

# **Learning to Value English: Cultural Capital in a Two-way Bilingual Program**

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## **Abstract**

Two-way bilingual programs have the potential to promote bilingualism, biliteracy, and pluralism in minority and majority group students who study together in two languages. This paper examines how a focal group of Mexican-background middle school students enrolled in a two-way maintenance bilingual program learned to value English over Spanish at school. Evidence supporting students' choice of English over their native language came from close analysis of interactional patterns with peers and teachers in classes and informal settings and from students' explanations of their lived school experiences in interviews over a three year period during middle school. Elements of the hidden curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment policy served to devalue students' native linguistic cultural capital compelling them to use English in the classroom and within peer culture.

This paper examines how Mexican-background middle school students in a two-way bilingual program that promoted bilingualism and biliteracy came to value English over their native language. This work is closely related to the work of Bourdieu (1977a, 1977b) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) who posit that schools and other symbolic institutions contribute to the reproduction of inequality by devising a curriculum that rewards the "cultural capital" of mainstream groups while devaluing working class or non-mainstream forms of knowledge. Families from different social classes pass on different cultural knowledge to their children. Children of the dominant class possess forms of cultural and linguistic competence that advantage them over working class students in schools where the curriculum requires dominant class knowledge for success. MacLeod (1987) states,

... the school serves as the trading post where socially valued cultural capital is parlayed into superior academic performance. Academic performance is then turned back into economic capital by the acquisition of superior jobs. The school reproduces social inequality, but by dealing in the currency of academic credentials the school legitimizes the entire process. (p. 12)

Cultural capital explanations of inequality are a considerable improvement over correspondence theory (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), which explained inequality in purely deterministic, economic terms. Such theories posited a direct relationship between capitalist modes of production and schooling, which prepared students to be future workers. According to correspondence theory,

children were separated into tracks where non-mainstream students were trained for manual labor by learning docility and how to respond to authority; the children of the dominant class, on the other hand, were prepared for higher level managerial jobs by learning to choose among learning alternatives, becoming independent, and internalizing external rules. As a consequence, dominant class children left school with academic credentials that qualified them to assume managerial jobs at the top of the job market, whereas working class students left school prepared for the more numerous blue collar jobs.

Correspondence theory has been heavily criticized for its overly deterministic approach to explaining inequality in schools (Apple, 1983; Cole, 1988; Giroux, 1983). Relying solely on structural factors to explain how schools function to reproduce social inequality gives an incomplete and simplistic portrayal of a very complex process. Bowles and Gintis' "factory model" of schooling treated students as input for schools that in turn produced workers for capitalist economies without regard for what happened *inside* schools.

Bourdieu's cultural capital explanation is an improvement over the work of Bowles and Gintis, for it allows cultural elements to mediate among economic structures, schooling, and the lives of students in schools (Mehan, 1992). Students are individuals who possess differential class-based knowledge that does not have equal exchange value within the school. As a consequence, children of the dominant class who display social and linguistic competence required by the school curriculum excel, graduate, and obtain better jobs after graduation. Working class children, on the other hand, learn from their school experiences *not* to expect success, experience leveled aspirations, and exhibit negative group attitudes regarding their futures. These attitudes are part of what Bourdieu refers to as *habitus*—"the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of those inhabiting one's social world" (MacLeod, 1987, p. 13). While *habitus* is a result of objective structures, for example, a curriculum that disadvantages working class students, the resulting negative group attitudes and leveled aspirations of working class students reinforce the very structures that produced them.

While a cultural capital explanation directs attention to previously ignored cultural elements that influence learning, it may be faulted for not exploring those elements far enough. The actions and choices of individuals within the same social class are not considered and students of the same class are treated as actors who are playing out their assigned class-based roles (Apple, 1983; MacLeod, 1987). The work of MacLeod (1987) demonstrates how students from the same social class but with different life histories and ethnic backgrounds accepted or rejected the school's achievement ideology. MacLeod's seminal work highlights the weakness of class-based explanations of achievement that obscure the diversity of cultural elements and *habitus* within social classes. To more fully articulate cultural capital theory, Mehan (1992) calls for interpretive studies that document *how* the school devalues other forms of cultural capital through close interactional analysis of school practices and the interaction of teachers and students. Such research has the

potential to demonstrate how students of the same social class, but with different forms of habitus, react in different ways to schooling.

A cultural capital framework (Bourdieu, 1977a, 1977b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) provides a broad conceptual framework for analyzing how non-mainstream students' cultural capital may be devalued in traditional schools.<sup>1</sup> Within that broad framework, sociolinguistic theory (Kjolseth, 1982) is used to closely examine the interplay between different forms of linguistic cultural capital in a two-way bilingual program.

Kjolseth (1982) argues that different social consequences result from different types of bilingual programs—assimilation versus pluralistic models. His analysis heavily emphasizes the connection between minority and majority group power relations, how those relations are reflected in program language policies, and resulting language use patterns within the school and community.

