

Equal Educational Opportunity for Language Minority Students: From Policy to Practice at Oyster Bilingual School¹

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Based on a two year ethnographic and discourse analytic study of Oyster Bilingual School in Washington, DC, this article illustrates what equal educational opportunity means for the linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse student population who participate in this "successful" two-way Spanish-English bilingual program. The article begins by summarizing the Oyster educators' perspective on equal educational opportunity, and emphasizes their opposition to the notion of equal educational opportunity implicit in mainstream U.S. programs and practices. The majority of the article then provides a comparative discourse analysis of the "same" kindergarten speech event in Spanish and English to illustrate how the Oyster educators translate their ideological assumptions and expectations into actual classroom practices. The micro-level classroom analysis demonstrates how the team-teachers work together to distribute and evaluate Spanish and English equally so that all students acquire a second language, develop academic skills in both languages, and use each other as resources in their learning. The analysis also reveals systematic discrepancies between ideal plan and actual implementation which are explained by consideration of Oyster's sociolinguistic context.

INTRODUCTION

The Bilingual Education Act mandates that United States public schools establish equal educational opportunity for children defined as Limited English Proficient (LEP) through bilingual and/or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and practices. But what does *equal educational opportunity* mean? As Ramirez, Yuen, and Ramey's (1991) longitudinal study emphasizes, there is so much contextual variation across bilingual and ESL programs that it is difficult to compare and evaluate how well particular kinds of programs prepare LEP students to participate and achieve in the academic mainstream. Researchers therefore need to look locally at particular schools to make their ideological notions of equal educational

opportunity explicit, and then analyze how those notions are realized in situated practice.

This paper illustrates what equal educational opportunity means for the linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse student population who attend the James F. Oyster Bilingual School, a two-way Spanish-English bilingual school in Washington, DC. According to Oyster's March 1993 Fact Sheet, the school is 58% Hispanic (primarily from El Salvador), 26% White, 12% Black, and 4% Asian, with the children representing over 25 countries; 74% of the student population is language minority; 24% are LEP; and 40% of Oyster's children are on the free and reduced lunch program available to low-income children in the D.C. Public Schools. In operation since 1971, Oyster's two-way bilingual program is considered successful by a variety of measures including students' standardized test scores and teachers' ongoing performance-based assessments. In addition, Oyster was cited for excellence by the Presidential National Advisory and Coordinating Council on Bilingual Education in 1986, and selected by *Hispanic* magazine and the Ryder Corporation to receive one of their Schools of Excellence Awards in 1993. Because Oyster is considered successful with its linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse student population, it offers an important perspective on how schools can organize themselves to provide equal educational opportunities to an increasingly diverse student population in the United States.

This article begins with a discussion of what equal educational opportunity for LEP, language minority, and language majority students means to the Oyster educators, and emphasizes their opposition to the notion of equal educational opportunity implicit in mainstream U.S. educational programs and practices. The majority of the paper then illustrates how the Oyster educators translate their ideological assumptions and expectations into actual classroom practices that enable the Oyster students to participate and achieve in school.

THE OYSTER PERSPECTIVE ON EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

My two year ethnographic/discourse analytic study of Oyster Bilingual School (Freeman, 1993) is based on the assumption that schools, like other institutions in society, are constituted primarily through discourse. That is, institutions are made up of people who talk and/or write about who they are and about what they say, do, believe, and value in patterned ways. It is important to emphasize that the abstract, underlying discourses within any institution are never neutral, but are always structured by ideologies. Actual spoken and written texts can be understood as instantiations of underlying

discourses, and they provide linguistic traces of the ideologies that structure those discourses (Fairclough, 1989, 1991; Freeman, 1993; Gee, 1991; Lemke, 1989, 1991). By collecting and analyzing actual spoken and written texts produced at Oyster Bilingual School, for example policy statements and other site documents as well as transcripts of open-ended interviews with policy makers, administrators, and teachers, I was able to piece together and make Oyster's abstract, underlying ideological notion of equal educational opportunity explicit. This section provides a summary of that notion.

The Oyster educators emphasize that their bilingual program provides an alternative to mainstream U.S. educational programs and practices which they argue are discriminatory for language minority students. Because the Bilingual Education Act targets Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, I begin my discussion by summarizing mainstream U.S. schools' treatment of this segment of the language minority student population. The language of education in mainstream U.S. schools is English. When students are identified as LEP, they are generally segregated from the mainstream program in either pull-out ESL classes or in transitional bilingual programs (Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991). In pull-out ESL classes, students receive ESL instruction; in transitional bilingual programs, students additionally receive content-area instruction in their native language. The purpose of these types of programs is for students to be provided the opportunity to acquire enough English to participate equally in the mainstream classes. Without entering into discussion of whether pull-out ESL classes and/or transitional bilingual programs enable LEP students to develop "full competence in English" as the Bilingual Education Act mandates (c.f. Adamson, 1993), it is clear that these programs implicitly equate equal educational opportunity with English language proficiency. The student's native language is thus viewed as a problem to be overcome. This "language-as-problem" orientation (Ruiz, 1984) locates the problem blocking LEP students' equal educational opportunities in the students themselves. The solution therefore requires these students to change to fit into the system.

The Oyster educators oppose such mainstream U.S. programs because they claim they have negative implications for LEP students. First, these educators oppose segregating LEP students in special programs. According to *The History and Politics of Oyster Bilingual Elementary School*, "the Director of EDC (Educational Development Center) pushed hard for integrated two-way bilingual education involving English and Spanish speakers. She felt that transitional bilingual education had isolated Hispanic students" (p. 2). The Oyster educators also oppose the low expectations for academic achievement that they argue characterize pull-out ESL and transitional bilingual programs. According to Señora Ortega² the principal during the first year of my study, "they (LEP students) were just sitting in

the ESL classrooms for a year and finally mainstreamed two years later with exit criteria that were for the birds. So the teachers say why should they sit there when they can be acquiring an education." Moreover, the Oyster educators reject what they describe as strong mainstream U.S. pressure towards monolingualism in English. According to Señor Estevez, one of the co-founders of Oyster's bilingual program, "they (LEP immigrants) have to find the identification of being an American in the dominance of a language and [the idea that] the sooner that I forget the old country the more American I am." What we see in these and in numerous other accounts is a general opposition to transitional bilingual and pull-out ESL programs which provide LEP students with little choice other than to assimilate to monolingualism in English.

