribution more equitably extended. We are alarmed at the currently retreating levels of literacy at the levels of secondary and tertiary education and we bemoan the consequences of such retreat for an intelligent electorate, for a sound economy, and, indeed, for a civilized citizenry. The Old Order Amish and Mennonite skepticism with respect to literacy—particularly their notion of "too much literacy"—strikes us an unsuitable societal model for life in the midst of rapid urban change and increasing social complexity. It is in this very context that I hope to take you for a tour of several schools pursuing literacy in *two* languages.

Given the apparent difficulty experienced by American urban school

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[1] Abraham Stahl, "Creative Writers on the Effects of Reading," *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 7 (1975), 112-122.

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systems in attaining adult levels of *mono*literacy, it may seem rather indelicate of me to stress, as I intend to do, that *bi*literacy—the mastery of reading in particular, and at times also writing, in two (or more) languages—is not at all a rare skill among that portion of mankind that has successfully won the battle for literacy. I do so, however, not only because societal bilingualism happens to be my particular area of professional competence, but because *bi*literacy particularly lends itself to appreciations that may also help us understand *mono*literacy differently and, perhaps, even better than before.

VARIOUS KINDS OF BILITERACY

Perhaps the major force for biliteracy today, on a world-wide basis, is the continued spread of English as a second language almost everywhere.[2] The ability to read English has become no more than a taken-for-granted characteristic of the average younger Scandinavian and German and is close to approaching that status among educated (i.e., literate) younger Israelis, Arabs, Japanese, and Indians (from India). In geographically smaller spheres of influence, French and Russian, too, are having the same effect outside of their own national borders. On a still smaller scale, the movements for one or another international auxiliary language also result in the spread of biliteracy since literacy in any one of them is always acquired by individuals who are already literate in one ethnocultural language. Let us call this type of biliteracy *language-of-wider-communication based biliteracy*. It is usually the result of the expansion of econo-technical, commercial, religious, ideological, or cultural establishments to such an extent that ethnoculturally diverse first language users find it advantageous not only to use the language of wider communication (LWC) when addressing mother tongue speakers of that language, but to use it with one another as well.

Quite a different constellation of biliteracy is that which may be labeled *traditional*. This much over used word means many different things, but one thing that it always means is assumed historical depth. There are a few biliteracy traditions that may have started via the spread of languages of wider communication but that have indigenized "the other language" to such an extent that it has become a well established vehicle of *intra*group literacy. Indeed, when the two languages are genetically related they are sometimes viewed as one. Thus traditional Jewish biliteracy in Hebrew and

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[2] Joshua A. Fishman, Robert L. Cooper, and Andrew W. Conrad, *The Spread of English* (Rowley: Newbury House, 1977).

Judeo-Aramaic was and is frequently interpreted in this fashion (the two together being designated *Loshn Koydesh).* So is Greek facility in Classical and Katarevusa, and now in Demotiki texts, and Chinese facility in Classical Mandarin and in modern Pekingese, not to mention regional, e.g., Cantonese, texts. However, Old Order Pennsylvania German traditional biliteracy is not of this two-in-one kind. The two—Luther Bible German and English—are definitely *two* and not *one,* although English is also used primarily for *intra*group purposes. The Older Order folk may, now and then, write a letter or send a bill to an outsider, but what they publish in English they publish for their own edification. This, then, is the hallmark of traditional biliteracy, regardless of the historical or linguistic provenance of the languages involved. Unlike LWC biliteracy, where one language is primarily inward looking and the other is a window to the outside world, traditional biliteracy utilizes two languages primarily for *intra*group purposes.[3]

Finally we come to *(im)migration based biliteracy.* This type of biliteracy shares some features with each of the foregoing types. It is like *LWC biliteracy* in that one literacy tradition is obviously acquired from and directed toward *inter*group communication. It is like traditional biliteracy in that it has a strong authenticity or language maintenance stress as well. It differs from LWC biliteracy in that instead of a language having moved or spread to a new speech community, a speech community has moved to a new language environment. On the other hand, it differs from traditional biliteracy in that the newly acquired literacy tradition is exactly that, new rather than indigenized. Such is the nature of mass migrations in the modern world that quite a bit of *(im)migrant* biliteracy is in evidence. One finds ample examples of (im)migrant based biliteracy in expatriate European communities in Latin America, diaspora communities of Indians (from India), Armenians, and Lebanese, the world-wide (particularly the Third World-wide) phenomena of consular and diplomatic/commercial/technical staffs and their families, not to mention the honest-to-goodness immigrants and refugees that have resettled en masse throughout the world—not the least of all in the U.S.A. Certainly New York City is a natural laboratory for the study of just such biliteracy, as it is, indeed, for the study of biliteracy of all three kinds.