Pluralistic programs include minority and majority group students, promote bilingualism for both groups, and reflect an egalitarian distribution of power among community interests. Such programs are not limited to restricted periods of time and span both elementary and secondary school. The curriculum is organized horizontally allowing for equal representation of different language varieties and cultural knowledge. In addition, the program arises from the wishes of the community and is staffed by members of the ethnic community who speak the local ethnic language variety.

In contrast, an assimilation model of bilingual education originates from powerful non-ethnic or supra-ethnic sources, does not include community organization as a component in its planning or implementation, and organizes knowledge vertically in the curriculum. Teachers are not members of the ethnic community and advocate the superiority of “high” forms of linguistic and cultural knowledge. The program essentially uses a “transfer” approach moving students from their native language to English as quickly as possible while advocating the adoption of a world standard of the ethnic language, thus preserving the status quo and existing power relations. Due to their use of heritage languages, maintenance bilingual programs are essentially seen as non-assimilative in nature.

The pivotal element of Kjolseth's work is his challenge to that traditional perspective. He postulates that certain maintenance programs follow an “assimilation maintenance” model where all the features of the assimilation model appear but where a “high variety” of the ethnic language is used as the medium of instruction. Kjolseth posits that requiring use of the “world” ethnic variety to the exclusion of the local variety promotes a shift to English both in school and in the community. Bilinguals who have differential language skills view their two languages differently. In the stronger of their two languages, they are more aware of their command of the language (ability to switch among styles of speech or language varieties). Consequently, feeling they do not have full command of the “high” ethnic variety, they switch to English, where they lack such knowledge.

Kjolseth argues that the structure of most maintenance programs and their policies regarding language use actually foster loss of heritage languages and accelerate assimilation into mainstream culture. He states,

This is to say that in most cases the ethnic language is being exploited rather than cultivated—weaning the pupil away from his mother tongue through the transitional use of a variety of his mother tongue in what amounts to a kind of cultural and linguistic “counterinsurgency” policy on the part of the schools. A variety of the ethnic language is being used as a new means to an old end. The policy of “Speak Only English” is amended to “We Will Speak Only English—just as soon as possible and even sooner and more completely if we begin with a variety of the ethnic language rather than only English.” (Kjolseth, 1982, p. 16)

The effects of such programs are not limited to language shift within the school domain but extend to the language minority community outside the school where choice between the local ethnic and world ethnic language varieties divides minority communities. Kjolseth points out that such communities are divided between a small number of persons who are in positions of power and a very large number of persons who comprise the ethnic minority “majority.” At the community level, members of the ethnic power elite have command of the world variety of the minority language and use it to preserve their advantaged position over their counterparts in the ethnic majority who only have command of the local ethnic variety. The effect of using the world ethnic variety in the community therefore is analogous to what results when it is used to the exclusion of the local variety in school—members of the ethnic speech community shift to English.

The analysis in this paper is based on an interpretative study of the kind advocated by Mehan (1992); it documents how the school devalues other forms of cultural capital through close interactional analysis of school practices and the interaction of teachers and students. It examines how Mexican-background students came to devalue Spanish in a bilingual program designed to promote native language maintenance. The objectives of this paper are the following: a) to examine the reflexive relations between institutional practices and students’ lives in school; b) to demonstrate how a two-way bilingual program unwittingly devalued the linguistic cultural capital of language minority students; and c) to contribute to the growing body of interpretive studies that document how schooling valorizes mainstream culture and devalues non-mainstream students’ cultural and linguistic capital.

## **Method**

### **Theoretical Framework**

This ethnographic case study followed a group of Mexican-background and Anglo American students in a bilingual program through their three years of middle school to obtain their views on schooling. This analysis will focus primarily on the Mexican-background focal students who are defined here as recent arrivals from Mexico, as well as those who were born in the United States and consider themselves to be Chicano or Mexican American. The study followed qualitative methods and was done within an interpretive framework (Erickson, 1986). The work of Bourdieu (1977a, 1977b), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Kjolseth (1982) is used to examine how Mexican-background students who were enrolled in a bilingual program designed to maintain their native language learned to value English over Spanish.

### **Data Source**

This study began in the 1989-90 school year in a middle school in Clayton (pseudonyms are used throughout), a large metropolitan area in the Southwest. In the fall of 1989, I gained entry to the school, established rapport, collected baseline data and did initial classroom observations that led to the selection of the focal class. The focal class consisted of twenty-nine students in a two-way maintenance bilingual program where twenty-one Mexican-background and eight Anglo American students studied together. The goal of the bilingual program was to promote bilingualism and biliteracy in both minority and majority group students. All content area classes were taught using an alternate days approach to distribute Spanish and English throughout the curriculum; Spanish as a second language was offered to students with English as a primary language and Spanish language arts to native Spanish speakers.