The "language-as-resource" orientation (Ruiz, 1984) that characterizes Oyster's two-way Spanish-English bilingual program provides an alternative to the "language-as-problem" orientation of transitional bilingual and pull-out ESL programs described above. Instead of pressuring *LEP students* to become monolingual in English, the Oyster educators expect *all students* to become bilingual and biliterate in Spanish and English in integrated classes through the equal distribution and evaluation of Spanish and English languages and speakers. To accomplish this, there are two teachers in every class, one English-dominant who ideally speaks and is spoken to only in English and one Spanish-dominant who ideally speaks and is spoken to only in Spanish. These team-teachers are responsible for working together to ensure that approximately 50% of students' content-area instruction is in Spanish and 50% is in English so that students develop academic competence in both languages. At Oyster, Spanish is not a problem for native Spanish-speaking LEP students to overcome in order to participate equally in the mainstream classes. Because 50% of the content-area instruction is in Spanish, native Spanish-speaking LEP students can participate in the academic program from the beginning. And because Spanish-as-a-Second-Language (SSL) students need to develop academic competence in Spanish, Spanish-speakers' knowledge of Spanish provides them with symbolic capital that the SSL students need and (ideally) want. In this two-way bilingual program, Spanish is viewed as a resource to be developed by all students including those who speak Spanish, English, and/or any other languages. The classroom analysis in the next section provides an example of how this two-way Spanish-English program is implemented in practice.

However, the Oyster educators believe that there is more to equal educational opportunity than (English) language proficiency. As I describe in more detail below, implicit in mainstream U.S. educational programs and practices is an assumption of a relatively homogenous student body that interacts and interprets behavior according to white middle class (language majority) norms. Students who interact and interpret behavior differently are

expected to assimilate to language majority norms in order to participate and achieve in school. In other words, mainstream U.S. schools are characterized by a more general "difference-as-problem" orientation that parallels the "language-as-problem" orientation discussed above. The Oyster educators reject this orientation in favor of a "difference-as-resource" orientation because their student body is linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse. Their assumption of diversity in the study body has important implications for how the teachers organize their classroom practices.

Before proceeding to a discussion of Oyster's practices, it is important to make the abstract notion of "white middle class" or "language majority" norms explicit. The following synthesis of research in mainstream U.S. schools (Cazden, 1988; Chaudron, 1988; Cummins, 1989; Heath, 1983; Holmes, 1978; Kessler, 1992; Lemke, 1991; Mohan, 1989; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981; Nieto, 1992; Philips, 1983; Scarcella, 1992) is not intended to suggest that all mainstream U.S. classes are constituted by identical norms of interaction and interpretation. Rather, I present this brief theoretical discussion to provide a more concrete understanding of the underlying assumption of homogeneity that the Oyster educators oppose.

Mainstream U.S. classes are characterized by the transmission model of teaching and learning, which in a variety of ways reflects the assumption of a relatively homogeneous student population that has approximately the same background knowledge and that is able to integrate new information into that background knowledge in approximately the same way. Under this model, the teacher is defined as more powerful and more knowledgeable than the students. The teacher has the responsibility to transmit a standardized, Eurocentric curriculum content to the class; the students who make up the class have the responsibility to receive and learn the curriculum content, and then demonstrate mastery of that curriculum content primarily through standardized tests. One finds a narrow range of participation frameworks within mainstream U.S. classes, reflecting the assumption of a relatively homogenous student body that learns best in certain ways. The most common participation framework is the Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) triad. The teacher does the majority of the talking, and initiates students' responses primarily through the known-answer question. The classroom atmosphere is very individualistic, with students discouraged from talking to one another because such talk is viewed as disruptive and not part of the teaching and learning process. Rather, the students are encouraged to compete with each other for the teacher's attention and for the opportunity to respond to the known-answer question, thus demonstrating their mastery of the curriculum content in class. The students are then assessed through the teacher's oral evaluation of their contributions. It is also common for students to ask clarification questions of the teacher when they do not understand what is being presented in class. In

order for students to achieve in these classes, students must know what, when, and how to participate according to language majority norms.

The Oyster educators reject the assumption of a relatively homogeneous student population that must interact and interpret behavior according to language majority norms in order to participate and achieve in school. In contrast, their classroom practices reflect an assumption and expectation of linguistic and cultural diversity in the student population. For example, as opposed to a Eurocentric curriculum content, which reflects the heritage of white middle class (language majority) students, while excluding, marginalizing, and/or stereotyping the histories, contributions, and perspectives of language minority students (Nieto, 1992), the curriculum content at Oyster is multicultural. Multicultural at Oyster means that the histories, contributions, and perspectives of the (language minority) students who make up the majority of the school population (i.e., Latin American, African American, Caribbean, and African) are emphasized. And since standardized tests have been found to be biased against language minority populations (Mohan, 1992), the Oyster educators also rely on performance-based assessments that enable teachers and students to identify and document individual student's strengths.

Perhaps most importantly, Oyster's assumption and expectation of student diversity is reflected in the way the teachers organize the classroom interaction. At the broadest level, there are two major groups in the school; native Spanish-speakers and native English-speakers. The fact that half of the teachers are native Spanish-speakers contributes to these teachers' understanding of cultural differences, and to their abilities to meet the needs of their native Spanish-speaking students. For example, the sixth grade Spanish-dominant teacher once told me, "the Latino students don't know how to ask." His assumption that Latino students will ask questions of their peers but not of their teacher is a partial explanation for his use of small group cooperative learning organizations in which students are encouraged to ask questions of and learn from their peers (Freeman, 1993, pp. 219-224).

While generalizations such as this are useful starting points, there is so much variation within the native Spanish-speaking group at Oyster, and even more variation when the native English-speaking population is also considered, that generalizations about cultural differences can actually be limiting. Teachers therefore need to find ways to include students who have a wide range of interactional styles and learning preferences. Two years observing and analyzing classroom interaction throughout Oyster made it obvious that the Oyster educators employ a variety of participation frameworks in order to accommodate their students' diversity. Small, student-centered cooperative learning groups were most common. Such groups provide students greater opportunities to talk, negotiate meaning, and jointly solve problems in their first and second languages than traditional teacher-fronted classroom organizations allow. In addition, because students

are regularly organized into linguistically and culturally diverse groupings, the students (ideally) develop improved intercultural communication skills and increased tolerance of and respect for diversity (c.f. Kessler, 1992).