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[3] Charles A. Ferguson, "The Role of Arabic in Ethiopia: A Sociolinguistic Perspective," *Georgetown Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* (1970), 355-370, and "Patterns of Literacy in Multilingual Situations," *Georgetown Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* (1979), 582-590.

Let us take a tour of some biliterate school-and-community settings in New York and in doing so, ask ourselves how they manage to do it. For the purpose of ethnocultural comparisons, we will visit a French school, a Hebrew school, a Greek school, an Armenian school and a Chinese school, all five of them being all-day schools and, therefore, teaching English as well as their more particularistic languages. The first school, French, is an example of LWC based biliteracy; the second, Hebrew, an example of a mixed case of traditional biliteracy and immigrant biliteracy (potentially of triliteracy, if Hebrew and Aramaic are counted separately, and of quadriliteracy, if Yiddish too is seriously employed—as it is by many schools of this community); while the last three, Greek, Armenian, and Chinese, are more usual examples of immigrant biliteracy. These schools are representative of the universe of some 1500 such bilingual/biliterate/bicultural day schools in the U.S.A. today, the latter themselves being no more than a quarter of our country's total current bilingual/bicultural schooling effort under non-public auspices.[4]

ETHNOFUNCTIONAL COMPARISONS

In stable bilingual communities the two languages employed have different functional allocations; they are used for at least partially unique situations, topics, role relations, or interactions. To the extent that this functional uniqueness is preserved and protected, their separate functional continuity is maintained. So too, perhaps, with stable societal biliteracy. Speech communities maintain biliteracy institutions such as schools because they are convinced that they need two literacies for two at least partially distinct sets of functions. In all of the communities we are visiting, English is the link not only to the "outside world" politically and culturally, but to most of the world of work, and the worlds of sports and amusement and entertainment to the extent that these are recognized. Parents want their children to be able to read English well—and to a lesser extent to write English well—and most parents in almost all of the five groups have mastered these skills themselves to a reasonable degree. Although some parents in each community do quite a lot of English reading and writing, and although, on the whole, they all generally fall within the broad middle class and are predominantly second generation American born (except in

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[4] Joshua A. Fishman and Barbara Markman, *The Ethnic Mother-Tongue School in America: Assumptions, Findings, Directory* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1979). Multilithed report to NIE under Grant G-78-0133.

the Greek school), the newspaper, the favorite magazine, a little business-related reading, a modicum of correspondence, and a fashionable book every once in a while account for all the English reading and writing of the majority.

When we examine the functional roles and the social reward systems for non-English reading, a very diverse picture is obtained. French reading symbolically stands for belle lettres and the highest esthetic experience of Western civlization. It appears, overtly, however, that very little French reading is engaged in, and that which does occur is much more likely to deal with cooking, fashions, and etiquette. Hebrew reading is generally primarily rote recitation of prayers with only one eye on the well worn text. Some Jewish parents do, of course, look into rather recondite Talmudic texts on a rather regular basis, but only the men have ever had a chance to learn how to do so. While Yiddish can be read by some members of both sexes, on the other hand, the material read is far lighter—sometimes humorous and intimate—and the frequency of reading Yiddish is even less than for Hebrew as a result of functional competition with both English and Hebrew. Both Greek parents and Armenian parents generally have a smattering of the ecclesiastical reading necessary at their church services. Their reading in the modern language is also often religiously oriented and overwhelmingly ethnic in content, as is that of the Chinese parents. The children's reading in these languages is equally intra-community oriented; it focuses on material simply not available and, commonly, not desired to be available in English. Only French stands apart from the following generalization to some extent—because French has international connotations that the other languages lack—but for the others it is quite literally true: ethnic mother tongue literacy is pursued and well mastered by children during their school years, because their parents, who may have already lost part of the biliterate fluency that they too had as children, nevertheless view it as a mark of ethnic belonging, sophistication, and leadership. Ethnic language literacy is associated, among adult members of the community, with the ideal ethnic culture, with the best that the tradition has created and with the finest that it has to offer. It is primarily of symbolic usefulness rather than of practical usefulness; it has sentimental functionality rather than broad instrumental functionality. However, for all that, ethnic language literacy is strongly valued by the parents. The school for them is a major socialization channel into the ethnic community and into the pursuit of ethnic continuity. The acquisition of ethnic language literacy is viewed as a prerequisite for the optimal attainment of both community and continuity, even if it is not always absolutely necessary for the adults who support the schools themselves. Coming to know one's ethnicity is strongly

related to literacy in each of these cases.[5] Their schools focus on "knowing" and, therefore, on literacy acquisition, even if ethnic literacy ultimately becomes a somewhat rare and rusty skill for most adult members of the community.

