

ARE THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF JAMAICA'S BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROJECT BEING MET?

by Ronald C. Morren and Diane M. Morren

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1. Introduction and Background

Jamaica is a bilingual nation. The two languages used in Jamaica are known as Standard Jamaican English (SJE) and Jamaican Creole (JC). As Jamaica wrestles with the problem of adequate and equal education for all children, the issue of which language(s) will be recognized as valid languages of instruction comes up. Specific domains are commonly associated with SJE, e.g. education, and other domains are often reserved for JC, e.g. home, friends, etc. In Jamaica's elementary schools many teachers employ code switching between the SJE and JC in order to clarify what they are trying to teach, especially when they see that their students do not comprehend. Such indiscriminate code switching frequently results in students failing to distinguish between the two languages. Nevertheless, historically, to suggest that JC be *officially* endorsed as a medium of instruction in school has usually been received negatively.

In 2004 the Jamaican Language Unit of the Department of Language, Linguistics and Philosophy of the University of the West Indies, located in Mona, Jamaica began a four-year pilot Bilingual Education Project (BEP). While retaining Standard Jamaican English as the official language, the BEP ascribes equal status to Jamaican Creole and supports teaching in both languages.

According to Devonish (2004:6, 7) "This involves,

- a) redesigning instruction to support bilingualism with Jamaican [Creole] and SJE enjoying equal status in grades 1–4,
- b) providing learning – teaching materials in both languages, [and]
- c) training teachers in the specialist area of Jamaican [Creole] language instruction.

The project has as its chief objective the education of elementary school students in the speaking, reading, writing and comprehension of both the languages in general use in the country (Jamaican and English)."

The following paper will report on the outcome of an external, formative evaluation of the BEP conducted in November of 2005—approximately 1½ years after BEP was first implemented in the pilot schools. The paper focuses on the question, "Are the goals and objectives of Jamaica's Bilingual Education Project being met?"

2. External Formative Evaluation

The Jamaican Language Unit (JLU) of the Department of Language, Linguistics, and Philosophy of the University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona, Jamaica invited Ronald C. Morren and Diane M. Morren to conduct an external formative evaluation of JLU's pilot Bilingual Education Project (BEP) during the week of November 21–26, 2005. The external formative evaluation was conducted during the second year of the BEP's implementation. Since the focus of the formative evaluation was on whether or not the implementation of the BEP was commensurate with its stated goals and objectives and, where appropriate, suggesting ways of improving the effectiveness of the program, data collection tended to be informal. (See section 5 for a list of BEP's goals and objectives.)

To gather data, the Morrens conducted research on the following topics:

- (a) Observed pilot teachers using the newly translated materials in their classrooms.
- (b) Observed pilot school teachers being trained.
- (c) Interviewed the UWI personnel responsible for carrying out the BEP.
- (d) Interviewed the curriculum translation team.
- (e) Interviewed teachers (both pilot BEP teachers as well as traditional classroom teachers).
- (f) Interviewed school principals where the new BEP material was being implemented.
- (g) Interviewed a parent of children in the BEP.

3. Visits to the BEP Pilot Schools

The evaluators visited the four pilot BEP schools. During these visits principals were interviewed and classroom observations were made. One parent was also interviewed. In each instance a favorable opinion of the BEP was expressed. They also indicated that, in general, parents were positive about the use of Jamaican Creole (JC) as an additional medium of instruction in the classroom. Teachers remarked that, in comparison to previous classes that they had taught, the current students were less shy about participating in class discussions and seemingly more confident because they were able to use their most proficient language to express themselves.

Teachers being willing, and even eager, to use JC as a medium of instruction is not a problem—but having the JC materials and/or the necessary training to use the materials is. The following observations are not true of every pilot school, but with only four pilot schools to survey, any breakdown in availability of curriculum materials or in receiving BEP training will likely negatively impact the results of the BEP:

- (a) Insufficient materials, or no materials, due to a lack of BEP funds.
- (b) Not enough BEP-trained teachers.
- (c) BEP pilot-school teachers not attending the BEP training sessions.
- (d) Not keeping the first grade BEP students together for the second grade, but mixing them with non-BEP students.
- (e) Not writing in JC.

4. Bilingual Education Materials

As a general principle, for any bilingual education project to be successful, supporting curriculum materials must be available in a timely manner in all the languages being used as media of instruction.

