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“Like Everybody Else”: Equalizing Educational Opportunity for English Language Learners

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Equal educational opportunity for all students has long been a goal of public education in the United States. Realizing equality of educational opportunity for English language learners (ELLs), however, has proven to be a difficult task. This article examines 1 high school community's perception of educational opportunity and its approach to equalizing it. The findings reveal a community-wide endorsement of a policy of equal treatment for equalizing educational opportunity. This policy of difference blindness, however, was found to produce inequities for ELLs in at least 2 ways: restricted access to course content and inaccurate assessment and grading. Although teacher participants recognized inequities, they considered them temporary and tolerable. As educational opportunity was accessible only through English, equal treatment, which was perceived to speed English acquisition, was viewed to be the most effective approach for equalizing opportunity. Equality of educational opportunity at the school site, therefore, required ELLs to be normalized through linguistic assimilation, and an ideology of difference blindness through difference erasure was evident. Implications include the need for educational institutions to rethink approaches to equalizing opportunity and a call for reenvisioning educational opportunity as a participatory concept.

Equality of educational opportunity has long been central to the mission of public schooling in the United States. In an overview of the history of U.S. public schools, Deschenes, Cuban, and Tyack (2001) observed that common-school proponents in the early 19th century viewed a proper educational system to be “one that mixed together all the people in a free and public institution, [and] could provide equality of educational opportunity that would lead in turn to fair competition in the quest for achievement in later life” (pp. 529–530). Our focus on equality of educational opportunity remains undimmed in U.S. schools

today, where standards-based reforms, built on a platform of equalizing educational opportunity through high academic standards for all students, have been adopted nationwide (see U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Although equal educational opportunity, in principle, seems to have positive implications for English language learners (ELLs), research is needed to document its real classroom effects. This qualitative case study, therefore, reveals how three teachers in U.S. public schools implement their versions of equality of educational opportunity.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Lau v. Nichols, the Lau Remedies, and the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA) of 1974 are unanimous in their call for the equalization of educational opportunity for students of limited English proficiency. The majority decision in the Lau case states, "There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). Likewise, the EEOA asserts that educational institutions must "take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students." Yet the struggle to realize the objective continues in U.S. public schools today, where approaches to achieving equalized opportunity are characterized by "dueling philosophies" (Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003, p. 105) of inclusion and separation, universalism and differentiation.

Educational opportunity may best be described as a collection of opportunities extended to students throughout their enrollment in public school. Kenneth Howe (1997) explains that "having and exercising an educational opportunity can be understood only within a context of choice, the features of which are determined by the interaction between individuals and social conditions" (p. 32). In spite of the situated nature of educational opportunities, attempts to define and measure opportunity must be undertaken to ensure that all students receive adequate and appropriate schooling.

Educational opportunity has largely been thought of in terms of equality of educational outcome, which, in turn, has been measured primarily through parity in graduation rates, test scores, dropout rates, and college admittance. Equality of educational outcome, however, is not the sole measure of educational opportunity. Other indicators that have been used to gauge educational opportunity include universal access to school and equitable school financing. Each of these measures may indicate that some degree of educational opportunity has been

achieved, but no single indicator can be held as proof that opportunity has been equalized. Universal access to schooling serves as an example.

Universal access to schooling is fundamental to the equalization of educational opportunity (Petronicolos & New, 1999). In spite of challenges such as Proposition 187, which would have barred undocumented children from public schools in California, access to school is virtually universal in the United States today (McGroarty, 2002). Access to schooling, however, does not ensure that educational opportunity has been equalized. The disproportionate number of linguistically and culturally diverse students who fail in school, drop out, or get placed in low-track or special education courses suggests that merely having access to schooling is an inadequate measure of educational opportunity (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). "Having an opportunity merely to undergo X does not constitute a real opportunity, a good chance of success (but not necessarily a guarantee) must be present in order for a real opportunity to exist" (Howe, 1997, p. 19). Educational opportunity can only be considered real if students are also offered the means to obtain success.

