

Chapter 16

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

Gender and Bilingual Education in a Creole Language Situation

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Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore and examine an unexpected outcome of a body of research surrounding the Bilingual Education Project (BEP) in Jamaica. This project involved the use, for all educational functions, of English, the traditional language of education, and Jamaican Creole (Jamaican) over the first four years of primary education. The project was an outcome of several decades of academic research and some public pressure for the formal incorporation of Jamaican into the education system. The focus of the project was policy, specifically, establishing that the use of the Jamaican language in education would, at minimum, do no harm and, in fact, yield educational dividends.

Concentrating the research effort on providing arguments for and against the formal use of Jamaican in schools produced certain blind spots. These led to results which, as often happens in research, are unforeseen and unexpected and which, with the benefit of hindsight, should have been anticipated. We will look at some of the trends we should have been expecting in the results, specifically those for gender, that have come out of the Bilingual Education Project and examine some of the policy implications.

Why a Bilingual Education Project in Jamaica?

The Conference on Creole Language Studies held in Jamaica in 1959 was the first of its kind. Perhaps, not surprisingly, the issue of the role of the Jamaican language, Jamaican, made an early appearance. At an open forum held during that conference, the matter was heatedly debated. This is documented in Le Page (1961, 114–28). It is against this background that there emerged a large body of research on this subject which is summarized in Craig (1999). The focus of this work was

children of the region who were native speakers of a Creole language lexically related to English. The issue was how it might be possible to create conditions within which such children could develop an effective and consistent command of English, the official language of education.

This body of work was produced in the period of the 1960s during which the major territories of the Commonwealth Caribbean gained political independence from Britain. The prevailing model of English language teaching, that of English as a Mother Tongue (EMT), was perceived as not delivering the goods. It had failed to produce sufficient numbers of students finishing or leaving school with the required skill levels in English. Solutions were sought against the background of a perception that the education systems of these countries were in crisis as a result of a failure to effectively teach English (Craig 1971, 376).

The research was based on particular assumptions. It was assumed that the public would not accept the use of the respective Creole languages in school as languages of formal oral instruction, as a subject of instruction, or as a medium for acquiring and using literacy. In addition, the Creole languages supposedly did not have the level of autonomy in relation to English necessary for its formal use in education, given the existence of a continuum relationship between Creole and English. These factors were presumed to preclude English-lexicon Creoles from being formally used in the school systems of those countries having English as the official language and language of education. The absence of a widely accepted standard writing system for these Creole languages was taken as further evidence against the option of accepting these languages as formal languages of instruction and literacy.

These assumptions forced the pioneering research work on language education in the Creole-speaking Commonwealth Caribbean in the direction of what Craig (1999) refers to as the monoliterate transitional bilingual (MTB) approach. This approach supported the transitional oral use of the children's native language, Creole, using the language of the home as a bridge to the language of the school, English. Creole would not, however, be used in writing. The 2001 Language Education Policy (LEP) of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture of Jamaica – subsequently tabled in the Jamaican parliament as official policy – is a public policy document which supports this position.

The LEP document (Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture [MOEYC] 2001) reviewed and benefited from the mass of existing research on the subject. Like the research work on which it is based, the LEP viewed the MTB approach as the only viable option. There was a concession that fully bilingual and biliterate transitional bilingualism was ideal for the Jamaican situation. According to the LEP, however, the reality was that these options were impractical. In addition, the LEP, like the research work on which it is based, assumed that Jamaican society would reject formal written Jamaican Creole. The document also declared that there was no standard writing system for Jamaican.

Working from a radically different set of perspectives, as, for example, represented in Devonish (1986; 2007), the Bilingual Education Project (BEP) proposal challenged such received wisdom. What was the evidence to support the view that the public would resist the implementation of a programme using Jamaican alongside English as a formal medium of instruction, as a subject, and as a medium of acquiring and exercising literacy skills in schools? In addition, the BEP proposal also challenged the notions that Jamaican had neither a standard writing system nor the resources needed in technical, educated discourse. It had a campaigning element to it which becomes understandable once we identify the entity which initiated the BEP.

