

Sample Summary

This example is taken from Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum and Anne Greenwood's website.

To check out some of the strengths in the following *short* summary, keep an eye on how this student chose to

- include transitional phrases and other elements that contribute to the unity and coherence of the paragraphs
- integrate quotations into the text of the summary
- use references to the author to remind the reader that these ideas belong to Bernstein
- include selected examples from the original

In "Bilingual Education: A War of Words," Richard Bernstein claims that the longstanding and increasingly bitter debate over bilingual education is part of a larger national debate over the role minorities will play in shaping America's identity. Bilingual education programs have flourished because of the increasingly diverse ethnic makeup of American schools. However, bilingual education is intensely controversial. At one southern California high school, Hispanics picketed teachers who denounced bilingual education programs as "a fraud." These teachers had argued that such programs end up harming the very minority groups they are intended to help. Bernstein attempts to describe this debate and diagnose its root causes.

Those favoring bilingual education, according to Bernstein, stress that teaching students in their native languages offers young people their best chance for success in American life. Those opposed insist that bilingual education fails to prepare students for today's competitive and advanced job markets.

Yet Bernstein points out that underlying the educational arguments in the debate over bilingual education are powerful political arguments arising from the increasing diversity of America. Most immigrants to this country are no longer from Europe, but from the Caribbean, from the Middle East, and from Asia. Opponents of bilingual education argue that now, more than ever, America needs the common bond of language to hold its increasingly diverse population together. However, advocates see bilingual education as a means of moving away from the kind of "white Anglo" education that has belittled the ethnic identities of nonwhite minorities. Moreover, advocates of ethnic identity want to go beyond bilingual education programs to courses for all children emphasizing the role of America's ethnic minorities. For example, New York's "Curriculum of Inclusion" is designed to stress minority involvement in important historical developments.

For Bernstein, then, the bilingual education debate is a debate over the cultural identity of America. Those in favor of bilingual education and ethnic identity see America as a "salad bowl," rather than a "melting pot." They want each ethnic group to retain its own distinctive qualities. In contrast, opponents of bilingual education believe that while diversity is valuable, an over emphasis on ethnic identity could lead to hostility between ethnic groups and a breakdown of national unity. Indeed, one group, U.S. English, is lobbying for a constitutional amendment "that would make English the official language of Government."

In the end, Bernstein believes, schools will encourage their students either to develop their "ethnic self-realization" or to be part of a "unified culture." And while Bernstein does not predict which of these choices American schools will embrace, he asserts that the choice concerning bilingual education will determine more than the content of first-grade classrooms; it will determine America's future identity.