APPROACHES TO EQUALIZING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Two basic approaches to equalizing educational opportunity have dominated policy in the United States in the 20th century: differentiation and universalism (Howe, 1997). Differentiation matches schooling to students' individual needs, and universalism standardizes schooling to meet the needs of all students collectively. Although their strategies differ, the two approaches share the common objective of equalizing educational opportunity.

Differentiation

A differentiated approach to schooling provides instruction according to students' individual needs. "Persons who need educational resources cannot be said to have been treated with equity on receiving an equal share, when what is needed is a share equal to their need" (Gordon, 1999, p. 46). In the case of ELLs, differentiated instruction is typically designed to raise students to grade level in language proficiency through programs such as ESL or transitional models of bilingual education. Historically, separation of the special needs population has accompanied differentiation (see Platt et al., 2003). There are, however, instances of

differentiated programs that occur inclusively, such as push-in ESL, where ESL specialists work with ELLs in the general education classroom.

Although the intent of differentiation is to equalize educational opportunity, critics point out that differentiated schooling has a history of failing to achieve parity for linguistically and culturally diverse students (Deschenes et al., 2001; Nieto, 2002; Valdes, 2001; Watras, 2000). Perhaps contributing to this failure is the deficit perspective of learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds that some differentiated programs adopt. This deficit perspective is evident in some of the labels given to learners, labels that include "weaker members of society" (Gordon, 1999, p. 124) and "'underdogs' [who] compete against their more fortunate peers" (Fritzberg, 2000, p. 65). From this perspective, learners from nondominant language and culture groups are viewed as requiring compensation for their faulty backgrounds. Differentiated instruction becomes a method for retraining students to better fit their school, and students who have resisted retraining or who could not equip themselves quickly enough will likely be blamed for their own, rather than their school's, failure (Deschenes et al.).

Universalism

Universalism, an approach identified by the equal treatment of all students, has also received criticism for failing to equalize educational opportunity. Critics charge that universalism does not recognize important differences in students, in the schools in which they learn, and in the communities in which they live (Cooney & Akintunde, 1999; Deschenes et al., 2001; Larson & Ovando, 2001; McCarthy, 1995; McLaren, 1997; McNeil, 2000; Platt et al., 2003; Olsen, 1997; Sleeter, 1995). Blindness to these differences may perpetuate, even exacerbate, inequities.

Difference blindness is an inclusive term Larson and Ovando (2001) use to expand *color blindness*, which is a construct most commonly associated with a refusal to recognize or signify racial and ethnic differences (Lewis, 2001; McLaren, 1997). Color blindness, Peter McLaren writes, "is a concept that *symmetrizes* relations of power and privilege and flattens them out so that they appear symmetrical or equivalent" (p. 13). In her ethnographic study of a California high school, Laurie Olsen (1997) met many color-blind teachers who denied seeing racial or ethnic differences. "I don't see color. None of us really do, we just see all our students as the same," stated one participant (p. 180). Larson and Ovando argue that educators can be blind to more than just color, and I adopt their use of difference blindness to include blindness to differences in culture, language, gender, and class in addition to race and ethnicity.

In an ideology of difference blindness, a neutral image of students, free of social difference distinctions, is advanced in schools and other public institutions to ensure that everyone is treated equally, ergo fairly (Larson & Ovando, 2001; McLaren, 1997). Proponents argue that treating students equally in all aspects of education creates a color-free, difference-free environment, a level plane on which all students have equal access to educational opportunity. In other words, it is believed that "through color-blind practices, institutions can best avoid discriminatory policies and practices, protect equal rights, and ensure uniform access to entitlements" (Larson & Ovando, pp. 64–65). Universalism, as a difference-blind practice, is employed to "prevent inequity [and] bias" (p. 65).

