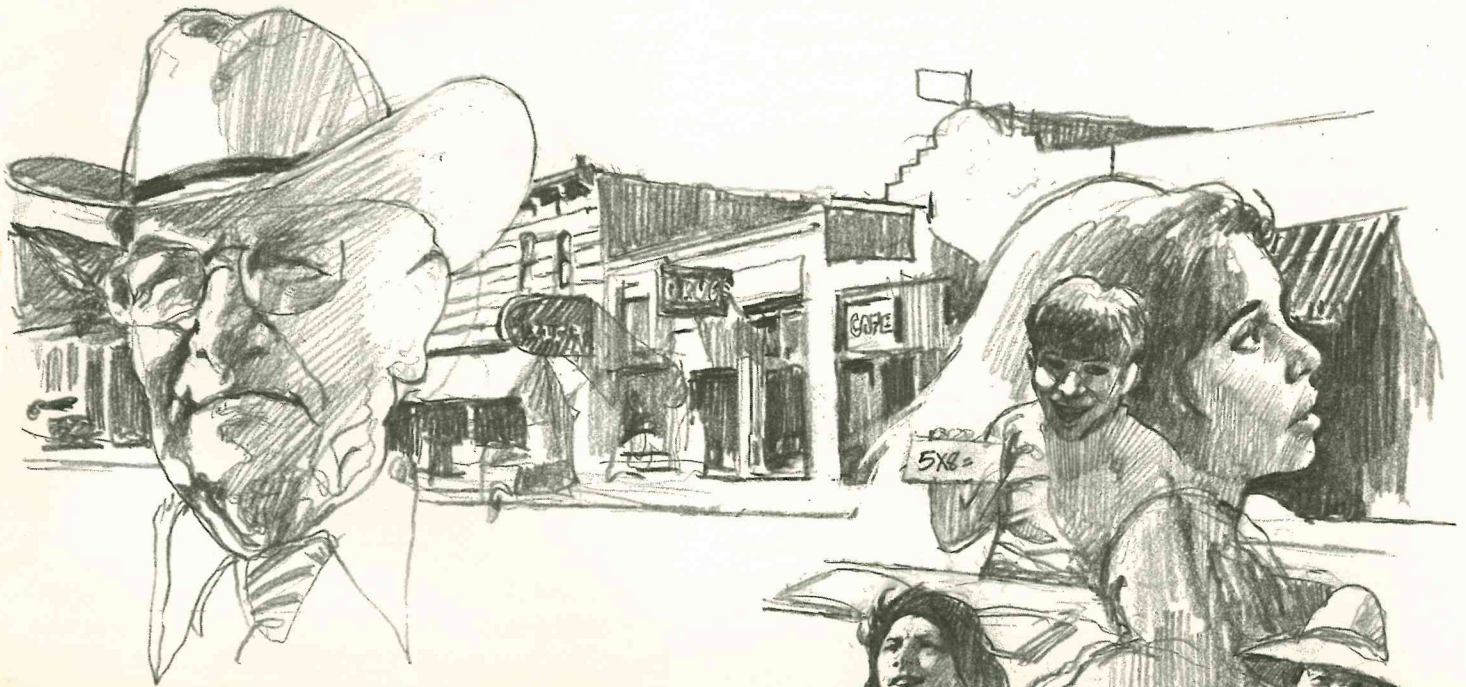


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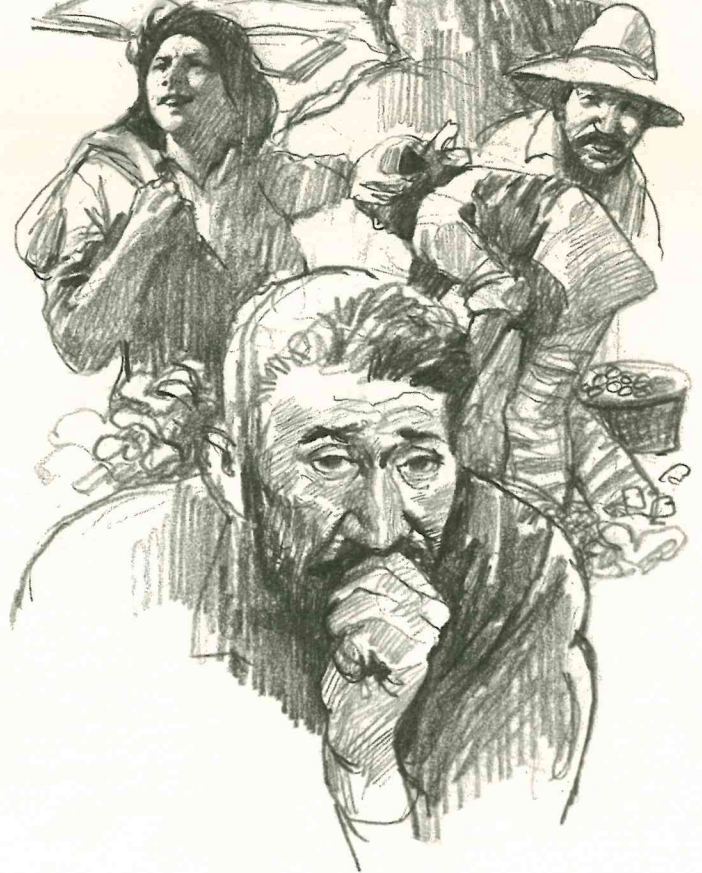


PARA UN NUEVO DIA EN LA EDUCACION: THE CHICANO EDUCATION PROJECT

Until a few years ago Alyse Dominguez, a quiet-spoken housewife who lives in the little town of Del Norte, Colorado, paid no special attention to the local school system that was daily shaping the lives of her three children—the same system that she herself had attended for 12 years while growing up in Del Norte.

“I did wonder about some things,” she now recalls. “Like why the books my children brought home were so old and worn, and why so many Chicano kids got suspended for breaking rules while the Anglo kids never seemed to get punished; and also why there were only two Chicano teachers out of forty-eight in the whole district, even though half the students had Spanish names. But I never did anything about those things. You see, my friends and I were raised to think the school knew best.”

Then, as Mrs. Dominguez puts it, “Gil and Bill came along”—and suddenly it was no longer self-evident that the



school knew best. "Those two educated us about the law," she remembers. "They took us to school board meetings and encouraged us to speak up. For the first time we realized that we had something to say."

"Gil and Bill" are Gilberto Cisneros and William Rosser, the young, energetic co-directors of the Chicano Education Project (CEP) of Western Service Systems, Inc., a Denver-based organization they started on a hunch and a shoestring in 1973. With Corporation and other foundation funds, the project has grown rapidly, generating much light and heat throughout rural Colorado in its efforts to bring about equal education for Mexican-American children.

Historically, Chicano children have received anything but equitable treatment at the hands of local public school systems, many of which have for generations practiced a brand of discrimination at once so complete and complacent that residents on both sides of the tracks have tended to close their eyes to the double