ETHNOPEDAGOGIC COMPARISONS

English reading in each of the schools is pursued in accord with rather modern American methods. Phonics and whole word methods—analytic and synthetic approaches—are combined, with early emphasis being more on the former than on the latter. Only some ten percent of the children are non-native speakers of English, and even fewer are less than fluent in English by the time they arrive in school. Non-fluent English speakers are given different degrees of initial attention—never very much or for very long since the schools lack the budgets and the manpower and the conviction needed in order to give more attention. Nonetheless, non-English mother tongue pupils never remain a problem for more than a semester to a year at most. There is nothing, furthermore, about the way English is taught that reflects different pedagogic cultures, not even in the Greek and Armenian schools where the teachers of English are generally fluent speakers of Greek and Armenian and were themselves students in schools not unlike the ones in which they are now teaching. With respect to how English reading is taught, the schools are typically good, white, middle class American schools. Not so when it comes to teaching children how to read their non-English language.

French reading, taught with great stress on "proper" standard pronunciation, is taught somewhat before English reading on the ground that it is more phonetic and, therefore, helps in the acquisition of English reading as well. Hebrew and Chinese reading, on the other hand, are taught somewhat later than—and, in the Chinese case, also more slowly than—English reading. Hebrew reading is stressed only after prayers have been fully internalized although readiness for it is introduced earlier; and, indeed, Hebrew reading, when first acquired, briefly interferes with the rapidity and automaticity of prayer.[6] Chinese reading comes rather slowly and is accompanied by seemingly endless choral repetition and copying

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[5] Joshua A. Fishman, "Language and Ethnicity," in *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*, ed. H. Giles (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 15-58, and Joshua A. Fishman, "Language, Ethnicity, and Racism," *Georgetown Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* (1977), 297-309.

[6] For earlier Eastern European approaches to childhood acquisition of Hebrew literacy see Diane Roskies, "Alphabet Instruction in the East European Heder: Some Comparative and Historical Notes," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science*, 17 (1978), 21-53.

with close attention to the sequence of strokes. Finally, Greek and Armenian reading are pursued simultaneously with English reading. The instructional approach makes much use of coloring books and picture books, singing, and dramatics. Learning to read Greek and Armenian is accompanied by lots of ethnic fun and games. The French school's conviction that French is more phonetic than English is also widely shared vis-a-vis their own ethnic writing systems among Greek and Armenian teachers, is even claimed by the Chinese teachers (!), and is least frequently claimed by teachers of Hebrew. Nevertheless, phonetic or not, Hebrew reading generally seems to be well acquired by the second grade, and Chinese reading, although it takes longer, is not viewed as taking an inordinate amount of time. A "traditional" frame of reference is obviously being employed and being applied to Chinese but not to English, since English is *supposed* to "go faster."

Thus, in terms of ethnopedagogy, we are observing a variety of rationales, procedures, and rates. Ethnopedagogies in New York City represent different traditions of literacy inculcation as these interact with the novel task of imparting English literacy as well. Interestingly enough, however, none of the schools views biliteracy as particularly difficult or problematic, and none of them reports experiencing drop-outs, complaints, or tears in connection with its pursuit. Nothing less than biliteracy is wanted, pursued, or achieved. Biliteracy is viewed as normal in both senses of the word, norm as common and norm as desired.

ETHNOLINGUISTIC COMPARISONS

One of the major areas of applied linguistics in the U.S.A. is that which deals with the teaching of reading to native speakers of those varieties of English that are structurally quite different from standard school English. Most of these "problem learners" are speakers of Black English, and a recent District Federal Court order requires teachers to learn it themselves so that they can better teach *in it* and, ultimately, *through it* to ease the transition to standard English. The difficulties experienced in connection with dialectal distance from the school norm in American public education might prepare us to expect or at least to look for similar or even greater difficulties in the non-English community schools that we have been studying. Actually, no such difficulties are encountered.