The feasibility of universalism to enact equality, however, has been questioned, in large part because the approach presumes that differences have already been neutralized and that power differentials can no longer be linked to differences in class, gender, race, ethnicity, or language. Critical multiculturalists have argued that this is simply not the case, that differences do matter and that schools and other public institutions, as sites of the (re)production of society's hierarchies, continue to striate and be striated by power differentials along social difference lines (Larson & Ovando, 2001; Lewis, 2001; McLaren, 1997; Olsen, 1997). Lewis, for example, found that a rhetoric of difference blindness merely "mask[ed] an underlying reality of racialized practice and color-conscious understanding" (p. 799) in her yearlong study of an almost all white suburban elementary school. Although many administrators, educators, and students in Lewis's study insisted that difference did not matter, their actions and the school's policies and procedures belied the assertion. The recent trend toward inclusive education for ELLs, in which students are rapidly mainstreamed out of ESL or bilingual courses, raises the question of whether the equal treatment of ELLs through inclusion is an extension of difference-blind practice or a truly equitable way to equalize educational opportunity. Platt et al. (2003) caution, "If the school ignores the linguistic and cultural diversity that English language learners bring, then the goals of inclusive education are subverted" (p. 125).

As the work of Lewis and other critical multiculturalists suggests, the equalization of educational opportunity requires an approach that neither assimilates nor structurally separates culturally and linguistically diverse students (Deschenes et al., 2001; Larson & Ovando, 2001; McLaren, 1997; Nieto, 2002; Platt et al., 2003; Sleeter, 1995; Valdes, 2001). Such an approach would "accept and affirm the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect" (Nieto, p. 29).

In this article, I examine how one high school and three of its teachers viewed and attempted to equalize educational opportunity for ELLs. I identify community-wide policies of universalism that pervaded the school setting and probe the complex interplay between the assumption that equal treatment resulted in equalized educational opportunity; teachers' recognition that, in practice, equal treatment produced inequities; and the community's continued commitment to equal treatment.

THE STUDY

The data and findings reported here are drawn from a yearlong study of secondary teachers' attitudes and perceptions of the inclusion of ELLs in mainstream, English-medium classes. Although qualitative and quantitative methods were used (see Reeves, 2002), this article describes only the results obtained from the qualitative data analysis. I spent 1 year in four teachers' classrooms gathering detailed information on their experiences with ELLs through interviews, observations, field notes, and document collection. The data and findings discussed in this article are drawn primarily from my work with three of the teachers involved in the qualitative inquiry. Two research questions guided my analysis of the data for this report: (a) How is equality of educational opportunity viewed, approached, and measured in this school and in the classrooms of the participants? (b) What steps, if any, do the school and these teachers take to equalize educational opportunity for ELLs?

The School Setting

Eaglepoint High School, a school of just over 2,000 students in an affluent suburb of a mid-sized southeastern U.S. city, is growing in cultural and linguistic diversity. In the 2001–2002 school year, approximately 10% of Eaglepoint High School's students were identified as culturally or linguistically diverse, a marked increase from decades past, when more than 95% of the school was white and native English speaking (NES). Nevertheless, the majority of students at the time of the study were white (90.5%) and NES (98%), and white NES teachers made up the majority of the faculty, with 99% of teachers reportedly NES. Seventy-two percent of teachers reported they had not attained more than a beginning level of proficiency in an L2. For more complete demographic information of the teachers at the research site, see Appendix A.

During the year of this study, 32 students at Eaglepoint were identified as non-English-language background (NELB). Of these students, 14

attended ESL classes. The remaining 18 students had either tested out of ESL or, in rare cases, the students' parents had refused ESL services. Eaglepoint parents who felt their student did not benefit from ESL were allowed to remove their child from the class, though this practice was discouraged by the ESL teachers and school administrators. ELLs came from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and their family members worked at international corporations, owned small businesses, and worked in restaurants. Several ELLs were refugees whose families were sponsored by local churches. According to Eaglepoint's ESL teacher, Linda, parents of ELLs were generally supportive of the school's language and academic policies. Professional parents, in particular, were reportedly pleased with Eaglepoint's reputation as an academically rigorous school. Although no native language group composed a majority, most students spoke one of three L1s: Japanese, Spanish, or Vietnamese.