Interviews were conducted with the focal students and their teachers from 1989-1992. Field notes were compiled from classroom observations done an average of twice a week in three instructional settings: Spanish language arts, science, and Spanish as a second language in the first year of the study. During classroom observations, audiotapes were also made of selected classes in the three settings. Students' interactional patterns in class, those that occurred in informal contexts with peers and teachers, were also recorded in field notes. Student-teacher interactions during classes and peer interactions were recorded in the field notes in the language spoken in order to examine the relative use of Spanish and English.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this project has been ongoing and has occurred simultaneously with data collection. Working the data has involved categorizing, synthesizing, and searching for patterns to create explanations

for information gathered (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) and to develop hypotheses about what influenced students' language choice in a bilingual school environment.

Analysis consisted of two strands—analysis of teacher-student interactions during lessons and analysis of students' social interactions with peers contained in the field notes and audiotapes. Language use in students' social interactions was determined by examining peer interactions during class, passing times between classes, and before and after class in the field notes. Observed patterns of student social interaction from the field notes were cross-checked with explanations students provided during interviews on language use patterns.

The majority of the Mexican-background students in this program that putatively promoted native language maintenance regularly used English during classroom instruction and in social interactions. Evidence supporting students' valorization of English over their native language variety came from close analysis of their interactional patterns with peers and teachers in classes and in informal settings and from students' explanations of their lived school experiences in interviews over a three year period. The "politics of language"—what is gained by choosing to speak a certain language, language variety or style of speech in a given context, at both the macro level of school organization and in the micro level of classroom and peer group interaction—taught students to value English over their native language. The following will describe the program and focal students, explain how the school devalued students' linguistic cultural capital, and discuss how students reproduced those values within the peer group culture.

## **Background**

### **History and Structure of the Program**

In 1989, the year this study began, John Dewey Middle School was named one of three bilingual centers in Clayton designed to promote bilingualism and biliteracy for minority and majority group students. The school was situated in one of the city's Hispanic barrios that contains both established Mexican-background residents as well as newer members of the community from Mexico and Latin America who use the barrio as a port of entry before moving to other neighborhoods where one must know more English in order to get along.

Dewey Middle School had a student body of 780 students that was composed of 77% Hispanic, 19% Anglo, and small percentages of Black and Asian students. Eighteen of the school's sixty-three faculty members had Spanish surnames and the principal, an Hispanic female, was a strong proponent of bilingual education.

The two-way bilingual program at Dewey Middle School was an experiment by the district to promote additive bilingualism (a second language is added to one's heritage language) in both majority and minority group children. As such, it received direct and frequent input from the district's bilingual director and staff. Issues such as programming, how languages were to be distributed throughout the curriculum, the procurement of bilingual instructional materials, and inservice training for the teachers received more attention than other bilingual programs in the district targeted only for minority populations. In general, the school possessed most of the necessary elements for providing a supportive environment that would produce additive bilingualism on the part of both Mexican-background and Anglo American students.

The student body and faculty were divided into seven teams, following a traditional middle school format. Of the seven teams only one—the Olmecs—elected to follow a bilingual program of study. The bilingual curriculum consisted of the regular course of study—math, science, social studies, art, and physical education—but included Spanish language arts for the native Spanish speakers and Spanish as a second language for the Anglo students.

Students were grouped in classes heterogeneously rather than tracked by language proficiency or academic skill levels. As a consequence, the whole spectrum of language proficiency levels could be present in one class. Such was the case in science, where Anglo students who had very low levels of Spanish, Mexican-American students who had not learned Spanish at home and were studying it as a second language, Mexican students who were bilingual, and Mexican students who were relatively new arrivals and spoke very little English were all combined.

Spanish and English were distributed evenly throughout the curriculum using an alternate days approach. On Mondays and Wednesdays instruction was in Spanish; on Tuesdays and Thursdays it alternated to English, and on Fridays, either language was permissible. The rationale for such an approach is that on any given day, a portion of the class will be studying in the stronger of its two languages, assuring comprehension of academic content. Grouping monolingual and bilingual students at tables in content area subjects assured that, theoretically, there would always be someone present capable of helping others who were receiving instruction in their weaker language.

### The Focal Students

The focal group was composed of twenty-nine students—twenty-one of Mexican-background and eight Anglo Americans. The socioeconomic background of the students was working class and their parents were employed in minimum wage or blue collar jobs such as factory work, food preparation, construction or auto repair. All the focal children qualified for the school's free lunch program, a general indicator of low socioeconomic status.

The Mexican-background students and/or their families came predominantly from the states of Chihuahua and Durango and spoke a working class variety of Spanish that is characteristic of that area of Northern Mexico. All but two entered school speaking Spanish as their primary language and learned English after beginning school. Seven students in the group were born in the United States but grew up speaking Spanish as their first language. Two others were monolingual Spanish speakers. Of the U.S. born students, two were monolingual English speakers and were learning Spanish as a second language.