standard of education that pervades their communities. This double standard not only distinguishes Anglos from Chicanos, it also sifts the affluent from the poor; and in the distribution of state funds for education it sorts out rural schools from metropolitan schools, with the cities and suburbs getting by far the larger share of dollars.

Whatever their mode, these inequities have caused widespread misery among Colorado's 83,000 Spanish-speaking public school children (about 15 percent of the total statewide enrollment). Reliable statistics are hard to come by—in itself a sign that something may be amiss—but state education officials concede that Chicano students generally score lower on achievement tests and repeat grades more

often than do their Anglo classmates. An investigation by the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) found that in Center, Colorado, where more than half the children speak a primary language other than English, 90 percent of the students who were held back were Spanish surnamed. Moreover, Chicano students starting school were academically about six months behind their Anglo counterparts, and by the sixth grade were a year or more behind—a process of widening disparity in school achievement that CEP staffers call "the fanning effect."

Not surprisingly, the dropout rate among Chicano high school students is high—according to state figures about 34 percent, or double the rate for Anglos. Even these figures do not tell the whole unhappy story, since a child must practically vanish from the face of the earth to be classified as a dropout. A student who has been made to feel wretched in school and moves in with relatives living in another school district is labelled merely a "transfer." Many such transfers are actually "pushouts" in the eyes of CEP and other school advocacy groups. Tabulations made by the project and its local allies in the small towns of Del Norte, Montrose, and elsewhere suggest that, in rural Colorado, the combined pushout-dropout rate for Chicano students from junior high on up approaches 65 percent.