Although the number of linguistically diverse students at the school was less than 2%, Eaglepoint, like the other 11 high schools in the school district, had experienced a rapid rise in students speaking a native language other than English in the last decade. The population of nonnative-English-speaking students more than doubled districtwide from 1990 to 2000. Most teachers (70%) had experienced the inclusion of an ELL in their classrooms.

Because of students' consistently high achievement on district, state, and national standardized tests, Eaglepoint High School was designated an exemplary school by its state board of education. The school had a reputation of being the best high school in the district in graduation rates, college acceptance rates, and test scores. In recent years 90% of the graduating class pursued postsecondary education at the university, college, or community college level. ELLs at Eaglepoint were somewhat less successful on these measures of educational outcome, particularly on standardized testing scores. Nonetheless, no ELLs dropped out in the 2 years prior to this study, and three quarters of ELLs regularly attended college, typically a community college, after graduation. Eaglepoint administrators, teachers, parents, and students took pride in their school's tradition of high academic achievement.

Tolerance and Equal Treatment

Eaglepoint fit the profile of a school that tolerated language diversity, as described by Sonia Nieto (2002). Nieto proposes four levels of school support for diversity: tolerance, acceptance, respect, and affirmation, solidarity, and critique. "The 'tolerant' school accepts differences but only if they can be modified. Thus, they are accepted but because the ultimate goal is assimilation, differences in language and culture are

replaced as quickly as possible" (p. 262). A tolerant school, like Eaglepoint, acknowledges the presence of diversity, but unlike at a school at the fourth level—affirmation, solidarity, and critique—differences are not embraced or accepted as "legitimate vehicles for learning" (p. 269).

Language diversity was acknowledged at Eaglepoint. ELLs were identified and offered ESL courses, but languages other than English, as spoken by nonnative English speakers, were not accepted as legitimate vehicles for learning or demonstrating content knowledge. Academic success and subsequent access to educational opportunity were predicated on natively like English proficiency, and a variation on difference blindness, one that recognized but worked to erase difference, was evident in the school community. In other words, language difference lacked saliency at Eaglepoint, and policies that implicitly or explicitly endorsed the equal treatment of all students in placement, curriculum, instruction, and assessment, regardless of language background, pervaded the institutional structure. Two examples of such policies are grade modification and end-of-course (EOC) testing.

Grade modification was a reporting system developed as a grading alternative for special education students at Eaglepoint, and no changes were made to the system of grade modification when it began to be applied to ELLs in the 1990s. A modified grade appeared on students' report cards as a letter grade followed by (M). This signified that the grade was earned under special circumstances, and that, for example, a student who received A- (M) could be assumed to have completed less work or less rigorous work than a student who received an A-. The reporting system for modified grades allowed for no distinction to be made between students who received a modified grade because of their English proficiency and students who received a modified grade because of a learning disability. Modified grades placed ELLs solidly in the nonacademic track because students with M grades were considered to be unprepared for the challenging curriculum of college preparatory classes. In some academic departments, teachers were allowed to choose grade modification for their students. In others, such as the history department, teachers worked under departmental policies of automatic grade modification for all students identified as limited English proficient.

The standardized testing battery at Eaglepoint also failed to acknowledge language difference as a salient variable in student success and failure. During the year of this study, the school phased in EOC exams, which were given to all high school students in every academic subject districtwide. To receive credit for each class, students were required to pass the English-medium EOC test. No modifications in time, instructions, or language were allowed, and, to ensure that teachers did not provide such allowances, teachers were not allowed to proctor their own

students' tests. Students who failed an EOC exam were required to repeat the course and the exam to receive academic credit. Although other standardized tests, such as the graduation test and state basic skills tests, allowed ELLs to be exempted for 1 or more years after their arrival, the EOC battery offered no exemptions.