The BEP proposal for primary schools in Jamaica came from the Jamaican Language Unit (JLU), an entity set up in 2002 within the University of the West Indies at the request of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament on a Charter of Rights to the Jamaican Constitution. The unit had been set up to influence public attitudes on the Jamaican language and to popularize the standard writing system for the language. This was so that parliament could find it practical to enshrine the freedom from discrimination on the grounds of language into the new Charter of Rights that was then before the legislature. The JLU put forward the details of a fully bilingual education project in three primary schools in Jamaica. The project sought to establish that options such as full bilingualism and biliterate transitional bilingualism, identified as ideal but impractical by the LEP, could, in fact, be implemented in an effective and sustainable manner. Once this could be demonstrated to be the case, official language education policy would be free to implement these approaches which it considered as ideal, but impractical.

The Theoretical Background

The major justification presented for the BEP was that it would develop in children a competence in both Jamaican and English, the two languages widely used in Jamaica. The various claims in the literature which justify bilingual approaches to education were employed. One of these was that of the cognitive benefits of bilingual education (Craig 1999; Scribner and Cole 1981). The proposal relied on some of the best-documented bodies of research on bilingual education. This was work based on the seven hundred thousand records of minority students in the United States researched by Thomas and Collier (1997) and later publications, Thomas and Collier (2002) and Collier and Thomas (2004). Thomas and Collier (2002, 53–55) demonstrate that fully bilingual education is a predictor of high levels of academic performance, not just in the languages themselves, but in all subjects across the board. This finding influenced the design of the BEP in Jamaica to be fully bilingual and to studiously avoid features characteristic of transitional programmes.

It is worth noting that the model of full bilingual education adopted for the BEP, involving the equal and continuing use of both languages, has come to be

deemed “dual language education” (Torres-Guzman 2002). For purposes of this work, however, we shall retain the term *full bilingual education*, in keeping with the terminology used in the original BEP proposal.

Time and the Project Design

In 2004, the Jamaican Language Unit at the University of the West Indies, Mona, approached the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture (Education Ministry) to gain permission to implement fully bilingual education in a small number of primary schools by way of the Bilingual Education Project (BEP). It would employ English and Jamaican, equally, as languages of oral instruction and written communication, and as subjects to be taught.

The original design of the BEP required that it be implemented over six years, covering the progress of the project group through the entire primary school cycle, from grades one through six. A BEP cohort of children entering first grade in 2004 would be tracked as they progressed through primary school. This six-year period was in keeping with the main research findings on the subject. These sources indicate that pupils had to have been in fully bilingual education for between five and seven years before the positive impact of bilingual education could begin to be measured. After this time, fully bilingually educated pupils pull ahead of monolingually educated ones, and the gap widens over time (Thomas and Collier 1997). There was found to be a lag factor affecting bilingually educated children resulting from their having to develop literacy and other language skills in two languages. This was because the time for exposure to language skills in each of the two languages is half that which children in monolingual education receive in the one language that is used.

The implementation of the BEP required the sanction of the Education Ministry. It granted permission for a pilot BEP to go ahead in three primary schools. However, the advice and wishes of the ministry were that the project not extend into the final two years of primary education. This was the time when the children would be preparing for their national secondary school placement examination, the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT), and the BEP being in place during these years might be interpreted as jeopardizing the futures of the participating children. The BEP project which was approved by the Education Ministry for implementation was modified to cover four years, tracking the progress of the 2004 grade one BEP cohort up through grade four.

The BEP saw itself as addressing the main reservations expressed in the LEP (MOEYC 2001) about formally using Jamaican in education, namely: (1) the lack of a standard writing system for the teaching of Jamaican, otherwise referred to by the Education Ministry as the “home language”; (2) the absence of written teaching materials in Jamaican; and (3) the perceived lack of public support for children being educated in Jamaican. There was also an implied concern. Did the demonstrated

advantages of fully bilingual education in countries outside the Caribbean transfer to the peculiar language situation of Jamaica?