Exposing the Double Standard

Thoreau observed that "it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things." How are so many Chicano teenagers rendered so unwise and so desperate? In Montrose a few years ago, some Chicano parents asked themselves a similar question. And when they inquired why, no one had a convincing answer—not the children, not their teachers, not the high school principal, not the school board. "We couldn't figure it out," recalls Victor Alires, a community leader there, "until we had the honor of Bill and Gil coming down here."

What Rosser and Cisneros did, among other things, was to legitimize the problem that Montrose Chicanos sensed but could not prove. After local school officials denied that they kept dropout statistics, CEP pried the figures loose from state records in Denver. Their worst suspicions were confirmed: the Chicano dropout rate in Montrose was a whopping 54 percent.

Their confidence strengthened by that single, unblinking statistic, the parents began in earnest to investigate the workings of the Montrose public school system and its impact on their children. What they found when they turned over the educational rock was the same old double standard that Cisneros and Rosser have been working to erase from school systems throughout rural Colorado. Now the parents began to see the connection between the behavior of the schools and the desperation of their children.

Obviously, not all the schools are insensitive; not all the



children are unhappy; and genuine learning and teaching do occur every day in many classrooms with large percentages of Chicano children. Nonetheless, the depredations of mind and spirit that many such children experience in school appear to be legion. Because they are likely to have a "language problem"—that is, they may speak Spanish more fluently than English or speak English with Spanish patterns—Chicano children are frequently consigned to a "special education" class for slow learners, there perhaps to languish for the remainder of their elementary school careers.

In too many schools, in fact, these special classes are mere dumping grounds for Chicano children suffering from a form of culture shock as they struggle in an ambience that is peculiarly Anglo. Their segregation from regular classes officially certifies their presumed academic inferiority, and the judgment often turns out to be self-fulfilling. As a Chicano sixth-grader remarked to his mother recently, "The teacher, she makes me feel dumb."

Teachers can be exasperatingly resourceful in finding ways to remind Chicano children—especially those from poor families—that their souls, their brains, and even their bodies do not meet school standards.

Item: A teacher stands at the classroom door each morning and sprays entering Chicano children with perfume—"because they smell," she explains to a visitor.

Item: A girl in the first grade is made to stand in a corner for saying something in Spanish to the teacher. What she said was, "I don't understand."

Item: The assignment in class is to draw a picture, but Jacinda tells her teacher she has no crayons. "If your father got off welfare and went to work," says the teacher, "you'd have crayons."

Such small affronts can eventually add up to large humiliations. It does not take long for the Spanish-speaking child to get the message, and then to internalize it. Whatever else these schools may teach, the lesson frequently driven home is one of predetermined self-disgrace.

Overcoming Alienation and Fear

From the beginning, then, the Chicano Education Project has had its work cut out for it. But unlike some other school advocacy groups, CEP has chosen to help children by working with their parents. As CEP views matters, one underlying problem for Chicano schoolchildren is their parents' alienation from the processes of public education. The alienation assumes many guises. There is, for one thing, the parents' natural timidity in the presence of school officials. Many, after all, are products of the same school systems that are now filling their children with self-doubts.

Also, as the Chicano culture places politeness and cooperation above bluntness and competition, the parents may find it difficult to confront authority figures with their complaints. Nor have they felt welcome in local PTAs and



other school organizations, which tend to be run by Anglos.

Finally, the parents' ignorance of budgets, bureaucratic procedures, and pedagogical jargon can expose them to embarrassments they would prefer to avoid. "The principal receives a group of frowning Chicano parents," says a Chicano leader in Center, Colorado, "but then he shows them a lot of complicated charts, and he uses terms like 'grade-level competency' and 'pursuant to our policy'—and pretty soon they're all nodding their heads in agreement and smiling."

The resulting frustration and anger that may accumulate within a Chicano parent's heart can, paradoxically, act as a further deterrent to protest. A mother in Grand Junction explains how this may occur. "When my girls come home from school in tears," she says, "my husband is afraid if he goes there he will beat up the teacher. So we don't do anything."

The upshot is that Chicanos in Colorado, as elsewhere, have been largely excluded from the day-to-day deliberations that influence school officials and determine school policies. The Anglo leadership, meanwhile, has been spared the troublesome necessity of coming to terms with the special needs of Chicano children. Of the more than 1,000 local school board seats in Colorado, only 33 are occupied by Chicanos—a figure that testifies both to the extent of Chicano exclusion and to the importance of CEP's efforts.

