

Expert Endorses Bilingual Program

By LAURENCE COHEN

A professor and Bilingual education expert at the University of Hartford said Friday his research indicates that the controversial bilingual program planned for the Ann Street annex is the best approach to educating Puerto Rican students.

Perry Alan Zirkel, an assistant professor of education and director of the Connecticut Migratory Children's Program, said research for his soon-to-be-published doctoral dissertation indicates that bilingual programs in Hartford are educationally successful.

Officials of the Hartford Federation of Teachers have criticized a federally-funded bilingual program scheduled to begin at the Ann Street annex in September. They suggested it would be detrimental to Spanish-speaking children in an English-speaking environment.

"We may live in an English-speaking society," Zirkel said, "but these kids live in a sub-society of Spanish-speaking."

The student population of the Barnard-Brown School, from which the Ann Street project will draw its students, is 78 per cent Puerto Rican.

The \$175,000 project is designed to educate students in the language in which they feel most comfortable, while teaching English or Spanish as a separate subject.

For example, a Puerto Rican student fluent in Spanish would be taught history and science in Spanish, while taking English as a separate subject.

Both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking students will be enrolled in the program.

In a study of bilingual programs made in 1970-71 in the cities of Hartford, Bridgeport, New Britain and New London, Zirkel reported that students in grades two and three of the bilingual programs in Hartford and Bridgeport experienced significant gains in academic abilities in both Spanish and English.

He said no significant improvements were found in the New Britain and New London programs, probably because they were administered on a part-time basis, unlike the full-time approach in Hartford and Bridgeport.

Zirkel said the English as a Second Language (ESL) program in Hartford schools has been fairly successful, but many Spanish-speaking students were

falling behind in academic subjects while learning English.

"They're not learning English and they're not learning their subject matter," he said. "We are trying to supplement something that is fairly successful. It's not that it's bad, but it's not sufficient."

John Palmerick, president-elect of the Hartford Federation of Teachers and an ESL teacher, has charged that a three-to-eight-week ESL program is a better method of teaching basic English, while weaning Puerto Rican students away from a dependence on Spanish.

HFT President Gordon Hill claimed that it is not the duty of Hartford Public schools to provide "all-Spanish" schools for newcomers in need of training in English.

"If that's the attitude feeling of all the teachers," Zirkel said Friday, "these kids are in grave trouble."

Puerto Rican leaders, representing the Spanish Action Coalition, the Bilingual Committee and the Spanish Education Planning Committee, branded the HFT officials' statements as racist at a meeting Thursday.

"I'm not a racist and I'm not against teaching Spanish," Hill said Friday. "I'm opposed to the approach that is going to be used."

Hill said the present English as a Second Language program puts pressure on Puerto Rican youngsters to learn English, "a type of pressure that is good for the community."

Commenting on the Ann Street program, Hill said Puerto Rican students would find it "easy to keep the Spanish," and have insufficient motivation to learn English.

"I'm afraid the thing will perpetrate current problems," he said.

Hill said he would be willing to meet with Puerto Rican groups to explain his opposition.