Whatever the designers of the BEP stated were the goals of the project, its success or failure would be judged by the ministry and the public based on quite different criteria. Rather than on the purely technical demonstration of "how to", as outlined in the project document, the project would be judged on the actual success of full bilingual education which it sought to provide. There was, however, a problem. The indications coming from the research were that improvements relative to monolingual approaches begin to show between five and seven years of schooling. Therefore, shortening the duration of the project to four years ran the risk of results which showed no benefit to the pupils in the project. In fact, there was a strong chance that they still would be showing a performance deficit relative to those pupils outside the BEP, since the project children would still be in a catch-up phase. Such a result would be seized on by the sceptics as proof that the approach was ineffective, if not damaging to the educational development of the child. We had a choice. We could wait, perhaps forever, until perfect conditions allowed us to run a six-year project. In doing so, we would miss the chance of perhaps ever implementing the BEP. We had no choice but to gamble on going ahead in an imperfect situation.

In 2004, the (then) minister, the Hon. Maxine Henry-Wilson, expressed support for the project in person and gave it her blessing. The official letter from the ministry stated that it was "very pleased to be associated with the work undertaken by the Jamaica Language Unit. We fully endorse your proposal to conduct a pilot project in Bilingual education for primary school enrolled in Grades 1-4 in three institutions" (letter, Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture, 6 May 2004).

More than a year later, the Hon. Henry-Wilson was interviewed by a newspaper reporter who was in the process of collecting information for an article which turned out to be quite sympathetic to the project. The comments which the minister was reported to have made are worthy of note:

But Henry-Wilson, though acknowledging that while the new education policy speaks to some of the issues discussed by the researchers, was noncommittal on implementing bilingual instruction on a formal scale after Devonish's project wraps up in 2008. . . . "They are doing some fieldwork through the . . . formal education system and we would like to see whether in fact the views expressed are true, that is, whether they will prove that the students would be more productive," said the education minister. . . . "But we must be mindful that English is a global language; Patois isn't," she added. . . . "India has their local dialect, but the country recognises the importance of speaking English. . . . One of the assets we need to optimise is that we do have English as a formal language, it's universal, and we need to ensure that our children are able to mine that advantage." (Martin-Wilkins, *Sunday Observer*, 20 November 2005, 8-9)

The minister's commitment or lack thereof to implementing bilingual instruction more generally was, as she stated, dependent on "whether they prove that the

students would be more productive” (Martin-Wilkins, 2005, 8). Her definition of what constituted “more productive” was clear – she had expounded on the glorious advantages afforded globally to speakers of English – it was the children’s ability to function in English.

The BEP proposal stressed the potential advantages of the BEP for the children’s cognitive development. It also addressed the prospect of improved mastery of content subjects. However, given the role which competence in English plays in the social hierarchy of Jamaica, the effect of the BEP on competence in English was critical, as highlighted by the minister’s reported remarks. It was this which would determine support for or opposition to a more general implementation of the bilingual approach.

The criterion by which others would judge the project, irrespective of the special time limitations that had to be accepted for its implementation, is that the BEP would produce an increase in language arts skill levels in English among pupils within the project relative to those in traditional modes of instruction.

For purposes of ensuring the validity in the findings, our research focused on what by the beginning of the fourth year was the only group of students that had had four consecutive years of bilingual instruction. These children began with the BEP in grade one of their primary education and had continued in the project through to grade four. It is the results for this group which shall be presented in the subsequent parts of this chapter.

Not So Great Expectations?

The BEP fitted the description of what Collier and Thomas (2004) call a “one-way enrichment dual language programme”, that is, a programme which is fully bilingual in L1 and L2 and in which all of the children have the same L1. This fact is significant and of concern to us because, with reference to enormous body of data collected on such programmes in the United States, Collier and Thomas (2004, 5) note: “In every study conducted, we have consistently found that it takes six to eight years for ELLs [English language learners] to reach grade level in L2, and only one-way or two-way enrichment dual language programs have closed the gap in this length of time. No other program has closed the gap in this length of time.” These findings are similar to those made in Thomas and Collier (1997, 36, 53). This was critical for us, given the short duration of the project, four years rather than the preferred six.