Not only do the Oyster students' interactional styles and learning preferences vary, but they also have a wide range of background knowledge. As the third grade English-dominant teacher described, "never assume that all the children know anything...their backgrounds are too varied." Therefore, teachers need to find ways to continually assess individual student's background knowledge, strengths and needs, and develop strategies to help students build on what they know. As the kindergarten Spanish-dominant teacher explained, "you have to know every family and you have to know every background of every child." While it is probably impossible for teachers to know all of this information about every child they teach, it is possible for teachers to look into why particular students are not participating and achieving in class in the way the teacher would want. And then it is possible for the teacher to find ways to bring the marginalized students into the classroom interaction, for example, by trying different kinds of assignments, or different kinds of participation frameworks, or different strategies to encourage students to demonstrate whatever strengths they have. The classroom analysis in the next section illustrates some of the strategies that the kindergarten teachers at Oyster use to include students that they believe may become marginalized in school.

While linguistic, racial, and ethnic differences are generally described as resources to be developed, socioeconomic class difference is repeatedly described as a problem that teachers face in meeting the students' diverse educational needs. According to the kindergarten Spanish-dominant teacher, "it's more class than anything else but here Hispanic is poor and black and white is rich." This notion of low-income-as-problem was echoed by other teachers. For example, in a meeting in which kindergarten and first grade teachers were discussing criteria for student promotion, one of the first grade English-dominant teachers expressed her concern for the low-income students as follows, "social and emotional stuff is a problem for me. We don't have a middle class here. We have rich and poor." The classroom analysis that follows demonstrates the Kindergarten teachers' coordinated efforts to include several of the low-income Salvadoran students in the classroom activities, which reflects the more general concern with this population throughout the school.

In sum, Oyster's perspective on equal educational opportunity can be understood as in opposition to the mainstream U.S. notion of equal educational opportunity in a variety of important and interrelated ways. As opposed to the mainstream U.S. assumption and expectation that LEP students be segregated from the mainstream program until they have (ideally) acquired enough English to participate and achieve in the all-English content-area classes, the Oyster educators expect all students to

become bilingual and biliterate in Spanish and English in integrated classes through the equal representation and evaluation of Spanish and English languages and speakers. And as opposed to the mainstream U.S. expectation that language minority students assimilate to language majority norms of interaction and interpretation in order to participate and achieve equally in school, the Oyster educators assume that their students come from radically different backgrounds, so they expect students to have different interactional styles, preferences, strengths, and needs. These assumptions and expectations require the Oyster educators to organize their curriculum content, classroom interaction, and assessment practices to accommodate that diversity so that all students can meet the Oyster educators' high expectations equally. The mainstream U.S. notion of equal educational opportunity places the burden of responsibility on the *LEP and language minority students* to change so that the school can treat all students equally according to language majority norms. In contrast, the Oyster notion of equal educational opportunity places the burden of responsibility on the *educational program and practices* to work in a variety of ways with their diverse student population so that all students can meet equally high expectations.

EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN SITUATED PRACTICE

This section demonstrates how the Oyster educators translate their notion of equal educational opportunity into actual classroom practices through a comparative discourse analysis of the "same" Kindergarten speech situation in Spanish and English. My analysis illustrates how students are to develop communicative competence, including academic competence, in their first and second languages through the equal distribution and evaluation of Spanish and English languages and speakers, and reveals systematic discrepancies between ideal plan and actual implementation. It also illustrates how the teachers work with students' diverse backgrounds in a variety of ways so that they can meet the equally high expectations that the Oyster educators hold for all students.

My investigation of classroom discourse follows an ethnography of communication approach (Duranti, 1988; Hymes, 1974; Saville-Troike, 1982), beginning with the macro-level notion of speech community. Because the Oyster educators explicitly refer to themselves as one "community," I consider Oyster Bilingual School to be the relevant speech community for analysis (Freeman, 1993, pp. 110-113). However, consistent with work in Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g., Fairclough, 1989, 1991), I assume that the Oyster educational discourse needs to be situated in relation to mainstream U.S. educational and societal discourse. Therefore, as the

discussion in the last section demonstrated, my analysis of discourse within Oyster Bilingual School is continually informed by an understanding of mainstream U.S. programs and practices.

The next level of analysis in an ethnography of communication study is the speech situation, which Hymes (1974) argues is in some recognizable way bounded or integral to the participants. The speech situations that are relevant to this study are the individual classes or segments of classes that teachers and students explicitly name (e.g., "Storywriting" and "Opening"). I proceed from identification of the speech situation to analysis of the speech event or speech activity (I use these terms interchangeably). My analysis of speech events, which is informed by ongoing conversations with students and teachers about what they do and why, provides a means of making the underlying norms of interaction and interpretation that guide behavior within the Oyster speech community explicit (c.f. Hymes, 1974).

I spent the first year of my study in the sixth grade class and the second year in one of the Kindergarten classes observing and analyzing classroom interaction. To increase the validity of the analyses, I also observed a variety of other classes on different grade levels. Because the Oyster teachers have a great deal of autonomy in how they allocate content-area instruction in Spanish and English, there is considerable variation from class to class. However, Oyster's policy, that students receive instruction in Language Arts in Spanish and English every day and approximately 50% of the rest of their content-area instruction in Spanish and English per week, is generally followed throughout the school. In some cases, the Spanish-dominant teacher teaches a subject one week in Spanish and the English-dominant teacher teaches that same subject the next week in English. In other cases, the teachers switch subjects/languages by the month or by the semester. Some teams work very closely together, with very structured coordination of content across languages, while others work much more independently. For example, as one teacher explained to me, there is not as much need for closely coordinated instruction in the upper grades because by the time students have completed kindergarten, they are expected to have acquired sufficient Spanish and/or English to learn content through their second language and to have learned what is expected of them in school. Regardless of the surface variation, all of the teachers organize their classes so that native Spanish-speaking students and native English-speaking students work together in many different ways to acquire Spanish and English through content, develop academic skills in both languages, and come to see each other as resources in their learning. The following excerpts from Kindergarten "Opening" in English on Friday, March 8, 1991 and in Spanish on Friday March 15, 1991 clearly illustrate patterns that I observed throughout the school.³

