



Bilingual Education and Social Change. Rebecca D. Freeman. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1998. 262 pp.

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In *Bilingual Education and Social Change*, Rebecca D. Freeman documents an impressive effort by a public school in Washington, D.C., to provide a coherent, well-thought-out, and apparently successful dual-language program. Sometimes also called dual-immersion programs, dual-language programs distinguish themselves from other bilingual programs in aiming for bilingualism and biliteracy for both language minority and language majority speakers. A critical quality of dual-language programs is their status as enrichment programs. Speakers from two language backgrounds usually are integrated into an educational program conducted in both languages. Each group's "immersion" in a second language, ideally for half their schooldays, leads to first-language maintenance and second-language acquisition while boosting academic achievement. Many bilingual programs are conceived as remediation efforts, frequently a quick fix for the limited English proficiency of a growing number of students entering the U.S. school system. As Freedman argues repeatedly, such an orientation is predicated on and reproduces views of second language proficiencies as problems, as barriers to an efficient and effective delivery of instruction in English, and as *the* cause of eventual educational underachievement among language minority speakers. *Bilingual Education and Social Change* makes the case that an enrichment orientation toward second language proficiencies and cultural pluralism can make a profound difference in the design and eventual implementation of educational programs for second-language speakers. And the benefits of dual-language programs do not accrue just to language minority speakers; in Washington's Oyster Bilingual School, native Spanish speakers acquire English, native English speakers acquire Spanish, and all increase cross-cultural understanding and appreciation and achieve significantly—from 1.6 up to 6.2 grade levels above the national norm as measured by standardized test scores.

It is heartening to read about a school that works. Dysfunctional schools have been described and condemned with some frequency, especially in urban settings. Though these sobering descriptions are a necessary part of critical research, they can sometimes overwhelm reformers searching for more functional alternatives. Moreover, Freeman resists a second tendency in U.S. educational research, the tendency to embrace successful models with uncritical zeal and an eagerness to bottle them for easy transfer to other settings. Her study carefully examines the complexities of Oyster's program, outlining a concerted effort to create an alternative vision and to follow through with a



program that realizes that vision, albeit imperfectly.

Oyster School has articulated a mission statement that clearly positions language minority and urban students as children with "the ability to learn" and "the inalienable right" to a sound educational program, and (Oyster) educators as obligated to provide a learning environment that "builds on" children's ability to learn, with respect for the "ethnic richness and diversity of the Oyster student body" (pp. 109–110). That educational philosophy takes a consciously oppositional stance toward the more common U.S. view that urban and limited-English-proficient children suffer from various forms of linguistic and cultural deprivation and that they come to school with little to contribute to the educational process. At Oyster, children come to school with different learning styles and different learning needs but also with different funds of knowledge, including a range of abilities in English and Spanish. In essence, one group comes to the school with an urgent need to learn English but also with a command of Spanish that is transformed into an instructional resource and source of enrichment for the other group in the program, the group that speaks English but has yet to learn Spanish. The school presents each of its classes with a team of teachers, one English- and the other Spanish-dominant, and a carefully balanced curriculum that ideally is conducted half in Spanish by the former and half in English by the latter. And the very heterogeneity represented by the school's student body makes it possible for children with a range of abilities to learn from each other as they negotiate learning in their first and second languages. The cognitive-linguistic challenges inherent in such daily negotiations appear to stretch the academic abilities of many of Oyster's children and may be at the root of the school's impressive academic achievements.

Freeman investigates Oyster School's policies and practices quite thoroughly and is able to provide an analysis based on ethnographic observation, discourse analysis, and a thorough grounding in the language planning and bilingual education literature. Her acknowledgment of "slippage" between ideal plan and practice at Oyster is testimony to this thoroughness. English dominance can be interrupted but does tend to re-establish itself. Teachers tend to code switch to English to deal with discipline and tend to have higher expectations and standards for English learning than for Spanish. Student achievement in Spanish is not as highly valued as student achievement in English; indeed, it is not even recorded, for the District's entire assessment battery proceeds in English. These slippages have been observed before, especially by Edelsky and her colleagues, but Freedman does not discuss the parallels between her findings and these earlier ones—a puzzling omission.

One of Freeman's aims is to "inspire educators who work with linguistically and culturally diverse student populations to critically examine their own assumptions about diversity and to consider how these assumptions shape the ways they organize their educational programs and practice" (p. 30). With the growing number of language minority students entering U.S. schools, there is a critical need for such analysis, and her well-grounded effort makes an important contribution. Unfortunately, her style has yet to



Anthropology & Education

QUARTERLY

make the transition from dissertation to a less academic and more pared down prose, and the writing tends to get in the way of that laudable goal. The book tends to get repetitious and could benefit from some judicious editing, particularly of overused transitions like "in this section" or "in this chapter." On the whole, the substance makes up for the style.

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