Anglo American students were selected for the program from a pool of students who had participated in bilingual programs throughout the city during elementary school. Students receiving permission to attend were provided transportation by the district to Dewey Middle School, which was outside their school attendance area. Student interviews showed that the quality and extent of their bilingual experience in elementary school varied greatly. Regardless of their length of tenure in elementary bilingual programs, all the Anglo-American students exhibited low levels of Spanish oral proficiency. At the end of sixth grade, students had varying levels of receptive vocabulary but were unable to construct simple sentences with subject verb agreement.

## **Results**

In interviews conducted during sixth grade, both groups of students, Mexican-background and Anglo-American alike, revealed very positive attitudes about school and the value of bilingualism, and had high future job aspirations (McCullum, 1992). Most liked school very much and felt that being bilingual would aid them in securing better jobs after graduation. Like other adolescents, they were also learning part of school involved being a member of a social group and expressed concern about the importance of developing social ties, fitting into the new middle school peer culture, and gaining acceptance by people who were “cool.” In summary, the focal students came from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds but possessed similar interests and attitudes. For the most part, the focal students began middle school with positive attitudes about learning and the value of being bilingual.

### **Institutional Practices and Students’ Lives**

Why then, given their positive stance regarding bilingualism, did they use English almost exclusively in school? As previously stated, due to the experimental nature of the program at Dewey Middle School, policy and curriculum were carefully planned. Unfortunately, language policy regarding the place of students’ native variety of Spanish during instruction was never addressed. Each teacher followed his/her own beliefs about the place of the vernacular in the classroom; as a consequence, Spanish language arts became a battleground where political confrontations regarding the value of a vernacular versus a “high” academic variety of Spanish regularly occurred.

Spanish language arts was taught by Mrs. Tapia, who was originally a member of the local community. At the time of this study, she lived in a nearby suburb of Clayton, was married to an Anglo American and was not teaching Spanish to her children. In interviews she voiced a strong commitment to improving education for students like herself and felt that Spanish language literacy would improve the focal students' chances for employment after graduation.

### *Peering into the classroom*

During Spanish language arts, students' linguistic cultural capital—a working class form of Spanish—was devalued during instruction. The teacher, Mrs. Tapia, modeled and taught a “high” variety of Spanish, which she stipulated be used during instruction. She regularly corrected lexical, phonological, and syntactic features of students' speech as they contributed to lessons that stressed analyzing the language rather than using it for communication. Often, her corrections were accompanied by evaluative explanations that placed students' vernacular Spanish in an inferior status. The following vignette demonstrates typical interactions between Mrs. Tapia and the class during Spanish language arts.

Mrs. Tapia began the vocabulary review by asking Eduardo the meaning of the word *ascensor*, which he didn't know. After calling on three other students who didn't know the meaning, Mrs. Tapia said, “*Bueno, me imagino que la palabra que Ustedes conocen es elevador, pero no es correcta. La palabra correcta es ascensor.*” (Well, I guess the word you know for elevator is *elevador*, but that isn't correct. The correct word is *ascensor*.) Eduardo turned to Armando and said, “That's how we say it in my house, *elevador*.” Armando said, “Us too” and shrugged his shoulders and rolled his eyes. Mrs. Tapia then asked, “¿Eduardo, qué pasó?” and he responded, “*Yo lo digo asina–elevador*. What's wrong with that? You know what I mean.” In exasperation, Mrs. Tapia countered, “*Tampoco no se usa “asina.” La forma educada es así.*” (You don't use “*asina*” either. The educated form is *así*.) and she underlined the word emphatically as she wrote it on the board.

Table 1 demonstrates vernacular forms that were corrected and the preferred “high” forms that were to be used in their place.

Table 1

Teacher's Corrections of Students' Vernacular Forms

Students' Vernacular Forms	Preferred "High" Form
Lexical Features	
"Yo lo hago <b>asina</b> ." ( <i>"I do it like this."</i> )	"Yo lo hago <b>así</b> ."
Syntactic Features	
"María me lo <b>trujo</b> ." ( <i>"María brought it to me."</i> )	"María me lo <b>trajo</b> ."
"No lo <b>vide</b> . No sé donde está." ( <i>"I didn't see it. I don't know where it is."</i> )	"No lo <b>ví</b> . No sé donde está."
" <b>Está</b> calor." ( <i>"It's hot."</i> )	" <b>Hace</b> calor."
"Tu lo <b>hicistes</b> mal." ( <i>"You did it wrong."</i> )	"Tu lo <b>hiciste</b> mal."
Phonological Features	
"Miss, <b>Gabriel</b> me está molestando." ( <i>"Teacher, Gabriel is bothering me."</i> )	"Miss, <b>Gabriel</b> me está molestando."
"Fuimos al <b>Triato</b> Colón el sabado." ( <i>"We went to the Colon Theatre Saturday."</i> )	"Fuimos al <b>Teatro</b> Colón el sabado."
"No he tenido nunca esa <b>experiencia</b> ." ( <i>"I haven't ever had that experience."</i> )	"No he tenido nunca esa <b>experiencia</b> ."