Equal Distribution and Evaluation of English and Spanish: Ideal and Actual

This section illustrates how the kindergarten team-teachers work together to distribute and evaluate Spanish and English equally so that students acquire their second language, develop academic skills in both languages, and use each other as resources in their learning. Based on my observations and supported by the teachers' interpretations, the speech situation "Opening" is the most formal language and skills lesson in kindergarten, and provides students the most structured opportunity to understand what it means to be in school. Otherwise kindergarten focuses on social skills and language acquisition in a more playful, less structured format. Opening is the second speech situation of the day, occurring immediately after Storywriting. Opening lasts approximately 20-30 minutes, and tends to get longer as the year progresses with the teachers integrating more skills into the Opening format. To fulfill the goal of equal distribution and evaluation of English and Spanish languages and speakers, the language used in Opening alternates weekly. One week the English-dominant teacher, Mrs. Davis, leads Opening in English and the next week the Spanish-dominant teacher, Señora Rodriguez, leads Opening in Spanish. I refer to the teacher who leads Opening as the "official" teacher, and I refer to the teacher who generally observes and/or circulates to help certain students as the "unofficial" teacher. When the Spanish-dominant teacher is the official teacher, I refer to Spanish as the "official" language, and when the English-dominant teacher is the official teacher, I refer to English as the "official" language. The classroom analysis presented in this section, which focuses on language use patterns and distribution of skills in the Spanish and English Openings, reveals systematic discrepancies between ideal plan and actual implementation which can be explained by the interaction of the Oyster educational discourse and mainstream U.S. discourse.

There is considerable similarity between Opening in English and in Spanish on these two consecutive Fridays, reflecting the close coordination of the team-teachers in this kindergarten class. For example, the same six speech activities constitute both Openings, and they occur in the same order. These speech activities can be distinguished from one another primarily by their different goals. Reflecting those different goals, I named the speech activities as follows: 1) *Opening song*, 2) *Today is*, 3) *Framework*, 4) *Counting girls*, 5) *Counting boys*, and 6) *Total*. English Opening ends with an additional speech event, 7) *Reading the story*, which does not appear in Spanish Opening. While the speech events consist of the same basic elements in the same order, there are some important differences. I begin my discussion of these similarities and differences with a comparison of the language used in each Opening. This analysis begins to reveal that although Spanish and English are ideally distributed and evaluated equally throughout

Oyster Bilingual School, English is actually attributed more prestige. Consideration of Oyster's sociolinguistic context, however, makes this discrepancy not only understandable but expected.

Both English and Spanish Openings begin with a song, which signals to the children that it is time to stop writing their stories and to prepare for Opening. This use of songs is prevalent in Kindergarten in Spanish and English throughout the day. Songs are very involving for the children, and seem to aid their acquisition of native-like accent and fluency in the second language. In addition, because the children enjoy singing, the regular use of songs seems to enhance even the few reluctant students' willingness to participate in learning the second language, and to learn content through that language.

Opening song is the only speech activity that is longer in the Spanish Opening than in the English Opening. This difference in length can be explained by the fact that Spanish Opening is regularly initiated by two songs, the first in English and the second in Spanish, while English Opening is initiated by only one song in English. The language choice pattern in the Spanish and English *Opening song* activity reflects a more general pattern that I observed throughout the school. That is, although the ideal at Oyster is for Spanish and English to be distributed and evaluated equally, Oyster does not exist in a sociolinguistic vacuum. English is the language of wider communication in Washington, DC. as in mainstream U.S. society. All of the children, including the LEP students, are assumed to have at least some exposure to English. Many of the native English-speakers, in contrast, have no base in Spanish whatsoever, and may have had no contact with the Spanish language or Spanish speakers before their experience at Oyster. English is therefore always used in the *Opening song* to signal the beginning of Opening to the children in a way they can all more or less understand. When Señora Rodriguez follows with a Spanish song, which the students all immediately join, Opening that day is to be in Spanish. The language choice is never stated explicitly to the children, but is indicated through the song and the teacher who sings it.

Analysis of codeswitching behavior in this kindergarten class and throughout the school provides further evidence of leakage from mainstream U.S. discourse (in which English is the language of wider communication and therefore attributed more prestige than Spanish) into the Oyster educational discourse (in which Spanish and English are to be distributed and evaluated equally). Not surprisingly, the kindergarten teachers' codeswitching practices show evidence of the influence of mainstream discourse at Oyster. Consistent with the ideal plan that the English-dominant teacher speak and be spoken to only in English and the Spanish-dominant teacher speak and be spoken to only in Spanish, there are very few examples of codeswitching to the unofficial language in either Spanish or English Opening. Because the English-dominant teacher does not speak

Spanish, there are no examples of codeswitching by the official teacher to the unofficial language in English Opening. The fact that this English-dominant teacher, like several others at Oyster, does not speak Spanish, but that all of the Spanish-dominant teachers speak English, is an example of the unequal distribution and evaluation of the two languages. That is, while bilingualism is clearly an asset for the English-dominant teachers at Oyster, it was not a necessity in 1993. When I mentioned this discrepancy to the principal in 1994, she said that all new hires were required to be bilingual.

There are, however, two examples of the official teacher switching to the unofficial language in Spanish Opening. In both cases, Señora Rodriguez's utterance in English, *excuse me*, was the same, and functioned to discipline the children (one instance of this codeswitching behavior appears in the following section). Señora Rodriguez's switch to English to discipline the students could be unwittingly signaling to the students that English is the more serious language. This interpretation gains support from studies of speech communities around the world in which a speaker switches to the "high" language in order to impress a child with the seriousness of a command (c.f. Fasold, 1984).