Insofar as English is concerned, none of the American-born pupils arrive in school with more than mild non-standard accents, accents which reflect the informal English of their homes and neighborhoods. Many teachers in these schools also share these non-standard accents (intonations, pro-

sodics) but have them under good control, which is to say they can minimize them in school when they interact in the teacher role either with colleagues, pupils, or parents. Some teachers—particularly in the Greek school—teach in accented English although their pupils' English is always less accented than their own. Teachers seem to aim at nothing more than adding school English or strengthening it in the children's pre-existing English repertoire of Greek-English, Armenian-English, Jewish-English, or Chinese-English, respectively. On the other hand, American-born pupils at the French school do not come speaking French-English; and this, therefore, eliminates this particular problem for the French school, except as every school in the world must seek to take vernacular speakers several notches closer to the school standard, at least insofar as reading and writing are concerned. However, it is not really much of a problem for the other schools either. No one's English in the five schools we are reviewing is as significantly discrepant from the school norm as is the English of Black English speakers. Even were it to be otherwise, many teachers in these schools are already at the point that the courts recently required of teachers of speakers of Black English: they already know and speak and are functionally and emotionally comfortable with the local variety of English and can not only understand it but can use it to pedagogic effect, which means that they can use it or not use it and teach their pupils to vary their repertoires as well.

When we turn to the ethnic mother tongues, the situation is somewhat more varied insofar as speakers of non-school varieties are concerned. American-born children do not come to either the French school or the Hebrew school speaking these respective languages. Thus, these children get their first, or first major, exposure to the non-English language in school proper, and, therefore, no dialect but the school dialect is initially learned. As for native speakers of these two languages—some ten to fifteen per cent in each school—neither school is terribly pleased with them, but not for reasons of distance from the school norm. They mostly represent streaming problems in the early grades, for they are already fluent in a language that other pupils are still learning. In the French case, no arrivals from overseas have ever *dared* bring (or so we are told) a non-school variety of the language into school from their homes. Presumably, whether they come from Toulouse, Marseilles or Strasbourg, they have already been dialect disinfected, either by their prior school or by the cleansing effect of crossing the Atlantic. Native Hebrew speakers are also rarely perceived as ethnolinguistically problematic. Indeed, although a few arrive pronouncing glottals not available in the Ashkenazi phonological repertoire,

more arrive with a disdain for religious ritual and belief, and that is infinitely more problematic for the school authorities than a few glottals here or there.

The dialect problem is somewhat more recognizable at the Greek and Armenian schools. In both of these cases, the majority of children arrive either speaking the language or accustomed to hearing it in a variety not identical to that stressed by the school. Additional minor complications enter in the Greek case given the recency of the *demotiki* standard (1977) which the school has adopted and the fact that no *demotiki* texts are available for all grades, particularly the upper ones. Accordingly, *Katarevusa* texts, the semi-classicized variety that alone was considered school-worthy in Greece until a few years ago, are still at times used—particularly in the upper grades. Nevertheless, there is no adult community *Katarevusa*-loyalty to cope with and, apparently, no major intra-dialectal demotic divergence to overcome. Thus, dialect differences of whatever kind are viewed as ephemeral and minor insofar as the school's functioning is concerned. They are no problem insofar as Greek literacy acquisition and retention are concerned. The same is true in the Armenian case. It is not seen as problematic that there are two modern standards—one in Soviet Armenia and one in the diaspora—nor problematic that even diaspora parents and children are derived from a wide variety of countries of origin (Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria) and, therefore, also bring a variety of different dialect backgrounds to the school. Children learn the school variety—spoken, written, and read—with no particular problems related to their home dialects. Then, like the children in the Greek school, they also learn on their own to sound out the older ecclesiastic variety for church rituals that they have already partially internalized. If the children speak different dialects to their parents at home, and they do, these differences are soon leveled at school; and no special exercises or materials or efforts are required for this purpose. Indeed, both schools tell stories of the triumph of the school dialect over the home dialect in certain homes rather than stories about the intrusion of the home dialect into the school.