In response to being corrected, most students switched to English when speaking to Mrs. Tapia. They did not understand why their form of Spanish was unacceptable in the classroom and preferred to use English to avoid being corrected. Kjolseth's (1982) theoretical work posited the result of the imposition of "high" varieties of the minority language for instruction would cause such an effect; he also saw such behavior as the first stage in language shift to the majority language.

Many times, the teacher followed her corrections with comments that devalued students' language such as "Así no habla la gente educada" ("That's not how educated people speak"). Students then showed signs of incomprehension and refused to speak further in Spanish. Many also withdrew from writing when they received papers returned in a wash of red ink from corrections of spelling and lack of accent marks, for Mrs. Tapia stressed the importance of the *form* of the written language rather than the expression of content.

Students' body language and asides to each other showed that they did not understand why their variety of Spanish was not good enough for the classroom. Equally incomprehensible to them was why their fluent communication in the vernacular was criticized while their Anglo American peers were lauded in content area subjects for even attempting to produce isolated vocabulary words. Armando asked, "Why does she always tell us our Spanish is wrong? The white kids can't say nothin." Most of the group expressed in interviews they felt they already "knew" Spanish and did not understand why they had to take the course. Some expressed desires to study another language instead. One student, Carolina, even feigned not knowing how to read Spanish to try to get out of the class. When I asked one of Carolina's friends why she wanted out of Spanish language arts, Xochi replied, "She just doesn't want to speak it (Spanish)." Students' negative attitudes toward the class stemmed from having their linguistic cultural capital devalued during instruction in favor of a "high" variety of the language with which they were not familiar.

Many of the Mexican-background students in this study were in a regrettable double bind in which both their Spanish and their English were devalued. The latter occurred in the English language arts class. Most of the bilingual students who were born in Mexico spoke English very well but were at least two years behind grade level in reading and struggled with writing. Some students stated they liked Mr. Morris' English language arts class because he frequently made fun of Xochi's writing by reading her papers with pronunciation errors to indicate her misspellings. Xochi and I kept a dialogue journal for a semester, averaging two exchanges per week. She used the journal to talk about her family, school, and her future plans to be an artist or actress after graduating from high school; frequently, she composed Spanish poetry. During that semester, she never made a journal entry in English. When probed to offer an explanation, she stretched the truth by saying, "I don't know how to write in English. I can't spell."

In some cases, the bilingual students in this study received negative messages about both of their languages during classroom instruction. In Spanish language arts, the use of a “high” form of Spanish as the medium of instruction and the exclusion of their native vernacular taught students to devalue their native language variety and caused them to switch to English; moreover, in some content area subjects as the case of Xochi illustrates, they learned that their English also did not measure up to acceptable academic standards.

### *Spanish within the larger school context*

The devaluation of Spanish during Spanish language arts instruction was embedded within a school environment that conveyed English was the language of power. On the surface level, efforts were made to increase awareness of Spanish and the bilingual program within the school. As one entered Dewey Middle, a large banner read, “Bienvenidos a John Dewey Middle School”; in addition, examples of students’ work in Spanish were displayed in the halls. Beneath the surface, however, other features worked to mark the school as an English domain. For example, daily announcements were given in both English and Spanish but the English segment always preceded the one in Spanish. Furthermore, each day’s announcements ended with the assignment of an English vocabulary word that students were to learn the meaning and usage of by the end of the day. Although the school was 77% Hispanic in origin, a Spanish vocabulary word was never assigned.

Stronger clues regarding linguistic power relations in the school were contained in practices surrounding the end of the year external assessments done with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in English and La Prueba Riverside in Spanish. In interviews, students stated that the ITBS had to count more than La Prueba because it was in English. They also felt that one’s performance on the ITBS determined whether one would pass to the following grade. For example, Eduardo revealed, “The Iowa determines if you pass the year. Not La Prueba. It’s important because it goes to the State.”

Students’ perceptions about the relative importance of the two tests resulted mainly from how they were administered. The administration of the ITBS was preceded by a flurry of preparation. Months before its administration, teachers interjected comments into instruction concerning the importance of particular teaching points because they might appear on “The Iowa.” The week prior to the test, such advice increased significantly and the importance of attending school during the week of the test was stressed. In general, the atmosphere was one of anticipation mixed with anxiety for both students and teachers. Teachers made enticements to students to insure attendance and avoid having to give make-up exams. Mrs. Tapia told students they would receive a candy bar each day at the conclusion of testing if they attended and were not tardy. Every morning was devoted to testing the week the test was

given. In the afternoons, instruction was suspended while students recuperated from their morning travails by watching videotapes supplied by teachers who busily filed, cataloged, and dispatched that day's tests to the main office and prepared materials for the following day.

In comparison, La Prueba was given almost as an afterthought. As the test is much shorter than the ITBS and was only given to the bilingual team, classes were not rescheduled nor was the test given at a uniform time; each homeroom teacher administered it when possible. In contrast to the ITBS, students were not alerted during instruction about the possible occurrence of related items appearing on the test.