Observation of the students talking informally among themselves, for example at lunch or at recess or during Storywriting time in kindergarten, also suggests that the students attribute more prestige to English than Spanish, despite the ideal that these languages be distributed and evaluated equally throughout the school. While some students do choose to speak Spanish among themselves outside of the official classroom interaction, it is much more common to hear English than Spanish in these situations, especially among the older students. Given Oyster's sociolinguistic context, with students regularly exposed to English outside of school in the music that they listen to and on the television programs that they watch, such language choice is not surprising. When I pointed this observation out to Señora Rodriguez, and asked whether she thought the native Spanish-speakers would maintain their Spanish, she responded, "I think they'll recapture their Spanish...they'll realize exactly where they fit...but society begins to teach them that there is a difference and there is a discrepancy." However, although the ideal of equal distribution and evaluation of Spanish and English is not achieved throughout the school, it does seem that the status of the Spanish language and Spanish speakers is raised considerably. All of the students, regardless of linguistic background, can and do speak Spanish, and interviews with the students suggest that they value this skill and want to continue to develop and use their Spanish in the future.

In addition to revealing discrepancies between ideal plan and actual implementation, analysis of codeswitching behavior illustrates a way that the students attempt to negotiate meaning with each other through the two languages. For example, at the end of the *Total* activity in Spanish, an

English-dominant student switches from Spanish to English apparently to request confirmation of his comprehension from a Spanish-dominant student⁴:

- 192 T and Ss: doce..trece..catorce..quince (counting students together)
 193 diez y seis..diez y siete..diez y ocho..diez y nueve
 194 veinte..vientiuno
 195 Rodriguez: hay veintiuno (there are twenty one)
 196 S: **me me** (raising hand and calling out)
 197 Rodriguez: que pasa a ti (what's the matter with you)
 198 Ss: (unintelligible)
 199 S: **is it twenty one?** (to another student)
 200 S: **yeah twenty one**

This brief example illustrates how knowledge of Spanish functions as symbolic capital in the two-way bilingual model. The students who are proficient in Spanish are positioned by the Limited Spanish Proficient (LSP) students, as well as the teachers, as resources in the LSP students' learning. The students' switch to the unofficial language is not problematic in this Kindergarten class or in other classes that I observed throughout the school. The primary goal of Oyster Bilingual School, like any public school, is comprehension of content and academic skills development. However the students accomplish these goals is acceptable.

Codeswitching is not the only practice through which I observed discrepancies between ideal plan and actual implementation. There are also discrepancies in the skills required in the English and Spanish content areas in this Kindergarten class and throughout the school. For example, immediately following the opening song, the official teacher begins to write on the board in exactly the same format every day. Below is a representation of what the English-dominant teacher writes when Opening is in English and of what the Spanish-dominant teacher writes when Opening is in Spanish. I have provided the English translation of the Spanish in parentheses—this information is not provided to the students on the board.

English	Spanish
Today is _____	Hoy es _____ (today is)
We have _____ girls	las niñas _____ (the girls)
We have _____ boys	los niños _____ (the boys)
We have _____ students	los estudiantes _____ (the students)

The written format is almost identical in English and Spanish, and provides the organizational framework for the remainder of the Opening activities. Consistency in content across languages here and throughout the Opening activities assists the students in developing academic skills through their first and second languages, and helps them acquire their second language through content. Notice, however, that in the English activity, the format includes full sentences on each line. In the Spanish activity, only the first line is a complete sentence; the other lines include only nouns and articles. We see here a first example of skills discrepancies between English and Spanish with more skills required in English.

There is a very smooth transition between the *Opening song* and *Today is* activities in English and in Spanish, and the pattern is identical across languages. In each case, as the teacher writes the first sentence on the board, the teacher and students read aloud in unison using very formulaic intonation: in English, *toda:y?...i:s?...* , and in Spanish, *ho:y?...e:s?...* In both cases, the vowels are lengthened (marked with a colon), each of the words ends in rising intonation (marked with a question mark), and the pause between words is (approximately) the same length (marked with three periods). A similar pattern can be found later in the English and Spanish *Framework* activities. In both of those activities, when the teacher and students read the lines about the girls and about the boys, they use rising intonation; when they read the lines about the students, they use falling intonation. These intonation patterns provide unity within and across Opening activities in both languages. In addition, it seems that this formulaicity helps students memorize these chunks in the second language, which seems to facilitate their development of academic skills using these chunks as the content-base.

After the teacher and students read the first sentence of the *Today is* activity out loud, the teacher encourages the students to jointly negotiate the name of the day, the date, the month, and the year. In this activity, however, as in the written framework discussed above, there are more skills required when Opening is in English than when it is in Spanish. For example, as the beginning of the *Today is* activity below in English illustrates, students are also expected to provide spelling information:

- | | | |
|----|----------|------------------------------------------------|
| 20 | Ss: | Today:y?... i:s?... (In rehearsed unison) |
| 21 | Davis: | If you tell me |
| 22 | | If you tell me the day |
| 23 | | You have to tell me what letter it starts with |
| 24 | S1: | F |
| 25 | S2: | Friday |
| 26 | Davis: | Juanito? |
| 27 | Juanito: | [F (quietly)] |
| 28 | Ss: | [F] |

- 29 Ss: [Friday
 30 Davis: Juanito says it's Friday with aa:n? (Rising
 31 intonation-elongated to signal for them to finish)
 32 Ss and T: F

In this example, in response to the teacher's request for spelling information, students begin to provide the name of the day and the letter it begins with (I provide a discussion of the teacher/student interaction in the next section). Later in the *Today is* activity in English, the teacher also requests punctuation information.

As we see below, however, the Spanish *Today is* activity requires neither spelling nor punctuation information. Note also that although the Spanish *Today is* activity begins in the same way as the English *Today is* activity, the transition from the formulaic *ho:y? e:s?* to the students' providing the name of the day is marked by a song:

- 29 Ss: ho:y?...e:s? (toda:y?...i:s?
 30 domingo lunes? (in song: Sunday Monday?)
 31 Rodriguez: no..espérate (no..wait)

(Señora Rodriguez interrupted the activity to make a comment about a student to Mrs. Davis. When she resumes the activity in line 41, the students' rhythm is off a bit.)