Collier and Thomas (2004, 5) examined the limitations of all programmes that were not dual language. None of these had been able to close, in the long term, more than half of the achievement gap with native English speakers. Native speakers of English continued to improve their language competence in their L1 even while English language learners try to catch up with them. L1 speakers of English presented a constantly moving target. English language L2 learners, therefore, could only close the gap by making more than one year of progress in their L2

with every year of schooling. It was this which was achieved by children in the dual language enhancement programmes studied by Collier and Thomas (2004). This fact made them stand out relative to all other programme types, including Transitional Bilingualism and English as a Second Language.

We were optimistic in our own situation. The hoped-for positive results for a four-year-long dual language programme was based on a bit more than blind optimism. In the Jamaican context, the moving target problem did not challenge the dual language BEP in quite the way it might have done elsewhere. In Jamaica, the comparison group were not L1 speakers of English who were being taught monolingually in their L1. Rather, they were the non-BEP children of the same grade within the same primary school. They, like the BEP group, were not native speakers of English and had Jamaican as their L1. This latter group was being taught using hybrid approaches, including that of EMT. They as a target group were not, therefore, moving as quickly as they would have had they been native speakers of English being taught in English. This made the four-year target date seem marginally more achievable than otherwise might have been the case.

The Grade 4 Literacy Test

The Education Ministry, as part of its normal functions, had the Grade 4 Literacy Test, a national test, administered to all fourth grade children. It was taken towards the end of the school year, in the May–June period. The results were used as a guide to the literacy competence of children in grade four. In cases where children failed the test, an Education Ministry–mandated intervention took place to get the children to a point where they could pass the test and move on to grade five.

We were interested in the results of tests administered in the May–June 2008 period, the time at which the BEP pupils and their non-BEP counterparts within the project school would have completed grade four. The test came in two parts. The first, which can be labelled Test 1, was made up of Word Recognition and Reading Comprehension components. Word Recognition consisted of forty questions. In twenty of these, pupils were required to *match the picture with the correct word*, selecting from a list of four words. For the remaining twenty questions, students had to *match the word with the correct picture*, choosing from one of four pictures. The Reading Comprehension component had seven passages and thirty questions in total. Students were required to read the passages carefully before choosing their answers to each question from the possible A, B, C or D.

In Test 2, there were two writing tasks. In Task 1, pupils were asked to complete a registration form to join their local library. Task 2 was a letter-writing activity.

The Research Questions: BEP versus Non-BEP / Boys versus Girls

This section focuses on the scores for the nationally administered Grade 4 Literacy Test for two groups of children at the project school. As already noted, the assignment to a particular one of the three class streams in grade one at the project school was random. The composition of the particular grade one stream which became the BEP group was, therefore, equally random. This group, the BEP group, received four years of instruction in both Jamaican and English, with literacy being taught in both languages. The other group, the non-BEP group, received education in the traditional manner, for the same four-year period, with English officially being the sole/main medium of oral instruction and the only language of literacy.

The data for the nationally administered Grade 4 Literacy Test in English, presented below, divides students' performances into three categories: Mastery, Near Mastery, and Non-Mastery. The Education Ministry uses the categories when publishing their results. The method by which the ministry assigns a mix of scores for a particular pupil (i.e. Mastery, Near Mastery and Non-Mastery) is not explained in the ministry documents and has not been made clear to us. There are three subtests on which the children are examined, Word Recognition, Reading Comprehension and the Communication Task. Here we simply present the data for Overall Results, as these have been presented in the records held by the school for the respective children. We extracted the results for each BEP and non-BEP child and created an amalgamated set of results.

This analysis was aimed at helping us arrive at some understanding of the possible impact of the BEP on the (thirty-four participating children) versus the non-BEP (seventy-seven participating children) with regard to their performance on the Grade 4 Literacy Test. Because the issue of gender is a major talking point in discussions about education performance in Jamaica, we also separated the data in relation to gender and decided to identify what effects gender might have on these results. When broken down by gender the sample distribution was BEP: sixteen girls, seventeen boys and non-BEP: twenty-eight girls, forty-eight boys). The questions we sought to answer, therefore, were:

- What was the impact if any, of the academic programme pursued by pupils, that is, BEP versus non-BEP, on results?
- What was the influence, if any, of gender on results in each of the two groups?
- What was the differential impact of gender, if any, across the two groups?