At the time of the evaluation, the curriculum translation team had translated the Standard Jamaican English (SJE) primers for first, second and third grades. There have been no other books written or translated into JC for the express purpose of being a part of the BEP curriculum. There is a small pamphlet called “Bilingual Teaching Materials,” produced in August 2005, that contains an Alphabet Chart, Outline of lesson plans for first and third grades (for 6 weeks), and suggestions for flash cards, a social studies lesson, a clock lesson, sentence strips, and one math lesson. There is also a JC-English glossary for the teachers to use when teaching in JC. The glossary contains words appropriate for math, science, social studies, and language arts.

In the beginning, BEP photocopied the SJE primers for first, second, and third grades, covered-up the SJE words, substituted the translated JC for the SJE, and photocopied the results. The plan was to photocopy sufficient quantities for small groups of BEP students (ten to fifteen children) to have access to a copy according to their grade level. There were not enough funds to reproduce sufficient copies for all children to gain access to one copy. However, regarding the books that were available, some of the books are of excellent quality and some are of poorer quality. Some could be improved by changing the margins so that all the words fit on the page. (Some pages cannot be read completely because the words are missing, i.e. the margins are too wide for the page, so not all words are printed.)

In order to improve the quality of the pictures in an inexpensive way, one of the books that the BEP produced was done in a different, yet creative, manner. Direct translation from the SJE primer was done as before. However, pictures were taken of local primary students posing to

illustrate the stories. In addition, the book was enlarged. The results were excellent. The photos were engaging and the print was very easy to read. The idea with this type of book is to make one larger-sized book (8½" x 11" as opposed to 9" x 6") for the teacher, with many stories inside. Then, taking one or two stories at a time from the larger teacher's book, the BEP plans to reproduce up to fifteen copies of smaller-sized books for the students. In this way, a group of students can have access to small books when that group is ready to read a particular story and will not need to have the entire book during the whole term. It is expected that this will preserve the books for a longer time.

Another important aspect for an educational endeavor to be successful is that the students must have opportunity to practice what they are learning. The evaluators observed adequate opportunity for students to express themselves *orally* in JC. The development of *written* creative skills in JC, however, seemed insufficient. We saw students copying JC from the chalkboard into their notebooks, but in our limited observation (five classrooms where JC is being used as a medium of instruction), we did not see any evidence of students expressing themselves by writing in JC. In one pilot second grade classroom, after giving an excellent lesson in JC with posters, flash cards, and dramatizations, the teacher switched to SJE for the written part of the lesson.

This is in keeping with BEP's stated objective of not interfering with what all Jamaican children are learning in SJE (see the following section), but obviously weakens the objective of parallel learning in JC. An important aspect of language development includes the mental processing necessary for meaningful written output.

5. Evaluating the Goals and Objectives of the BEP

The BEP has stated the following as its objectives:

Align with Jamaica's Ministry of Education, Youth, and Culture (MOEYC) guidelines for Language Arts Education in SJE.

Evaluation: This has been accomplished by (a) translating the SJE curriculum into JC and (b) by training teachers to instruct students first in JC and then in SJE though it was observed that some teachers were introducing SJE first.

Translate the existing MOEYC Language Arts, Science, Math and Social Studies materials for grades 1–6 into Jamaican. (*Later changed to just grades 1–4.*)

Evaluation: The translation of Language Arts primers is accomplished or in process for grades 1–4. There are some education materials for the teaching of Science, Math, and Social Studies but actual translation of these content subjects was not evident to the evaluators. While translating texts from one language to another is usually less effectual than generating texts directly in the target language, the BEP wanted to assure MOEYC and pilot schools' principals, teachers, and parents that students would be receiving exactly the same curriculum as students in regular SJE classrooms.

Select three (now four) experimental (pilot) primary schools.

Evaluation: Two schools were selected the first year. Two more schools were added the second year.

Train forty-eight teachers in three primary schools in the speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension of Jamaican.

Evaluation: Less than forty-eight teachers have been or are being trained as of the date of the formative evaluation.

Reinforce the existent methodologies and curriculum for Language Arts in English through teacher training.

Evaluation: This is being accomplished through regularly scheduled teacher-training seminars, however, attendance on the part of BEP primary teachers is incomplete. It appears to the evaluators that the teachers are out of compliance. What are the training expectations of the teachers participating in this experimental project? What can be done to encourage one hundred percent attendance?

Implement a bilingual Language Arts programme in three (now four) Jamaican primary schools.

Evaluation: This was realized in two schools the first year (2004) of the BEP with an additional two schools added in 2005.

Support the teachers in the experimental (*pilot*) primary schools through ongoing workshops.

Evaluation: These supporting workshops are available but not all BEP teachers attend faithfully.