Accordingly, in some 20 Colorado towns with mixed Anglo-Chicano populations, CEP's 16-person staff—spearheaded by four field workers and "Bill and Gil"—has been

prodding Chicano parents to speak out on their concerns rather than give in. Depending upon the occasion, project workers have shown parents how to organize committees and mount protests; lent them the courage to confront school bureaucracies; joined them in various efforts at litigation; taught them to monitor key school programs; encouraged them to defend their children's civil rights; cheered them up when they are sad and calmed them down when they are mad; and, not least, initiated them into the mysteries of school budgets, state codes, the electoral process, and other arcane matters that bear directly on their children's welfare.

One result has been that Chicano parents are learning the advantages of persistence in the cause of their children's education. "In advocacy work," says Gil Cisneros, "there is no substitute for tenacity and doing your homework. It takes a lot of hard study and follow-through, day after day, to get the job done."

In sum, CEP has been urging rural Chicano parents to take seriously what American educators and politicians have long been preaching: namely, that the schools belong to everyone. In doing so, they have succeeded in underlining an embarrassing inconsistency between public ideology and public behavior that haunts many school administrations. As the proverb goes, *Del dicho al hecho hay un gran trecho*. ("Between the saying and doing there is a great distance.")

Hard Work and Persistence Pay Off

At CEP's headquarters in Denver, the staff engages in a remarkable mix of activities, encompassing a sharply edited quarterly newsletter called *Un Nuevo Dia*, training seminars for local Chicano leaders who are then asked to go home and train their co-workers, and a blend of diplomacy and litigation that puts pressure on all manner of officials and agencies to be accountable to the educational needs of Chicano children. The state education bureaucracy, along with the legislature that sets its policies, is a constant CEP target. Last year, for example, the project joined a group of Chicano parents in a lawsuit aimed at forcing the state to distribute a greater share of its education dollars to the poorer communities. (On March 13, the state District Court declared the system of financing Colorado Schools unconstitutional.)

Federal agencies such as HEW's Office of Civil Rights are not neglected either. The office is exhorted in particular to stop local school systems from violating federal civil rights laws. "Our relations with CEP are bittersweet," notes Gilbert Roman, regional director of OCR in Denver. "We don't relish their criticism, though we know it is useful." When Denver will not do, CEP has been known to descend upon Washington, D. C. Last year Cisneros and Rosser brought with them a delegation of Chicano parents to confer at length with Vice President Mondale, HEW Secretary Califano, and other Administration luminaries.

Still, the project's heart is in the hinterlands, in villages like Del Norte, where the educational drama unfolds day by day, with its attendant joys and heartaches. Alyse Dominguez' story typifies that drama and tells us much about the special role that CEP has played therein.

The early visits by Rosser, Cisneros, and project field workers ignited Chicano parents with a new, undreamed-of sense of possibilities. "Until then," says Rita Roybal, a colleague of Mrs. Dominguez, "we didn't even know we had the right to ask questions. CEP gave us information—and information is power."

It was not long before their new-found poise began to pay off politically. First, Mrs. Dominguez and some of her friends won control of a joint parent-teacher committee that was supposed to supervise the schools' new, state-mandated bilingual-bicultural program. Then, in the spring of 1977, the Spanish-speaking community succeeded in getting Mrs. Dominguez elected to the school board, the first Chicana in Del Norte's history to serve in that capacity. (Her father had run for the same office 10 years before—and had lost by one vote!) Finally, after a painfully strident campaign, the group engineered the electoral recall of the school board president, an Anglo who for years had been





dismissing Chicano complaints and resisting their pleas for reforms.

In snail-like response to these triumphs, the Del Norte schools appear to be inching toward a more sensible position vis-a-vis their Chicano constituency. The two Spanish-speaking teachers whom Mrs. Dominguez sadly counted in 1974 have grown to six in 1979; Chicano parents these days regularly attend school board meetings; and time is routinely set aside for them to be heard. A Chicano principal—another “first”—now reigns over the high school and, thanks mainly to Alyse Dominguez’ persistence, a newly drafted school disciplinary and dress code makes it less likely now that Chicano students will be punished for wearing their hair long, or suspended for committing minor infractions.

Significantly, the information that CEP imparted to the Del Norte group and others included a thorough rundown of the state’s new Bilingual-Bicultural Act, which requires school systems that serve sizable numbers of “linguistically different” students to offer those students bilingual programs in the lower grades. The idea is to reinforce the children’s reading, writing, and arithmetic lessons in their native tongue, on the theory that they can then master the regular curriculum more readily.