As these policies attest, an ideology of blindness to linguistic difference permeated the school community. Teachers' ambivalence toward receiving training for working with ELLs may provide some evidence of the ideology's pervasiveness. In the fall of 2001, the ESL teachers in Eaglepoint's district offered an in-service for all high school teachers. Flyers placed in the mailboxes of all district high school teachers advertised that strategies and tips for working with ELLs in mainstream courses would be offered. Of the district's nearly 800 high school teachers, fewer than 15 attended, and 7 of these were the ESL teachers themselves. In my survey of Eaglepoint's faculty, 51% of teachers agreed with the statement "I am interested in receiving more training in working with ESL students," and 93% reported they had received no such training, but the only Eaglepoint teacher to attend the in-service was Linda, the ESL teacher. Teachers' lack of attendance and their lukewarm interest in training can likely be attributed to a number of factors, including the troubled history of one-shot in-service programs (Guskey & Huberman, 1995). Clair's (1995) research, however, suggests that general education teachers may feel that no special training is necessary for teachers to work successfully with ELLs. Eaglepoint's schoolwide endorsement of equal treatment would support this assertion.

Teacher Participants

Participants for the qualitative inquiry were recruited from a pool of all teachers whose courses were scheduled to enroll ELLs in 2001–2002. Linda, the ESL teacher, provided a list of 15 teacher candidates, and I contacted one teacher from each of the six content areas represented. Four teachers agreed to participate: Kathy, Neal, Gina, and Libby. All four were white NESs with limited L2 learning experience. Kathy had no experience with an L2. Neal, Gina, and Libby had studied French or Spanish briefly in high school and college, but none of the teachers felt they were more than beginning-level L2 speakers. Like most teachers at Eaglepoint, none of the four had received preservice or in-service training to work with ELLs. Participants' subject areas, lengths of tenure, and experiences with ELLs are provided in Table 1. In this article I limit my discussion to the experiences of Kathy, Neal, and Gina with ELLs in their classrooms.

TABLE 1
Characteristics of the Teacher Participants for the Qualitative Study

Name	Sex	Subject area	Years of teaching experience	ELLs during career	ELLs during semester of study
Gina	Female	Social studies	5	4	1
Kathy	Female	Business	37	1	1
Neal	Male	English	4	15–20	4

Note. ELLs = English language learners.

Data Collection and Analysis

To understand how the experience of the inclusion of ELLs in mainstream classrooms was “created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 4) by each participant, I spent 1 academic year with the teachers at Eaglepoint. I was familiar with the school site and personnel because I worked simultaneously as a clinical supervisor for teacher interns at Eaglepoint. The school was on a block schedule; four 90-minute classes were taught over the course of 1 semester. Although 50-minute classes in a traditional schedule lasted the entire academic year, classes at Eaglepoint covered the same material in 1 intensive semester. Therefore, each semester brought a new group of students into my participants’ classrooms. I interviewed and remained in contact with participants over the course of the year, but I limited my observation of their classrooms to 1 semester and one group of students.

Before observations began, the participants and I met for an initial interview. This interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes and was guided by a set of questions designed to elicit information about teachers’ experiences with ELLs, their attitudes toward the inclusion of ELLs in their classrooms, and the accommodations, if any, they used or planned to use with ELLs (Appendix B). All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed for analysis. The first interview was followed by weekly classroom observations during which I scripted the dialogue of the teachers and students, taking particular note of interactions that involved ELLs. I also collected worksheets, tests, rubrics, and other documents that teachers distributed to students during class. These were analyzed for modifications, or lack of modifications, made by the teachers for ELLs. Following each observation I spoke with teacher participants, taking notes on their reactions to the lesson and asking questions that had arisen from the observation. The second formal audiotaped interview was conducted after three or four classroom observations. In these interviews I asked questions about classroom practices I had observed, clarified information gathered in the

first interview, and invited participants to share other information or feelings they had regarding the inclusion of ELLs in their mainstream classes. Cycles of interview and observation continued until the semester's end.