- 41 Rodriguez: Ho:y?..
 42 Ss: e:s?
 43 Rodriguez: e:s?
 44 S: domingo lunes? (in song: Sunday Monday?)
 45 Rodriguez: domingo (Sunday)
 46 T and Ss: mingo lunes? martes y miercoles (Sun.
 Mon.? Tues. and Wed.)
 47 jueves y viernes y sabado? (Thurs. and Fri. and
 Sat.?)
 48 son los días (they are the days)
 49 de la semana (of the week)
 50 vamos a ver (let's see)
 51 qué día es hoy (what day is today: end of
 song)
 52 Rodriguez: Qué día es hoy? (what day is today)
 53 Silvia
 54 Silvia: viernes (Friday)

In the English *Today is* activity, students are expected to know the days of the week on their own, and to provide that information in response to the

teacher's request for that information. In contrast, in the Spanish *Today* activity, the use of the Spanish song reinforces the names of all of the days. In this way, if the students don't know exactly what day it is in Spanish, they can simply pick the name of the day out of the song.

Analysis of each of the other Opening activities in English and Spanish reveals similar patterns; very close coordination of basic skills across languages, and more skills required in each of the English activities. While other classes may not be coordinated as closely as these kindergarten Opening activities, one can observe more skills required of students in English than in Spanish throughout the school. Oyster's assessment practices reflect the same pattern. For example, because Oyster is a DC. public school, it is required to administer standardized tests, and these tests are only administered in English. Furthermore, if a student fails a class in Spanish, he/she can be promoted to the next grade; if a student fails a class in English, he/she must repeat that class. The teachers are aware of these discrepancies in the distribution and evaluation of Spanish and English throughout the school. As one teacher told me, they are working in a variety of ways to "make Spanish count as much" at Oyster (c.f. Freeman, 1994).

Providing Equal Educational Opportunity to Students from Unequal Backgrounds.

As discussed in the beginning of the paper, equal educational opportunity at Oyster means more than the equal distribution and evaluation of Spanish and English. Perhaps more importantly, equal educational opportunity means recognizing the very unequal backgrounds that students bring with them to school, which requires the teachers to work differently with their students so that all students can meet the equally high expectations that the teachers have for them. This section illustrates how the kindergarten English-dominant and Spanish-dominant teachers work together to include the students that they are the most concerned about in the kindergarten speech event "Opening" in English and Spanish. The team-teachers' marked behavior with the same low-income native Spanish-speaking Salvadoran students provides specific examples of the Oyster educators' more general concern for how to provide equal educational opportunities to this segment of their student population.

I begin my discussion with Silvia, a student who had been very quiet and seemingly uninvolved in this and other activities throughout the year. In the following excerpt from the English Opening, the unofficial teacher, Señora Rodriguez, nonverbally requests that the official teacher, Mrs. Davis, call on Silvia to answer a question. Because she is standing at the back of the class, the students cannot see Señora Rodriguez's gesture:

- 78 (Rodriguez motions for Davis to ask Silvia from behind the class)
 79 Davis: And...
 80 Silvia
 81 Can you tell me what..
 82 year it is?
 83 S1: nineteen...
 84 S2: nineteen ninety one
 85 Davis: (whispers) Silvia...
 86 Silvia (motions for her to come to Davis)
 87 (Silvia whispers to Mrs. Davis)
 88 (other students are talking a little while Silvia whispers to Mrs. Davis)
 89 Davis: OK this is what she told me
 90 S1: I know
 91 (students read aloud in unison as Mrs. Davis writes on board)
 92 S1: nineteen (begins)
 93 Ss: ninety one (follow with her)

In line 78, Señora Rodriguez motions to Mrs. Davis from the side of the classroom for Mrs. Davis to call on Silvia. Mrs. Davis' utterance in line 79, *and...* with a relatively long pause, provides her opportunity to attend to what Señora Rodriguez is saying without interrupting the official floor at all. With lines 80-82, *Silvia can you tell me what...year it is?*, Mrs. Davis takes up Señora Rodriguez's suggestion and explicitly invites Silvia into the interaction. Silvia sits quietly at the desk without really responding while several of the other students begin to provide the answer. Rather than incorporate the other students' correct responses into the official floor, which would have been the easiest move, Mrs. Davis whispers, *Silvia* (line 85 and 86), and invites her to come and whisper the answer to her. After a bit of hesitation, Silvia approaches Mrs. Davis, who leans down as Silvia whispers into her ear. Mrs. Davis responds to the class in line 89, *OK this is what she told me*, and writes the correct response on the board which the other students repeat in lines 92 and 93, *nineteen ninety one*.

Whether Silvia did in fact whisper the correct answer cannot be determined by anyone but Mrs. Davis and Silvia. What is important is that Señora Rodriguez's and Mrs. Davis' interactional work integrated Silvia into the official classroom discourse, which all of the students witnessed. The students' repetition of Silvia's (presumed) contribution in lines 92 and 93, *nineteen ninety one*, which Mrs. Davis writes on the board, functions to position Silvia as a student who knows the answer and who contributes to the students' joint construction of the answer to the larger question, *What day is today?* that structures the beginning of the Opening activity. Continued positioning of Silvia as a legitimate participant in the classroom interaction (as opposed to a student who rarely responds to the teacher's questions, or

who rarely volunteers an answer) contributes to Silvia's understanding of herself, and to the other students' understanding of Silvia, as having the right to be a legitimate participant in the classroom interaction (c.f. Davies & Harre, 1990; Freeman, 1993; Ochs, 1993).

It is essential to point out that such differential positioning of students could have quite negative outcomes. In this case, for example, calling attention to Silvia could somehow mark her as different from the other students, and possibly encourage her to withdraw further from the class. Furthermore, teachers' assumptions about students' relative abilities can limit the educational opportunities of those students that the teachers assume have lower abilities (c.f. Oakes, 1985). However, my observations of Señora Rodriguez's and Mrs. Davis' behavior with their students, supported by my conversations with them about their practices, suggest that these teachers' differential positioning of students is based not on their assumptions of students' different abilities, but on their assumptions of students' different background knowledge, strengths, and needs. In fact, these two teachers, like the others at Oyster, seem to hold more or less equally high expectations for all of their students' abilities. Because the Oyster teachers assume that their students have unequal backgrounds, they need to position them differently in order that all students can meet those expectations.