Evaluate, compare, and contrast experimental (**pilot*) school results at grades 1 and 4 with three comparable schools using existing MOEYC achievement tests.

Evaluation: The external evaluators are not aware of any results for grade 1 being available at this time. The BEP has not yet reached grade 4.

Evaluate Jamaican Creole language competencies for experimental (*pilot*) schools.

Evaluation: Not yet done. For grades 2–4, it is too early to do so as these grades have not completed the BEP curriculum. The evaluators assume that these language competencies include oral proficiency as well as knowledge of the material covered as part of the instruction in language arts, such as letter-sound correlation, punctuation, etc.

Determine the strengths and areas of improvement for the BEP for primary age students.

Evaluation: The external evaluation is one attempt to determine the preceding.

Raise the levels of literacy in the experimental (*pilot*) schools in JC and Standard Jamaican English through the following:

- (a) Developing an understanding of first language (JC) and how it differs from Standard Jamaican English.

Evaluation: This is an ongoing process for both teachers and their primary grade students. An evaluative instrument has not yet been employed.

- (b) Teach JC as a subject and its use as a medium of instruction.

Evaluation: This is being done in the four BEP schools.

- (c) Test, evaluate, and adjust the BEP in response to teacher and learner needs.

Evaluation: No evidence of testing, but evaluating and some adjustment is being accomplished through supervisory observations and participating teachers' feedback during the teacher-training sessions. Attention to, and consideration of the teachers' suggestions create the potential for the teachers to 'buy into' what the BEP is trying to accomplish.

*This comment and the evaluation statements were added by the evaluator.

- (d) Create literacy skills in JC in grades 1–4.

Evaluation: At the time of this formative evaluation, the BEP is only in its second year; this item has been realized in grades 1 and 2 within the BEP participating schools and is expected to continue into grades 3 and 4 in the succeeding two years.

- (e) Improve literacy in Standard Jamaican English in grades 1–4.

Evaluation: Evaluation results are not yet available.

6. Strengths of Jamaica's BEP

Using Jamaicans to produce JC materials for Jamaican classrooms is a strength of the BEP in Jamaica.

It is obvious that the UWI personnel, working both publicly and behind the scenes on the BEP, doing administrative work, translation, training, school visits, and/or publicity are professional linguists and graduate students of very high caliber.

We commend the BEP team at UWI for the very discerning and imaginative way of working with primary school teachers. In the teacher training sessions and in general interaction with teachers, UWI personnel demonstrated a sensitivity to the teachers' pedagogical knowledge, to the teachers' linguistic awareness of the two languages, and to their position as 'pioneers' in the classroom.

The plan to train teachers in phases throughout the training year appears to be a good way to help teachers assimilate the material in manageable amounts, practice using JC in the classroom, and reflect on the effectiveness of using both languages.

The first grade large-sized (8 ½" x 11") book with photos of local students depicting the events of the story is of excellent quality. It is the type of book that first graders would be drawn to and look forward to reading. The BEP should continue producing this type of book, if possible.

The pilot school principals and teachers all expressed positive attitudes toward using JC materials in the classroom.

Using JC is motivational in that the students in the BEP primary classrooms were delighted to hear lessons and read stories in their first language.

7. Recommendations for Jamaica's BEP

7.1 BEP Teachers

The BEP teachers said that their overall goal includes the following:

- An increase in literacy among experimental [pilot] schools.
- Improved performance and competence in the content subject areas (Math, Science, and Social Studies).
- Fluency in language use of Jamaican and English.

While it is too early in the BEP to determine if these overall goals are being met, the external formative evaluators suggest that: (1) in order to accurately assess the attainment of these goals, those responsible for the oversight of the BEP need to have teachers well trained at all four grade levels for each participating school. (2) In order to have a successful outcome to the BEP,

teachers must not only be well trained but also well supported, encouraged, and listened to. (3) On-going, sustained supervision and support for all teachers is crucial—well beyond the initial training period and beyond the first year of implementation of the bilingual curriculum. Teachers and BEP personnel reported that supervisory visits had been greatly reduced from the first year of the program due to lack of human and financial resources.

7.2 BEP Students

Students who receive their first year of education in the BEP must be allowed to remain in a BEP classroom so that at the end of four years there is a large enough sample of students who have completed the Project to make a determination as to its effectiveness. After completing first grade, mixing BEP students with non-BEP students not only dilutes the sample, it also means that the second grade teacher (and perhaps the third and fourth grade teachers) will need to help students who were not previously a part of the BEP to catch up in JC. If this becomes too big a burden for the teacher, the external formative evaluators predict that they will give up and revert to the non-BEP SJE curriculum.