The notion is hardly a new one: bilingualism has been introduced into thousands of American classrooms with varying degrees of success. But in Colorado the technique remains controversial. For many Chicanos it has become a rallying cry and a symbol of bicultural possibilities within tradition-bound, one-culture school systems. For many Anglos, particularly rural Anglos, bilingualism has emerged as a discomfiting challenge to old, chauvinistic habits. As

one expressed it in a letter to the CEP office: “My family came to this country quite a few years ago. My great-grandfather said, ‘We are in America—we will speak American. When in Rome, do as the Romans do.’”

At the request of legislators, CEP had a hand in drafting the law that mandated bilingualism. And because some in the legislature feared foot-dragging on the part of Anglo-dominated schools, they made sure that the law required a committee of parents and faculty to monitor the new program in each locale. It was the prospect of being elected to such a committee in Del Norte that first excited Alyse Dominguez and launched her on an advocacy career.

The whole chronology thus nicely illustrates the way CEP likes to do business: first it received an invitation from legislators to help write a major reform into law; then, working with the Chicano community, it pushed for the program’s enforcement in rural communities throughout the state. And in the process, CEP identified and trained local Chicano leaders to carry on the broader struggle long after the argument over bilingualism had faded.

The Conflicts Remain

It would be pleasant to report here that Mrs. Dominguez and her cohorts have lived happily ever after, but nothing could be further from the truth. The level of conflict between Chicanos and Anglos in Del Norte appears to keep escalating, and there is no rest for the reformers. “If I was a man, they’d probably punch me out,” says Mrs. Dominguez of her fellow school board members. “I come home from those meetings with my stomach in knots. I scream at my kids—but I think they understand. I tell them that

I'm doing all this not because I love them less, but because I love them more."

Love, hate, anger—such are the emotions that stir Chicanos and Anglos alike, polarizing whole towns and investing routine educational "dialogues" with passions that transcend mere policy disputes. Wherever one travels throughout CEP territory, one senses that the Chicano parents, propelled by a new assertiveness, have penetrated close to the Anglo quick. The towns are haunted by their own bifurcated histories, wherein two American cultures have for generations lived side by side, uneasily and unequally. Now both the past and the present are being stripped of pretensions; nerves have been rubbed raw.

Nowhere has this been more true than in Center, a village of some 1,500 people about 50 miles from Del Norte, where nearly two-thirds of the schools' 600 children are Spanish-speaking. The Chicano community in Center has an excellent memory. It remembers, for instance, that 25 years ago all entering Chicano first-graders were instantly assigned to a special "room"—a dingy space beneath the stairs. That cruel custom has long since been banished, but the memory lingers, and it continues to hurt. The reason is that in the Chicanos' view, school attitudes have not really changed; discrimination may be more subtle now, but it is almost as corrosive in its effects.

"One way or another," says Jennie Sanchez, a community leader whom CEP hired four years ago as a field worker, "our children are still being shoved under the stairs."

The Center experience is instructive, because the Chicano community here, unlike most others served by CEP, has long been organized for advocacy. La Frontera, the group in Center that provides shelter and sustenance to reform-minded Chicano residents, publishes its own monthly newsletter and sponsors a wide assortment of educational activities ranging from Head Start to a craft cooperative that develops Hispanic art. For more than a decade now, La Frontera activists have been engaging Anglo officials and opinion makers in tense debate, with mixed results. A few reforms—such as the approval of a school disciplinary code that operates to protect students from arbitrary suspensions—have cheered the Spanish-speaking community. Yet every Chicano push appears to have inspired an equal and opposite push from the Anglo direction, and the animosities have grown apace (as have the Anglo denials of wrong-doing). "There's no discrimination here," assures one Anglo political leader. "I think those charges are a bunch of garbage."

Equal Education: A Long Way to Go

The long, uphill struggle of Center's Chicanos can be seen by other, less experienced CEP-trained groups as a preview of their own struggles to come. But if the Center experience is any lesson, there may be some slight hope for

a rapprochement between the two sides, now that the hurt and anger have been expressed.