Further reflecting Señora Rodriguez's efforts to include Silvia in the official classroom interaction, in the following excerpt from the beginning of the Spanish Opening, Señora Rodriguez directs her question in line 52, *Qué día es hoy* (*What day is today?*) specifically to Silvia. Señora Rodriguez's direct nomination of Silvia is marked because she does not generally call on students, but encourages them to bid for the opportunity to provide the right answer by raising their hands. More often than not, the students simply shout out an enthusiastic answer to the teacher's question.

- | | | |
|----|------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 52 | Rodriguez: | Qué día es hoy? (what day is today?).. |
| 53 | | Silvia? |
| 54 | Silvia: | viernes (Friday) |
| 55 | Rodriguez: | muy bien (very good) |
| 56 | | hoy es viernes (today is Friday) (writes on the board) |
| 57 | Rodriguez: | muy bien Silvia (very good Silvia) |

Line 52, *qué día es hoy?* (*what day is today?*) is the first question in the Opening activity, and it occurs immediately after the Spanish days of the week song (see discussion in last section). Since Silvia is a native Spanish-speaker, she presumably knows the answer to Señora Rodriguez's question. Without hesitation, Silvia provides the correct answer, *viernes* (*Friday*) in line 54. In line 55, Señora Rodriguez ratifies Silvia's contribution with her

utterance, *muy bien* (*very good*), which is consistent with her strategy of praising student contributions in Spanish, thereby providing additional comprehensible input, which enhances the SSL students' acquisition. Señora Rodriguez then repeats and expands on Silvia's contribution, *today is Friday* (line 56). Again in line 57, Señora Rodriguez praises Silvia's performance, this time including her name, *very good Silvia*. Señora Rodriguez's repeated praise of Silvia's contribution is marked; she rarely praises students more than once.

This interaction has several functions. With respect to the education of the entire class, one of the students has provided a correct answer, demonstrating that the task is possible, and providing correct input in Spanish for the others to acquire. With respect to Silvia, the teacher has drawn on her strength, Spanish fluency, to provide her the opportunity to demonstrate her knowledge of something the others don't necessarily know. This gives Silvia as well as the other students the opportunity to see Silvia as successful. As I mentioned above, repeated positioning of Silvia as successful in the classroom interaction allows all of the students, including Silvia, to think of Silvia as an equal participant who has important contributions to make to the class.

These team-teachers are also concerned about Juanito's access to educational opportunities because they claim that he began school with much lower skills than the other students. In both English and Spanish Openings, the teachers give special attention to his contributions and progress. For example in the English Opening, Mrs. Davis' ratification strategy is different with Juanito than with all of the other students. In general, Mrs. Davis ratifies the students' correct contributions by writing them on the board in the framework they fill in together to answer the organizing question, *what day is today*. Mrs. Davis rarely talks at this point in the activity. The exception to her exclusive use of written ratification can be found in her interaction with Juanito:

- | | | |
|----|-----------|------------------------------------------------|
| 21 | Davis: | If you tell me |
| 22 | | If you tell me the day? |
| 23 | | You have to tell me what letter it starts with |
| 24 | S1: | F |
| 25 | S2: | Friday |
| 26 | Davis: | Juanito? |
| 27 | Juanito: | [F |
| 28 | Ss: | [F |
| 29 | Ss: | [Friday |
| 30 | Davis: | Juanito says it's Friday with a:n? |
| 31 | Ss and T: | F |

In this case, Mrs. Davis does not ratify the correct contribution that S1 made in line 24. Instead, she calls on Juanito directly in line 26, *Juanito?* to answer her question, which he does quietly in line 27 and at the same time as the other students. It is not apparent whether the other students heard Juanito's contribution or not. In line 30, Mrs. Davis invites the students to repeat Juanito's correct contribution in her utterance, *Juanito says it's Friday with a:n?* Her rising intonation and elongated vowel signal to the students that they continue with her, which they do in line 31. Mrs. Davis' ratification strategy functions to define Juanito as a legitimate participant who can and does achieve in class (c.f. Philips, 1983).

Señora Rodríguez's behavior is also marked with Juanito in the Spanish Opening. As the following excerpt illustrates, Señora Rodríguez interrupted the official class and invited me in from my position as observer to comment on Juanito's progress:

- | | | |
|------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| 105 | | Juanito ven acá (Juanito come here) |
| 106 | | y escribir el ocho (and write the eight) |
| 107 | | (students talk among themselves as Juanito writes) |
| 108 | Rodriguez: | (after Juanito finishes writing) muy bien (very good) |
| 109 | | (students talking) |
| 110 | Rodriguez: | (to researcher about Juanito) cuando él vino (when he came) |
| 111 | | a la escuela por primera vez (to school for the first time) |
| 112 | | en septiembre (in September) |
| 113 | | no sabía ni el uno (he didn't know even the one) |
| 114 | | nada (nothing) |
| 115 | | no sabía (he didn't know) |
| 116. | | (lots of Ss talking) |
| 117 | | qué le ponía? (what did he put?) |
| 118 | Rodriguez: | (to students) excuse me |
| 119 | | (students quiet down) |
| 120 | Rodriguez: | (to researcher) este..(this) |
| 121 | | yo le ponía por ejemplo (I put for example) |
| 122 | | si yo le decía a Juanito (if I said to Juanito) |
| 123 | | qué es ésto (what is this) |
| 124 | | cuántos yo tengo en la mano (how many do I have |
| in | | my hand) |
| 125 | | cuántos borradores (how many erasers) |
| 126 | | Juanito no me podía decir (Juanito couldn't tell me) |
| 127 | | que tiene un borrador (that I have one eraser) |
| 128 | | y y él (and and he) |

- 129 aprendió a contar (learned to count)
 130 y después le ponía por ejemplo el uno
 (and later I put for example)
 131 y le decía (and I said to him)
 132 uno y ésto aquí (one and this here)
 133 cuántos hay aquí (how many are there here)
 134 el no podía decirme (he couldn't tell me)
 135 que ésto era uno y que ésto era uno
 (that this was one and that this was one)
 136 el concepto de de de (the concept of of of)
 137 del símbolo con (of the symbol with)
 138 y Juanito ahora *cuenta* hasta el veinte
 (and Juanito now counts until twenty)
 139 *reconoce* hasta el doce (he recognizes until
 twelve)
 140 Rebecca: (to Juanito who is listening and smiling proudly)
 141 muy bien (very good)
 142 has aprendido bastante no? (you've learned a lot,
 haven't you)
 143 Rodriguez: Sí (yes)
 144 este año Juanito ha aprendido mucho mucho
 mucho
 (this year Juanito has learned much much much)
 145 y yo estoy muy contenta con él (and I am very
 happy with him)
 146 Rodriguez: OK