The Results

We present in table 16.1 the overall mean scores for BEP and non-BEP pupils; for BEP and non-BEP boys, and for BEP and non-BEP girls.

The Analysis

Given the size of the BEP and non-BEP groups, these figures can be used for no more than a discussion of possible trends. The composite results in column 4 form part of the official record of the performance of each individual child and are used for determining which children "failed". There was, interestingly, a trend that

Table 16.1. Grade 4 Literacy Test results

Bilingual Education Programme (33 Students)				
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Word Recognition</i>	<i>Reading Comprehension</i>	<i>Communication Task</i>	<i>Overall Results</i>
Girls (16) 48.48	15 mastery 93.7%	14 mastery 87.5%	13 mastery 81.25%	13 mastery 81.25%
	1 non-mastery 6.3%	2 non-mastery 12.5%	3 non-mastery 18.75%	3 almost mastery 18.75%
Boys (17) 51.51%	15 mastery 88.2%	16 mastery 94.1%	14 mastery 82.4%	14 mastery 82.3%
	2 non-mastery 11.8%	1 non-mastery 5.9%	3 non-mastery 17.6%	1 non-mastery 5.9%
				2 Almost mastery 11.8%
Totals 100%	30 mastery 90.9%	30 mastery 90.9%	27 mastery 81.8%	27 mastery 81.8%
	3 non-mastery 9.09%	3 non-mastery 9.1%	6 non-mastery 18.2%	1 non-mastery 3%
				5 almost mastery 15.2%

suggested that from the perspective of Mastery, the BEP group, at 81.8 per cent, outperforms the non-BEP group, at 77.3 per cent.

Viewed from the perspective of Non-Mastery, we see a similar trend, with 3.3 per cent for the BEP group and 10.52 per cent for the non-BEP group. One interpretation of these trends would be that the BEP seemed to be producing a positive effect on the BEP group performance as compared with the non-BEP group. However, the BEP group had almost the same number of girls as boys, whereas the non-BEP group had nearly twice as many boys as girls. That gender is a relevant factor can be seen by the following national statistics (table 16.2) for the Grade 4 Literacy Test for 2008, the year in which the BEP and non-BEP pupils did that test.

Table 16.2. Grade 4 Literacy Test results

Non Bilingual Education Programme (75)				
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Word Recognition</i>	<i>Reading Comprehension</i>	<i>Communication Task</i>	<i>Overall Results</i>
Girls (28)	28 mastery 100%	25 mastery 89.3%	27 mastery 96.4%	25 mastery 89.3%
		3 non-mastery 10.7%	1 non-mastery 3.6%	3 non-mastery 10.7%
Boys (47)	42 mastery 89.4%	37 mastery 78.7%	37 mastery 78.7%	33 mastery 70.2%
	5 non-mastery 10.6%	10 non-mastery 21.3%	6 non-mastery 12.8%	6 non-mastery 12.8%
			4 almost mastery 8.5%	8 almost mastery 17%
Totals 100%	70 mastery 93.3%	62 mastery 82.7%	64 mastery 85.4%	58 mastery 77.3%
	5 non-mastery 6.7%	13 non-mastery 17.3%	7 non-mastery 9.3%	9 non-mastery 12%
			4 almost mastery 5.3%	8 almost mastery 10.7%

Given the national trend in 2008 for girls to outperform boys by margins up to 18 per cent (for reading comprehension and writing), we have an alternative explanation for the seemingly better performance of the BEP group. This could have been the result of there being a higher proportion of girls in the BEP group as compared with the non-BEP group.

Against this background, therefore, we need to attempt for our own BEP/non-BEP data a breakdown of the figures along gender lines. Table 16.3 presents the Grade 4 Literacy Test Mastery results, from tables 16.1 and 16.2, in descending order of overall performance (column 4, bolded), for the boys and the girls in each of these two groups.