Observation of the administration of both achievement tests showed that the students reacted to them very differently. Most of the Anglo American and Mexican background students approached the ITBS seriously and tried to give it their best effort. That was not the case, however, during the administration of La Prueba, where most of the Anglo American students laughed nervously as they randomly filled in bubbles on their computerized answer sheets. In interviews, students revealed their reactions were not due to a lack of importance placed on doing a Spanish achievement test but rather to uneasiness about being required to take a test in a language they did not fully understand.

Ironically, student perceptions about the relative importance of the ITBS to La Prueba were borne out by a change in program policy in the second year of the program. Based on the eight Anglo American students' low ITBS achievement scores, instruction in the bilingual program was changed drastically. Teachers were directed to teach students in the language they understood best and content area courses were no longer taught one day in English and the following in Spanish. What resulted were mixed groupings of minority and majority group students where instruction was given predominantly in English. Concurrent translation (the repetition of what is said in one language immediately in the other) frequently occurred to clear up points for the Spanish dominant speakers. The program's original two-way structure that promoted the maintenance of Spanish was abandoned due to the low performance of eight Anglo American students on a district-mandated English language achievement test.

### Peer Group Culture Language Politics

The primacy of adolescent peer group associations is well chronicled in the literature (Coleman, 1961; Cusick, 1973; Everhart, 1983; Foley, 1990; Grant & Sleeter, 1986; Valenzuela, 1996, 1999; Waller 1965) and the focal students in this study were no different. For the most part, even those who did not like school enjoyed coming to school to socialize with friends. In the focal group, student social groups were drawn along linguistic lines; students associated with those they could communicate with most easily. As nineteen students in the focal group spoke Spanish as a first language, one would predict they

would speak it most frequently in informal situations. Observation however, showed that most interactions occurred in English and were prompted by values within the peer group status hierarchy that ascribed higher status to English.

Students saw English as more prestigious due to the rewards that accrued from speaking it. Within the peer group culture, speaking English gave one a shot at becoming popular. Students stated in interviews that to be popular one had to “be bad” and “be known.” The former entailed giving teachers a bad time by talking back, cursing, and disrupting classes. Such behavior made one stand out and be known to others who studied with them and to those in other teams. Students shared their opinions in interviews about what it took to be popular:

PM: What do you have to do to be popular in school?

Carolina: They (the popular ones) know everybody in school. Well, actually almost the whole school knows *them*.

Heather: What makes someone popular is having lots of friend in the school that’s in other grades and if you fight a lot.

PM: Can a bad student also be popular?

Angel: Oh yeah! It’s not cool to be a good student anymore. It’s better to be bad.

Zaida: Well bad students are popular too—like Xochi. She’s pretty bad in class and she is a very popular girl at school. So is her sister in eighth grade who always ditches school. Mostly everybody knows Xochi and her sister.

Xochi: Talking back to the teacher, not paying attention, and everything like that makes you part of the (popular) group.

Other studies have documented how working class students invert mainstream values and embrace being “bad” to gain status within peer group culture (MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1981). What has not been previously examined is the effect of working class language minority students’ peer group values on language choice in bilingual school settings. In this study, Mexican-background language minority students also saw “being bad” as a vehicle for gaining peer group status. One of the most commonly displayed forms of oppositional behavior was students’ use of English on days when classes were to be conducted in Spanish. Choosing English over Spanish not only allowed students to be viewed as “bad” by their peers in class but outside the classroom it allowed them to

*Figure 1*

increase their range of communication both among classmates and with students in other teams who followed an all-English program of study. Therefore, speaking English also led to “being known”—the other requisite for popularity in peer culture. Figure 1 illustrates student peer groups that were defined by bilingual language proficiency or language preference and how students communicated within and across groups.

Examination of students’ language proficiency (19 with Spanish proficiency versus 10 who spoke only English) would suggest greater use of Spanish; such was not the case because bilingual students grouped further by language preference. Observation and teacher ratings revealed that 11 of the 17 bilingual students preferred to speak English. An examination of the peer group affiliation of students who were named as being “popular” by their peers showed that the popular students, both male and female, were English-preferring bilinguals. When asked if it were possible to be popular and only know Spanish, Alicia responded, “Well, I guess you could but it would be hard. Like if you only spoke Spanish, you’d only be popular with the kids who just spoke Spanish and there aren’t that many.”

Everhart (1983) discussed the importance of socializing during school hours and the opportunities provided by science for such activities for junior high school age students. This was borne out at Dewey Middle School, where the more open structure of science with its emphasis on hands-on activities and projects gave the focal students increased opportunities for getting to know and become “known” by their peers. The English preferring and monolingual English speakers all interacted about the day’s occurrences in English as they worked on projects. While the Spanish dominant and Spanish preferring bilinguals spoke in Spanish as they did their assignments, their interactions generally were not part of most mainstream peer exchanges. They always remained on the sidelines and generally depended on Xochi, a Spanish preferring bilingual, to translate for them.