As the above excerpt makes clear, Señora Rodriguez's interruption of the official class activity was relatively lengthy as she positively evaluated Juanito's academic progress. When it appeared to me that Señora Rodriguez had finished her story, I addressed Juanito directly in lines 141-142, *muy bien....has aprendido bastante no? (very good...you've learned a lot haven't you)*. Note that Señora Rodriguez, and not Juanito, responded to the question that I had directed to Juanito. Her utterance in line 143, *yes*, provides an example of the teacher talking for the student. Rather than allow Juanito to speak for himself, Señora Rodriguez continued in lines 144-145 to summarize his progress and her evaluation of that progress. Señora Rodriguez's comments make her stance toward Juanito, and toward the kind of progress he is making, clear to me, to Juanito, and to the rest of the class.

Also note Señora Rodriguez's emphasis on how much Juanito had learned, and on her strategy of encouraging him to participate in the official class activities even though his skills were lower than those of the other students. This reflects Señora Rodriguez's assumption that Juanito has different background knowledge based on his experiences outside of Oyster,

not that he has different abilities than the rest of the students. Señora Rodriguez's task, like that of the other teachers, is to observe what the individual student's strengths and weaknesses are to determine how to best help that student build on his/her strengths. Of course, Señora Rodriguez's public evaluation of Juanito's progress could backfire, for example, leading Juanito to see himself as different from and inferior to the other students in the class. Juanito's active participation and continued progress, however, suggest that Señora Rodriguez's efforts were at least not damaging and at best effective. In sum, it is not possible for teachers to know in advance what strategies will and will not work with which students. It is more often a case of principled trial and error.

I conclude this section with one final example of how Señora Rodriguez strives to provide equal educational opportunities to students that she assumes come from very unequal backgrounds. Based on her 21 years of experience (in 1993) as a Kindergarten teacher at Oyster Bilingual School, Señora Rodriguez assumes that there are cross-cultural differences in how the low-income Latino parents and the middle-income Anglo parents socialize their children at home, and that these differences have implications for student achievement in school. To address some of these differences, Señora Rodriguez invited a native Spanish-speaking educational toy specialist to meet the Latino parents at 6:00 one evening to talk, in Spanish, about toys that parents can use to support their children's education at home. Specifically, they talked about games that could reinforce students' recognition of patterns, a skill the students were working on in math. Señora Rodriguez explained to me that some of the Latino students could use extra support at home which she assumed they were not getting. It is possible to argue that Señora Rodriguez's differential positioning of the Latino and Anglo parents is discriminatory (she organized no such meeting for the Anglo parents), reflecting a negative assumption about Latino parental involvement. However, my observations of that meeting, of other interactions with Señora Rodriguez, students, and parents, and of other teacher, student, and/or parent interactions throughout the school, lead me to suggest that this differential positioning is an effort to accommodate the diversity throughout the school. Through such differential positioning, all members of the Oyster community can participate and achieve more or less equally.

CONCLUSION

This paper has illustrated what equal educational opportunity means at Oyster Bilingual School, a "successful" public elementary school in Washington, D.C. Analysis of policy statements, interviews with policy

makers, administrators, teachers, parents, and students, and analysis of other site documents, enables an explicit statement of Oyster school ideologies. In this case, we saw that the Oyster two-way bilingual program, which encourages additive bilingualism in Spanish and English for all students, can be understood as in opposition to mainstream U.S. programs, which encourage language minority students to assimilate to language majority norms of interaction and interpretation in order to participate and achieve in school. To accomplish this, Spanish and English languages and speakers are to be distributed and evaluated equally throughout the school. For example, there are two teachers in every class, one Spanish-dominant who is to speak and be spoken to only in Spanish and one English-dominant who is to speak and be spoken to only in English; approximately half of the student population is native Spanish-speaking and approximately half is native English-speaking; approximately 50% of the content-area instruction is to be in Spanish and approximately 50% in English; and the students are to develop communicative competence, including academic competence, in both languages. However, because there are always differences between what people say they do and what they actually do, it is crucial to look beyond ideal plans to actual classroom implementation.

An ethnography of communication approach to analyzing classroom interaction, supported by participants' explanations of what they do and why, provides a means of seeing how the ideal plan is translated into practice. My analysis demonstrated how the kindergarten team-teachers worked together to distribute and evaluate both languages and speakers more or less equally, and revealed systematic discrepancies between ideal plan and actual implementation which were then explained by consideration of Oyster's sociolinguistic context. Perhaps more importantly, the analysis illustrated how teachers translate their assumptions about students' diverse backgrounds, strengths, and needs into strategies that position all students to achieve the equally high expectations that the Oyster teachers hold for them.

NOTES

¹ I use the school's real name with permission and encouragement of school administrators. The names of all individuals have been changed.

² Consistent with the way the Oyster educators refer to themselves and each other regardless of the language they are speaking, I use Spanish address terms (*Señora*, *Señor*) to refer to the Spanish-dominant educators and English address forms (*Ms.*, *Mr.*, *Mrs.*) to refer to the English-dominant educators. Thanks to Isolda Carranza for making me aware of the need to point out this use of address terms.

³ See Freeman, 1993: ch. 8 for extensive analysis and transcripts in their entirety.

⁴ My transcription conventions are as follows. The line numbers on the excerpts correspond to the line numbers on the original transcripts. Following Tannen (1989)

and Chafe (1986), each line represents an intonation unit. Three dots indicates a pause, a colon indicates sound stretch, and a question mark signals rising intonation (not a grammatical question). Brackets preceding words in consecutive lines signal overlap. Codeswitching is indicated by bold face. I include information about who says what to whom, loudness, nonverbal cues, and translations in parentheses.

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