The Chinese case has the potential for being ever so much more complex. Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghaiese—all the Chinese dialects are extremely different in their reading pronunciations of the characters (which they share). *P'u-ting hua* ("common speech" based on modern Pekingese) in turn differs from them all. What would a Chinese school do if, indeed, it were to have students from all of these different spoken-dialect and reading-dialect backgrounds? Fortunately, the dynamics of most Chinese-American schools are such that the problem hardly ever arises with any great seriousness. Our school teaches City-Cantonese reading pronuncia-

tion because most of the parents derive from one or another Cantonese dialect area. Although their rural Cantonese dialects differ quite substantially from each other—certainly as much as Black English differs from "school English"—the parents' and teachers' view is that Cantonese have "always" learned to read in City-Cantonese reading pronunciation, and that is what their children will do today. In essence, therefore, all the children are learning a new and quite discrepant dialect relative to their home dialect. The rare Pekingese child who may wander into the school is said to make an early if not easy adjustment both to the spoken school dialect and to its reading dialect. Teachers may or may not know the variety or dialect that children bring to school. This is considered unessential. All beginners must learn the spoken school dialect. They do so little by little. At the same time, little by little, they also acquire the reading school dialect. It is just a matter of practice, perserverance, and patience rather than a problem insofar as all involved are concerned.

ETHNO**GRAPHIC** COMPARISONS

Both reading and writing involve use of arbitrary characters, namely those of the printing system on the one hand and of the writing system on the other. Sometimes these characters are essentially like those of English, as in the French school; usually—in our sample of schools—they are not, not only in their overt shapes and basic rationales (phonemic, syllabary, ideographic) but not even in their direction. Sometimes they have one system for writing and printing as in Chinese, but more often they do not. Sometimes the printing system has both capitals and lower case, but sometimes, as in Armenian, Hebrew and Chinese, it does not. We rarely stop to think just how difficult the total graphic system may be for the beginner, even without the additional complexity of biliteracy to cope with and even without the issue of whether reading and writing should or should not be taught simultaneously in either language.

Complex though this ethno*graphic* area may be in terms of all of its possible permutations and combinations, it is really not very complex in practice. There is not a school among our five that makes much of the difference between English printing/writing and its own particular non-English printing/writing. This is never volunteered as a reason why any pupil has a problem in reading/writing. No school has prolonged the period of printing nor made much use of texts that are in writing rather than in printing in order to shield their pupils from the potential confusion inherent in yet another system of characters. Neither dyslexia nor reversals nor mixtures of writing systems are at all common initial problems, and any exceptions to this rule "quickly figure it out." All in all, writing system

and printing system conflicts just don't exist, either within languages or across them, except as extremely fleeting and unimportant affairs.

Rather than problem causing, the non-English writing/printing systems are generally regarded as identity-related, tradition-related, and sanctity-related. The French school gives handwriting lessons because French and, derivatively, also English *must* be written beautifully. The language that is beautiful to the ear must be beautiful to the eye, too! The ethnic printing systems in the other schools are clearly sanctity-related, and their sanctity is taught to the younger generation. The sanctity of the printing system contributes to the sanctity, to the non-triviality, to the heightened experience of reading per se in those languages. The characters themselves, as visuals and as graphemes, are surrounded by stories, poems, songs, and folklore.[7] They are related to the establishment of heaven and earth, to the giving of the Law, to holy martyrdom, to the triumph of the spirit, to overcoming adversity, to glorious attainments and incomparable achievements. It is doubly good to read and write in those "oh, so special characters"!

CONCLUSIONS

It is the functional dimension that seems to carry the brunt of the biliteracy acquisition and retention "burden" in the schools we have studied. Our five schools differ greatly with respect to their ethnopedagogic, ethnolinguistic and ethnographic profiles, and yet these differences are not at all related to any differences between their pupils insofar as the attainment or mastery of biliteracy. They all stress *both* of the languages that they teach, and this stress seems to be paying off. Most pupils come from at least moderately biliterate homes. Literacy in each language has its particular functions. English literacy cannot fill the functions of ethnic language literacy. The immediate community supports and admires the school's stress on ethnic language fluency, and both the immediate community and the greater community stress the importance of English. All the other potentially problem-causing factors are neither viewed, experienced, nor observed to be problem causing. For intact and vibrant and self-regulatory ethnic communities, the outsider's search for problems with biliteracy is met with good-humored puzzlement. The children read well, do they not? Indeed they do! They read, and may yet write, in two languages because they are bilingual and bicultural, with

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[7] See Roskies.

significant literacy-related roles in both languages and cultures. They expect to continue in this fashion. Grant God that they may!