If so, local historians will point to last summer as the time the logjam began to break up. That was when the school superintendent suddenly resigned—in part, because of Chicano pressures—forcing the Anglo school board to find a replacement in a hurry. Bedevilled by a half-dozen Chicano lawsuits, as well as by the HEW report that charged the schools with a score of civil rights violations, the perplexed board, assisted by the Chicano community, signed a four-year contract with an experienced and sophisticated educator from upstate New York, one known for his practice of skillful diplomacy among warring factions.

David Rossi arrived in the fall of 1978 and wasted no time negotiating a moratorium on hostilities. As he recalls it now, one of the first things he did was to meet with the leaders of La Frontera. "I asked them to back off a little—to give me a little breathing room," he says. Jennie Sanchez and her colleagues agreed temporarily to lower their public voices. Then, after studying HEW's damning report, Rossi announced to the school board that he intended immediately to resolve all the violations cited therein—"as a simple matter of justice and morality." The board then began to have doubts about its choice. "Some of the members came to me later with questions in their eyes," says Rossi. "I told them that if they wanted to run the schools, they should go ahead and run them. I'd pack up and go home."

Having more or less cleared the air, the new superintendent in Center has embarked on the risky business of bringing Anglos and Chicanos together in discussions of educational goals, reminding them at every opportunity



that "all people want the same things for their children." But it is too soon to tell whether his optimism is justified. As Rossi himself has observed, the question remains "whether the divisions in this community are so deep that reconciliation is impossible."

It is an old question but one that CEP keeps raising anew in Colorado, and by implication in the other 49 states. Our public schools have long been a testing ground for the concept of American pluralism, which postulates a national, multicultural journey that every citizen—regardless of race, income, or geography—can take first class. In effect, each generation of American parents is asked to reinvent the country, to choose which sort of society it wants its children to inherit: an artificial "melting pot" of a kind

that has brought much anguish to millions of new citizens, or a genuine medley in which many cultural strains blend but none disappears. On such decisions depends the outcome of the nation's 200-year-old quest for equality of opportunity, and they are being made every day in places like Center, Del Norte, and Montrose, where private impulses like ethnic pride and parental love have once again found expression in public arenas. The Chicano Education Project is helping both to define and to hasten that critical decision-making process. It is doing the Republic's work. ■

For further information:

Gilberto Cisneros and William Rosser, Chicano Education Project, 5410 West Mississippi, Lakewood, Colorado 80226.

What Bilingual Education Can Achieve . . .

Colorado's bilingual-bicultural program is less than three years old, but it is already receiving rave notices. "You are way ahead of any other state," Colorado's bilingual education unit was told in a recent letter from Ross P. Goldsmith, head of a Texas-based team hired by the state to evaluate its program.

Goldsmith, whose organization calls itself the National Dissemination and Assessment Center for Bilingual Education (DACBE), went on to note that he had, over the years, read scores of reports on hundreds of different bilingual programs, yet "I have never encountered a set of evaluation findings . . . that evidenced as high a degree of success as I found in the evaluation of the Colorado programs."

When the Colorado legislature passed the Bilingual-Bicultural Act in 1977, it appeared to have four main objectives for Chicano children: to improve their performance in reading, writing and speaking the English language; to encourage their school attendance and discourage their dropping out; to help them develop self-confidence and positive attitudes; and to promote more parental involvement in school affairs. DACBE gave the program high marks in all four categories, but made a special point of singling out the Chicano children's widespread improvement in language skills.

Among local school systems reporting pre- and post-test scores in reading, writing and comprehending English, 36 percent cited significant gains among "linguistically different" students, while another 54 percent reported that those students had not fallen behind during the program's tenure. The second statistic may be as important as the first, since it breaks the pattern com-

mon among Chicano children, many of whom lag by at least one whole grade level during their first six years in school.

Although Colorado legislators debate the program's virtues and defects each time annual appropriations come due, the fact that bilingual education seems to work should come as no surprise to anyone. As Jorge Lara-Braud, a Texas bilingual scholar, has pointed out, "When we deal with language, we deal with life at its core. . . . There is no other path to self-awareness and self-disclosure. . . . Man's dominion over the earth begins as a function of language, the naming of created things." An international group of bilingual experts has made a strikingly similar point: "It is axiomatic that the best medium of teaching a child is his mother tongue. . . . Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium."