Now that we have injected gender-based differentiation, a quite different picture emerges. The national norms in which girls outperform boys are maintained for the non-BEP groups. This impression is confirmed by a chi-square test of the contingency between *mastery* (coded as Yes or No) and *gender*. For the non-BEP girls, twenty-five achieved mastery and three did not; and for the non-BEP boys, thirty-three achieved mastery and fifteen did not (Pearson chi-square = 4.13, with 1 degree of freedom, $p < 0.05$). However, within the BEP group, the boys perform at about the same level as the girls, 82.35 per cent versus 81.25 per cent Mastery overall, respectively.

The accepted position, as, for example, expressed by Collier and Thomas (2004, 5), is that children in fully bilingual education programmes lag behind colleagues in monolingual programmes until the end of the sixth year or thereabouts. Our data in table 16.3 are taken from a bilingual education programme which had been running for only four years. The BEP girls behave normally and are demonstrating the lag (compared with non-BEP girls) which the literature would lead us to expect at this stage. The BEP boys, by contrast, potentially represent a special response to the gender-marked language situation in Jamaica. They perform at roughly the same level as their BEP girl counterparts and instead of lagging behind the non-BEP boys, as the literature might lead us to expect at this stage, they are performing better than they are. This latter establishes the fact that the boys' improved performance was not simply a result of the BEP girls performing worse than their non-BEP counterparts.

Table 16.3. Rank order listing mastery results

Non-BEP girls	100%, 89.3%, 96.42%, 89.3%
BEP boys	88.23%, 94.11%, 82.35%, 82.35%
BEP girls	93.75%, 87.5%, 81.25%, 81.25%
Non-BEP boys	93.42%, 81.57%, 84.21%, 76.31%

What accounts for the trend that suggests a positive effect of BEP only on the boys? An explanation for this can be found in the background linguistic situation in Jamaica.

Supporting Evidence: (1) Gender-Based Language Attitudes and Usage Among Jamaican Children

As far back as Craig (1971), we find some reference to gender-related phenomena among girls and boys in Jamaican primary schools. He notes, with reference to a group of first grade children, that, "in one or two instances, boys, when not aware of being observed by teachers, etc., amused themselves by a somewhat exaggerated mimicry of girlish voices conveying bits of standard speech. The point of the mimicry seemed to be *that femininity or lack of toughness was to be associated with standard speech*" (emphasis in the original) (Craig 1971, 381).

These children were being exposed to six months of what might be described as experimental transitional monoliterate bilingual instruction. The findings were that although there were no significant differences in the production of English forms among boys and girls at the beginning of the programme, "girls' speech changed more extensively towards the prestige norms than boys did" (Craig 1971, 381). The inference is clear. If boys have negative attitudes to English, even with the same exposure to the language as girls they are likely to acquire less competence and/or will be less likely to seek to demonstrate such competence in any interaction situation.

Supporting Evidence: (2) Gender-Based Language Attitudes and Usage Among Jamaican Adults

The 2005 Language Attitude Survey (LAS) was based on a sample of one thousand adult informants across Jamaica, and it was carried out in the year following the start of the BEP. Focusing on the results most relevant to the BEP, when respondents were asked what they thought about Jamaican being made an official language alongside English, the total percentage of those in favour of this proposal was 68.5 per cent. When asked which of two possible schools respondents thought would be best for Jamaican children, 71.1 per cent opted for the school in which children were taught to read and write in Jamaican and English as opposed to one in which only English was used. The conclusion from this, after the fact, was that the BEP-type approach did indeed have majority public support, contrary to the unsubstantiated claim made in the LEP (MOEYC 2001) that the opposite was true.

There were, however, significant differences across genders. In the LAS (2005, 13, 21, 38), the dominant tendency was for men of all groups and types to report (i) more use of Jamaican than women; (ii) less use of English than women; (iii) more positive attitudes to Jamaican than women; and (iv) less positive attitudes to

English than women. These results were consistent with the reported association of the use of English with femininity and Jamaican with masculinity.