Thus the early childhood acquistion and retention of biliteracy seems to require nothing more than two "cultures of reading" to institute, implement, and reward it. When viewed in societal perspective, children seem to learn to read, in some ways, not unlike the way they learn to speak—by being immersed in a world that reads, that enjoys reading, that benefits from reading, that values reading, that supports reading, and that demands reading for full-fledged membership.

Given this kind of support, societal biliteracy is relatively unproblematic. It easily weathers such minor static as ethnopedagogic, ethnolinguistic and ethnographic variation, given a strong ethnofunctional base. These three dimensions of variation can be realized in any one of a number of different ways, and yet the acquisition and retention of biliteracy may remain unaffected and definitely unimpeded. The eternal quest for better teaching methods must not lead us away from this basic truth. The fact of non-standard speech must not hide it from us. The endless variety of graphophonic and ideographic systems must not distract us. Given societies where reading really makes a difference in what counts and what works for its members, most of their children will learn how to read rather well and rather easily, be it in one language or, if the opportunity presents itself, in two, or even in more.[8] Certainly, it does not seem to be at all necessary for non-English language using/valuing parental communities in New York City today to consider foregoing their non-English language or the goal of literacy therein in order to foster greater attainments in English literacy among their children.

Social theoreticians and politicians, and those who are both simultaneously, may be uncomfortable with ethnicity, may view it as conflictual, may regard it as a falsification of empirical facts, may consider it expendable, and may in various other ways confuse their own personal and communal experiences and aspirations (ethnically colored ones to be sure, however much *that* may be denied) with "universal processes," but ethnic communities in New York City and elsewhere as well, indeed wherever the economic, intellectual and political climate permits, give ample evidence that their ethnicity is not only integrative, creative, enriching, true, and peaceful, but that it is compatible with good schooling in English as well as in the non-English language which is so meaningful to them. Indeed, as the

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[8] Abraham Stahl, "The Cultural Antecedents of Sociolinguistic Differences," *Comparative Education*, II (1975), 147-152.

French school reveals, literacy in two languages is attainable, at least for the early grades, even without ethnicity and its network of communal support.

The temptation to derive from our work conclusions that might be widely relevant to all the trials and tribulations of literacy acquisition in America today must be resisted. Nevertheless, the comparisons provided by our work *do* prompt some additional questions and observations. If ethnic communities in New York City—surrounded as they are by the world of English—can manage to organize schools that effectively teach predominantly English-speaking children reading and writing in the particularistic languages of their respective ethnocultural traditions, why cannot most of our public schools in New York City organize themselves to effectively teach English reading and writing to non-English mother tongue children or adults? Can the successes of ethnic community schools, and even of non-ethnic non-English schools such as the French school we have been studying, be maintained beyond puberty—when the effectiveness of schooling faces new and stronger competition from out-of-school sources—without far stronger communal functional rewards than those that now seem to be operative? Is the tendency, observed in the schools we have been studying, not to recognize difficulties of various kinds really a valid indication that those difficulties are not there? Or might reading/writing have been even better acquired if such difficulties *were* recognized and tackled? No one study can answer all the questions prompted by its own findings, let alone the questions prompted by other studies and outside realities. A good study frequently fosters more good questions.

Recent studies suggest we may, indeed, now be approaching a period of renewed conviction concerning the potential effectiveness of teachers, schools, and schooling.[9] Nevertheless, as optimal pedagogy advances, the discrepancy between actual and optimal student attainments grows. Seemingly, then, the familial and societal contribution to attainment becomes ever greater, and without the favorable and constant input of families, neighborhoods, and ever broader societal factors, such as encountered in the schools we have been studying, the attainment of a literate democracy for millions upon millions of English speaking

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[9] Benjamin S. Bloom, *Better Learning in the Schools: A Primer for Parents, Teachers and Other Educators* (New York: Mcgraw-Hill, 1980) as well as R. Gary Bridge, Peter R. Moock, and Charles M. Judd, *The Determinants of Educational Outcomes: The Impact of Families, Peers, Teachers and Schools* (Cambridge: Ballinger, 1979).

monolinguals will remain problematic indeed. Thus, it is ultimately at the societal level that "a job must be done," rather than at the level of methodology per se. Without proper societal arrangements—reward, opportunities, and encouragement—our most advanced methodological refinements come a cropper. With them, they may be somewhat superfluous.