It stands to reason, then, that a child who hears and speaks Spanish in the home will learn more in school—including more English—if the teacher there speaks Spanish as well, and shows sympathy for Spanish-American traditions. And in states like Colorado, where most Chicanos are American citizens, not because they crossed the border but because the border changed in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the bilingual argument carries particular force and justice. Indeed, that treaty contained specific guarantees of bilingual education for Mexican children who, by virtue of conquest, found themselves suddenly living in the United States. It has taken Colorado 130 years to begin making good those treaty obligations. ■

STAFF NEWS

Idalia Holder, personnel administrator since 1976, has been promoted to the executive staff as personnel director and office manager. Ms. Holder, a graduate of Northeastern University, joined the Corporation in 1974.

Arlene M. Kahn, formerly an assistant professor at both Livingston and Lehman Colleges, has joined the Corporation as a program associate in the area of public affairs. Ms. Kahn holds a Ph.D. degree from New York University's School of Education.

Patricia Haynes, head of files since 1977, has been promoted to administrative assistant. Ms. Haynes has been with the Corporation since 1969.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The following publications are the result of Corporation grants and may be ordered directly from their publishers:

Child, Family and State: Problems and Materials on Children and the Law, by Robert H. Mnookin (Little, Brown, and Company, \$20.00).

Handbook of Faculty Bargaining, by George W. Angell, Edward P. Kelly, Jr., and Associates (Jossey-Bass Publishers, Inc., \$19.50).

Family Policy: Government and Families in Fourteen Countries, by Sheila B. Kameron and Alfred J. Kahn (Columbia University Press, \$25.00 hardcover, \$10.00 softcover).

GRANTS

Grants amounting to \$12,166,856 were voted during the fiscal year ended September 30, 1978. This figure includes \$877,000 for the program in the Commonwealth.

Following is a selection of grants from June through October:

Wells College: for programs in practical politics at five women's colleges, \$272,200.

Associated Colleges of the St. Lawrence Valley: support of curricular cooperation among member institutions, \$158,000.

Clearinghouse for Community Based Free Standing Educational Institutions: for technical assistance and the development of evaluative criteria for member institutions, \$154,500.

Wellesley College: for development of career counseling workshops for women with Ph.D.s under the auspices of Higher Education Resource Services (HERS), \$138,450.

Wellesley College: support of the

Center for Research on Women in Higher Education and the Professions, \$100,000.

American Association for Higher Education: toward support, \$95,000.

Educational Facilities Laboratories: for a research and dissemination program on the management of physical resources in higher education, \$80,000.

University of Pittsburgh: for research on the social functions of educational testing, \$385,000.

American Friends Service Committee: for support of the Title I Parent Advisory Council Project of the Southeastern Public Education Program, \$364,500.

National Coalition of ESEA Title I Parents: for support, \$250,000.

High/Scope Educational Research Foundation: for research on the measurement of transactional writing, \$200,000.

Public Education Association: for research and advocacy on education of the handicapped in the New York City school system, \$125,000.

Advocates for Children of New York: for training and advocacy on education of the handicapped in the New York City school system, \$125,000.

Washington Research Project: toward support of the Brookline Early Education Project, \$589,400.

Martha Stuart Communications: for production and dissemination of three videotapes about parents and children, \$225,000.

NAACP Special Contribution Fund: for research and legal expenses in education litigation, \$275,000.

American Civil Liberties Union Foundation: for educational activities of the Women's Rights Project, \$152,000.

African-American Institute: for a program on policy issues in African-American relations, \$358,000.

University of the West Indies: for coordination of women's involvement in development in the Caribbean, \$225,000.

University of the South Pacific: for support of a Development Outreach Programme, \$200,000.

American Council on Education: for support of the Overseas Liaison Committee, \$140,000.

ALLOCATIONS

The trustees have renewed their commitment to these Corporation-sponsored projects:

Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting: for support, \$345,000.

Carnegie Council on Children: for the dissemination of its conclusions, \$187,750.

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Each issue of the Quarterly describes only a few of many Carnegie-supported projects in a variety of fields. Full listings of the Corporation's activities are contained in its annual reports.

Carnegie Corporation of New York is a philanthropic foundation created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding among the people of the United States. Approximately 7 percent of the Corporation's \$135 million endowment from Mr. Carnegie has been devoted to the same purposes for the people of what were then known as the British Dominion and Colonies. In the Commonwealth of today the Corporation's activities are concerned primarily with the developing countries of Africa. The Corporation's present capital assets, at market value, are about \$285 million. The Corporation is primarily interested in education. Grants for specific programs are made to colleges and universities, professional associations, and other educational organizations.

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