Findings

It is worthy of note that a search of the seminal works by Collier and Thomas (2004) and Thomas and Collier (1997; 2002) reveal no reference to gender. Whether the original data they worked with did not segregate the seven hundred thousand records into male and female or they chose to aggregate them is not clear. There was, therefore, nothing in the main body of literature on bilingual/dual language education to suggest that the gender effect would have been one which we should have looked for. Nevertheless, given the facts of the Jamaican language situation, both among adults and among children, the gender-related trends should not have caught us by surprise.

Based on the gender-related cultural attributes associated with English and Jamaican, the introduction of the formal use of Jamaican into the education system via the BEP was bound to have had a disproportionate effect on the boys in the sample as compared with the girls. The use of Jamaican would have been regarded by boys as recognizing and supporting their masculinity. This, in turn, would have produced a buy-in to the education process which would not have affected the BEP girls. At the end of the fourth year, when the Grade 4 Literacy Test was administered, the BEP girls lagged behind the non-BEP groups because they are "normal". They were not getting the extra advantage which the boys received from having a "masculine" language added to the "feminine" one being used in instruction. They were merely suffering from the lag created by less exposure to English when compared with the non-BEP girls. Based on the established patterns for bilingual education programmes, the girls would have to wait for the normal peaking in performance which begins at the end of six years of fully bilingual education.

Policy Implications

The language education issue, and the education issue in general, is increasingly being presented in Jamaica as a crisis affecting boys, and the crisis is increasingly being framed as a literacy issue. Literacy has to be expressed in a language, and the only language of literacy within the Jamaican education system at large is English. Any literacy crisis is, therefore, in large measure, a language crisis also. Inability or unwillingness to use English equates with being unable to demonstrate literacy skills.

On the part of the policy makers within the Education Ministry, there is an increasing willingness to do anything which might integrate low performers, predominantly boys, into the education system. A linguistically conservative education policy structure is being forced to look for innovative solutions to what it sees

as its literacy problems. These are most acute among the males within the education system. Do the advocates of good education practice relate to a dual language education focus on making proposals for that section of the school population about which there is most desperation?

The problem with the above is that making recommendations on the basis of the evidence we have presented so far would be premature. There is some statistical significance to be seen, based on the chi-square test, in the superior performances of non-BEP girls and boys. This is in contrast to the figures for the non-BEPs, whose performance is almost identical across the genders. There is, however, the possibility that were the BEP to have been implemented over six rather than four years, the BEP girls may have caught up with the BEP boys.

The way forward is for a new and expanded BEP. A proposal for just this was made in an October 2010 JLU presentation reporting on the BEP to the Senior Policy Group of the Education Ministry, which included the current minister. The JLU proposed that a ministry-resourced BEP involving three to four schools, a larger number of children, and covering the entire six years of primary education be implemented. Larger numbers over the minimum period required to see the full effects of bilingual education would greatly improve the reliability of the results. Policy makers would be in a better position at the end of such a project to develop policy informed by the outcomes.

Sadly, the implementation of the proposed new BEP may be longer in coming than one might have hoped for. The Hon. Andrew Holness, the minister of education, youth and culture at the time of writing and the one who immediately succeeded Henry-Wilson, is quoted in the *Jamaica Observer* as insisting that English must be the “predominant language of the classroom” (Budd 2011). When presented with the argument that the failure to teach the Jamaican language as a subject and use it as a medium of instruction in the classroom would be exclusionary, he is reported as saying, “I don’t buy this argument that I am excluding people because they can’t speak English . . . We must put this language debate to rest.” It is significant that the minister seeks to justify his position via a statement that he did not “buy this argument” (Budd 2011). As reported in the article, the minister fails to address the substance of the proposal being made for bilingual education. It would be ironic if the trends we have observed are maintained with more data and over a longer time period. It would be the boys, about whom the minister has expressed particular concern, who would be most negatively affected by a failure to try bilingual education as a policy option. The struggle for language education policies based on evidence rather than opinion continues.

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