7.3 BEP School Administrators

The external formative evaluators strongly recommend that the BEP school administrators commit to the following:

- (a) Let principals know that the BEP students need to remain together as they advance from grade to grade (as much as possible).
- (b) Do everything possible to keep teachers encouraged and supported so they will be pleased to be a part of the BEP and stay in the BEP. Supervisory visits not only help keep the Project on target, they tend to motivate the teachers.
- (c) Do everything possible to get JC language materials to the teachers in a timely manner. It will not be good for the BEP if the materials are delayed and therefore the students and/or teachers are not continually and sequentially exposed to JC reading and writing.
- (d) Parental support is crucial to the success of any innovative educational program. Taking the initiative to make home visits may be a good place to start. Develop strategies to include the parents in the planning and implementation of the BEP curriculum.

7.4 BEP Materials

It is imperative to make the Jamaican materials available as quickly as possible. Some teachers have not received the JC primers; either they are not yet available for their grade level or there are insufficient copies for distribution to all schools. This is lamentable because it militates against the purpose of the BEP. When the teachers do not have JC language curriculum materials, it cannot accurately be called a “Bilingual Education Program”.

7.5 Finances

Since financial resources are scarce, Big Books might be a way to reduce duplication costs. Big books are much larger than the excellent 8½” x 11” book that was produced for the BEP. “Big Books are...stories that have been made into large books so that they can be used with small groups or a whole class” (Waters 1998:96). “Big Books are an excellent way of providing inexpensive reading materials... Big Books are quite large so that a whole class can read and enjoy the book together. ...the advantage of Big Books is that you only need one book per class. Or you can share books between classes...” (Ibid:170).

Some of the training sessions could be dedicated to “make and take” teaching materials, i.e., a poster of the uses of ‘Dem’ in Jamaican. This would also insure correct spelling of Jamaican words. In some classrooms, the teachers had placed JC teaching posters on the wall but there were several instances where the teacher did not follow the agreed upon spelling standard—the Cassidy system.

7.6 Participant Feedback

In addition to spontaneous feedback received from classroom teachers during teacher training sessions or supervisory visits, it is recommended that, near the end of the academic year, a time be set aside for getting together with all the BEP teachers, grade-by-grade, who have been trained in the use of the translated materials and have actually been engaged in teaching the materials for a school year. This would be an opportunity for the teachers to give feedback as to the effectiveness of the new JC materials and whether they have encountered any difficulties with certain wording, illustrations or lack thereof, page layout, lesson progression, etc. Any suggestions given by the practicing teachers at this time should be seriously considered as possible revisions for subsequent reproductions of the JC texts.

7.7 Language Issues

The external evaluators urge the BEP trainers to continue emphasizing that BEP teachers keep the two languages separate. It was observed that teachers were attempting to keep the languages separate. For example, classroom teachers were heard to say to the students, “Now we are going to speak in Jamaican.” Alternatively, the teachers would sometimes ask the students, “What language am I speaking now?” Yet, old habits are hard to break and code switching was also evident. Frequent code switching could easily lead to ‘fragmented bilingualism’.

Having the two languages of the Program (JC and SJE) taught simultaneously may prove difficult for both the teacher and the student to handle. Sound pedagogy instructs us to start with the known and proceed to the unknown. Since the children start school knowing JC, it is advisable to start with that language while time is spent teaching SJE orally before introducing it in reading and writing. In two classrooms visited, the teachers presented the lesson in Standard Jamaican English first and then replicated the lesson in JC. Even if literacy in both languages is going to be taught simultaneously, since the first language of the students is JC, this is an instance where it would seem advisable to follow the age-old pedagogical axiom of going from the known to the unknown, or from JC to Standard Jamaican English.

7.8 Additional Considerations

For successful continuation of the BEP, more teachers will need to be trained to teach with the BEP materials—at least one each from 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades for each pilot school. To be adequately trained, the teachers need to faithfully attend BEP training classes.

The addition of one or more professional person(s), either from UWI’s School of Education or from one of Jamaica’s Normal Schools, to the BEP staff could be beneficial as linguists and educators interact and hone each other’s skills and contribute their expertise to the BEP.

8. Final Comments

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” The following picture demonstrates the obvious joy and enthusiasm the students have during a lesson presented in JC. This kind of zeal on the part of students indicates that the BEP is doing something right. The BEP should experience success in

spite of some of the difficulties it encounters if it translates, reproduces, and delivers the JC language material for classroom use in a timely manner, adequately trains teachers, and encourages them through supervisory visits.



Photo by Diane M. Morren

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