In analyzing the data, I used a framework similar to Hatch's (2002) model for interpretive analysis. First, I read data from all sources (transcripts, observations, field notes, and documents) to get "a sense of the whole" (Hatch, p. 181). On subsequent readings I recorded my impressions, noting "regularities" (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 431) in and between data sources, and developed preliminary interpretations. As I read and reread each data source I coded chunks of text by assigning a label to related chunks. I was aided in my organization and display of the data by NUD*IST, a qualitative research software program, and I imported transcripts, observations, and field notes as word-processed documents into the program. Labels, or codes, evolved over the course of the study as they were expanded, redefined, or broken into smaller units of meaning with each rereading of the data sources and as more data were gathered. Through the process of coding I identified what I considered to be "essential features [in the data] and the ways in which the features interact[ed]" (Glesne, 1999, p. 150). For example, as analysis progressed it became clear that teachers' notions of best instructional practice and effective English language acquisition overlapped and interacted with the concept of equal treatment. Preliminary interpretations, such as this one, gained or lost saliency through continued data collection analysis. To ensure the "trustworthiness" (Glesne, p. 150) of salient interpretations, I continued data collection to saturation when regularities appeared consistently in multiple data sources. As a final measure of trustworthiness, I conducted a form of member check by sharing a draft summary of my interpretations with participants and asking for their feedback.

THREE TEACHERS' APPROACHES

Neal

For Neal, making any accommodations for ELLs "cheated" them because the equal treatment of all students was the only way to guarantee an equal chance at success. He criticized teachers who thought making accommodations for ELLs was helpful. "It's easier for teachers just to give the kid the answer than explain to them. [But] I think that that's the way the kids get cheated" (interview, December 6, 2001, p. 5). In Neal's opinion, giving ELLs special consideration was a temporary fix that ultimately did more harm than good. Neal realized ELLs might have to

put in more time and effort than English proficient (EP) peers to complete coursework, but he did not lessen the quantity or quality of work for ELLs. "[I]f a student has something to read that's in English . . . if they have to wade through it for 10 hours to get [it], then that's what they're going to have to do" (interview, October 24, 2001, p. 6). Neal was not unsympathetic to the burden this placed on ELLs. "I realize you run the risk of frustrating the student, but it seems to me it would be frustrating functioning in a society where you don't know the language anyway, so you better get it over while you're in school rather than later" (interview, October 24, 2001, p. 6).

Neal viewed his classroom as a practice ground for life beyond high school. Because ELLs would not be given special treatment outside school, they should not be given special treatment in school. To Neal, this meant ELLs had to be able to function as EP students. He made no alteration in curriculum, instruction, or assessment for ELLs. "I want all of my kids to function on a level plane," Neal explained (interview, November 2, 2001, p. 7), and an essential aspect of the level plane, in Neal's view, was being a proficient English speaker. "It's not like you're going to wear a badge that says 'English is not my first language. Be Patient'" (interview, October 24, 2001, p. 7).

Neal was particularly opposed to allowing ELLs to continue using their native languages in his classes at Eaglepoint or even in their homes, because he believed L1 use slowed English acquisition and adjustment to life in the United States.

I've told my kids they should speak English. I said, "You should be teaching your mom English." It drives me crazy . . . you came to America because you wanted to be here, and . . . once you learn it [English] then you can function in the society that you wanted to be a part of in the first place. (interview, November 2, 2001, p. 8)

Neal's staunch resistance to accommodations was put to the test when his English Fundamentals class enrolled Hana, an Asian immigrant with minimal English ability. Hana, who had been in the United States less than 3 months, was placed in Neal's junior-level Fundamentals course with one other ELL and 19 EP students, 16 of whom had IEPs (individualized education plans) for various learning disabilities or emotional and behavioral disorders. As the semester progressed, Hana fell "so profoundly behind" (interview, November 2, 2001, p. 8), in Neal's estimation, that, despite his reluctance to allow any accommodations, he granted Hana extra time and the use of her L1-English dictionary to complete coursework. Neal was simultaneously uncomfortable continuing an equal treatment approach with Hana and very reluctant to allow any accommodations. He chafed at what he saw as the school adminis-

tration's nonresponse to the problems teachers faced when ELLs were included in general education classes. He suggested that, rather than placing ELLs in the mainstream, students with limited English proficiency ought to be served in newcomer centers until they reached a level of English proficiency that would make mainstreaming possible.