The following example demonstrates how students’ predilection for using English among themselves during science at times even affected language use during instruction.

Sonia, an English preferring bilingual had passed most of the hour discussing in English the relative merits of the school adopting a student dress code with her friends. While they were supposed to have completed a project on flight, they were only in its initial stages. After realizing the hour had almost elapsed, Sonia asked Mr. Montoya, the science teacher, if they would have more time to complete it the next day. Mr. Montoya responded that it was a Spanish day, which implicitly meant that the question was to be repeated in Spanish. After persisting in asking the question in English several times, Sonia laughed and said, “Hey, Mister, bilingual means English.”

Further evidence that students valued English over Spanish appeared in the greater use of English language materials in the science classroom. Students

were always able to choose between Spanish or English versions of their science texts, handouts, and worksheets and chose English versions with greater frequency. Of the twenty-nine students in science, an average of only five students chose Spanish worksheets on the days where such data were recorded. Their attitudes toward non work-related literacy materials was much the same. For example, as a reward for having finished their work early, Mr. Montoya told José and Carlos they could be the first ones to read the new books he had just put on the reading table by the door. They excitedly jumped up and raced over to inspect them. José picked up a book and dropped it disgustedly and said, “Oh man, these books are in Spanish! We don’t want to read them. They’re dumb.” Carlos said, “Mister, can’t you give us something better to read?” The boys were both English preferring bilinguals who were named by their peers as being popular.

In summary, peer group culture placed higher value on English than their native language and associated the former with popularity. The pull of peer group culture was demonstrated by the number of bilingual students (11 of 17) who preferred to speak English rather than Spanish. Classes with open structures such as science were characterized by high levels of English usage because they afforded students many opportunities to socialize and cultivate peer group relationships.

## **Discussion**

I contend the underlying reasons these Mexican-background students used English primarily at school are best explained through sociolinguistic research on language maintenance and shift (Kjolseth, 1982) and critical theory perspectives (Bourdieu, 1977, 1977b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The sociolinguistic framework provided by Kjolseth very accurately describes what transpired in the two-way bilingual program in this study where the program was maintenance in name only and actually closely approximated the assimilation maintenance model of bilingual education. The program originated from the wishes of the district, rather than the ethnic community, and was an experiment to promote bilingualism and pluralism. Like many such programs, instead of being an alternative form of education, it adopted the traditional curriculum and standardized forms of assessment that were then duplicated in Spanish. A “high” variety of Spanish was used during Spanish language arts that caused students to switch to English in oral communication with the teacher and to resist written assignments. Interestingly, the teacher Mrs. Tapia, was of the same ethnic group as her students but did not use the local vernacular during instruction. She held very elitist views regarding the superiority of the world standard variety of Spanish and believed it was necessary for success. She felt that by imposing the same “high” variety of Spanish she had learned during college as the medium of instruction in her classes, she was increasing students’ chances for success. Her efforts were well meaning, but actually contributed to abandonment of the native language during class and a shift to English.

Kjolseth's theoretical framework explains what was at the heart of students' reluctance to use Spanish in Spanish language arts. It also explains the attitudes of Mrs. Tapia who is a member of the language minority elite. As a teacher, she achieved a position of status that she, in part, attributed to her acquisition of a "superior" form of her native language. In turn, she felt obligated to help her students overcome what she saw as the drawbacks that accrued to speaking the local variety of Spanish. What is not explained by this sociolinguistic framework is why students who were native speakers of Spanish chose to speak English during social interactions. A critical cultural capital explanation not only answers that question but also provides a broader, more inclusive framework to explain all of the data in this study. Kjolseth's framework—a framework that emphasizes minority and majority group power relations and explains how non-mainstream linguistic cultural capital is devalued in school and attendant results within the ethnic community—is easily subsumed under a cultural capital explanation.

Although the program at Dewey Middle School was instituted to promote bilingualism and biliteracy for minority and majority group students, asymmetrical power relations within the school and elements of the "hidden curriculum" taught these language minority students to value English over their native language. Through both structural and cultural elements in the school, the focal students learned that English, not Spanish, was the language of power. Furthermore, they also quickly learned that their linguistic cultural capital, a working class variety of Spanish, could not be used during Spanish language arts where a "high" variety of Spanish was imposed as the medium of instruction.

Hegemony refers to a form of ideological control in which dominant beliefs, values, and social practices are produced and distributed throughout a range of social institutions such as schools, the family, mass media, and trade unions (Giroux, 1983, p. 94). Within the school, hegemony results from asymmetrical power relations in which middle and upper class students with social and linguistic competence matching the requirements of the curriculum are advantaged over working class students who possess different cultural and linguistic knowledge.

One institutional hegemonic process is language domination. Darder (1991) argues that the process of language domination first appears when language minority students' voices are silenced by values that teach them to devalue their native language variety. Later, traditional literacy practices place students in subordinate roles thereby completing the process.

Language domination has occurred in many forms in American schools. At times, languages other than English have been banned through justifications from psychological research that suggested their use retards learning (Anastasi & Cordova, 1953; Ramirez & Castañeda, 1974; Smith 1939; Terman 1916). The present day English Only movement is another form of language domination. It is fueled by xenophobic fears regarding the changing composition of the country and has striven to limit the use of non-English languages in schools as well as

in the public sphere. A third example has occurred in the area of bilingual education, where government funding is limited to transitional programs where the native language is used for two or three years and language minority students are then placed in English only instruction. This study presents empirical evidence to support Kjolseth's theory that in some instances, maintenance programs do promote language shift.

At Dewey Middle School, the imposition of a "high" variety of Spanish was a form of language domination that taught students their vernacular Spanish was inferior. To use MacLeod's metaphor, students did not participate in Spanish language arts because their linguistic cultural capital (working class Spanish) was not accepted at the trading post. Other factors such as standardized testing and the importance given to English within the school, made students believe that English was the language of power. Those values were then reproduced within the peer group culture where students gained status by speaking English in order to "be known." Having opted out of classroom competition, they willingly competed for status within their peer groups. Those values formed part of the habitus of the middle school culture, with older siblings passing on peer group norms to younger brothers and sisters as they entered sixth grade. One of the reasons Xochi was one of the most popular sixth graders was that her older sister in eighth grade taught her by example, the two cardinal rules for popularity—"be bad" and "be known." Additionally, she learned that speaking English was the fastest track to becoming popular.

The question of Mrs. Tapia's beliefs about what kind of Spanish should be used in the classroom is also easily understood within a cultural capital explanation. Being a teacher meant that she was a successful product of traditional schooling. She had accepted the achievement ideology of the school, excelled, and in the process of becoming a Spanish teacher internalized the value that being "educated" meant speaking a "high" variety of Spanish. In her present role, she reproduced those values in her own classroom where she frequently admonished the use of the vernacular by saying, "*No se dice así. Dame la forma educada.*" ("That's not how it's said. Give me the *educated* form.") While well-meaning, such comments unwittingly contributed to the devaluation of students' linguistic cultural capital and promoted the use of English.

Whose standard and to what end?

Darder (1991) calls for policy that does not lead to language domination of language minority students. She points to the folly of insisting on the use of "standard" English to the exclusion of other varieties during instruction and cautions that solely adopting language minority students' native language will not increase their voice. Students should be able to use their native language varieties to express themselves, to become literate, and to use as a key to learning other language varieties in their first and second languages. This study has shown the importance of developing language policy within

bilingual programs that includes the native vernacular as a base for learning not only academic material but as a resource to help students explore their own personal histories and identities. Teaching students their native language is inferior reinforces the status quo and entrenches existing power structures. Furthermore, when students are taught to devalue their spoken vernacular through teaching practices that impose the “high” ethnic language variety as the medium of instruction, students switch to English. As noted by Kjolseth (1982), such a shift to English with the school domain is often the precursor of a general trend of language shift within minority communities.

Kjolseth points out that what are commonly referred to as school “policies” are in reality “cultural politics.” The former refers to decisions made by professionals (administrators, curriculum developers, etc.); the latter refers to a process where members of the lay ethnic community have power in the decision making and can work toward rearranging structural asymmetries in the educational system. The program at Dewey Middle School had no lay ethnic community members in decision making positions, and while espousing goals of language maintenance for the minority community, unwittingly created conditions that caused students to switch to English at school.

### Significance of the study

The results of this study are significant because they add to the literature of interpretative studies that document how non-mainstream students’ linguistic cultural capital is devalued through schooling. Studies of this type make the work of Bourdieu (1977a, 1977b) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) more than simply suggestive theory. Through close examination of the interaction of students and teachers followed by interviews, it was possible to determine why language minority students chose to speak English over their native language. It has also bridged the gap between structural versus cultural theories of inequality by demonstrating how the two interact. Structural features from the school where English was the language of power, in turn, became constraining to students who reproduced the same values within their peer group. The use of English within peer group culture allowed students to gain status and become popular.

On another level, this study has supplied empirical data to support Kjolseth’s theory regarding the effect of assimilation maintenance forms of bilingual education and language shift within the school domain. This is part of the process of “subtractive schooling” (Valenzuela, 1999; Olsen, 1997) whereby immigrant students lose their native language and culture through schooling. I contend it has also shown the complementarity of the sociolinguistic and cultural capital frameworks for explaining how the misuse of minority languages can unwittingly have very deleterious effects on language minority students and ultimately their communities who wish to maintain their native language and culture.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>For critical analyses of schools and classrooms that document the devaluing of non-mainstream students' cultural capital see Willis (1981); Everhart (1983); Giroux (1983); Carnoy & Levin (1985); McLaren (1986); MacLeod (1987); Foley (1990).