Kathy

Prior to the semester of the study, Kathy had never had an ELL in any of her classes. On the first day of Marketing I, Kathy discovered that Joy, an ELL recently emigrated from Asia, was not an NES. In fact, Joy's English language proficiency was so low that Kathy and Joy had a very difficult time understanding one another. Within a few weeks, however, Kathy reported that she enjoyed having Joy in class, and she described Joy as hardworking and "just precious" (interview, October 31, 2001, p. 3).

In terms of coursework expectations, Kathy treated Joy and her EP students equally. All students were required to do the same quantity and quality of coursework. "[Joy] might take a little longer than the others . . . but I want her to do it like everybody else" (interview, December 14, 2001, pp. 2–3). To meet the course expectations, Kathy anticipated that Joy would have to work harder than the other students. Her prediction was accurate; throughout the semester Kathy observed that Joy put in more effort than most of her EP peers. Kathy empathized with Joy's double burden of learning English and content at the same time, but she remained committed to maintaining equal standards in coursework quantity and quality for all students. "[S]he's still required to do the work everybody else does. Just like this [assignment] for her is hard, but she's still required to do that" (interview, December 14, 2001, p. 1). Kathy did not modify the language she used, and she did not slow the pace of her class for Joy. She did, however, typically save a few minutes at the end of every class to offer students individual attention. During this time Kathy was able to give Joy some assistance with her work, although other students competed for Kathy's attention and left little time for one-on-one instruction with Joy.

Kathy recognized that her English-only classroom was an environment that may not have been ideal for students with limited English language proficiency, and to compensate for Joy's linguistic disadvantage, Kathy made a few accommodations. She gave Joy more time to complete coursework, and she allowed Joy the use of her (English language) textbook and L1-English dictionary.

On a test for the regular students, I would never let them use the book because I've discussed it [the content of the test], they've understood what I've said, they've got things to read. [Joy] might not get everything I say, so . . . when she takes the test, to be fair to her, she uses the book. . . . She also takes as much time as she needs. (interview, December 14, 2001, p. 1)

Kathy made these accommodations to equalize the opportunities for success in her class between Joy and the EP students. These accommodations, Kathy felt, did not challenge equality of treatment because all students were still required to do the same work.

Kathy understood that assessing Joy in the same way she assessed EP students would not provide an accurate measure of Joy's knowledge of course content. Although Kathy expected all of her students to attain 75% of the districtwide competencies for Marketing I, she anticipated that Joy, despite her hard work and ability, would not reach this goal.

My goals for her is to get as many of those [competencies] as possible. I think it would be idealistic to think that she would be proficient in every single thing we did like everybody else. I don't know how that would be possible. There are bound to be things that she'll miss. (interview, December 14, 2001, p. 4)

Despite her awareness that Joy's test scores were inaccurate measures of her understanding of the content, Kathy believed assessing Joy in the same manner and by the same standards as EP peers was the only way to ensure fairness. Joy would have to weather the low scores until her English improved.

Gina

Gina, unlike Kathy and Neal, believed some differentiated instruction was necessary for ELLs to have access to the content of her U.S. History class. Although she did not alter classroom instruction as a whole, Gina made numerous accommodations for Nu, an Asian immigrant student who had been in the United States only a few months when the semester began. Nu was a shy, polite student who, Gina suspected, was unable to understand much of the language of the classroom. "Sometimes she'll just smile, and I wonder if she's just doing that out of courtesy" (interview, January 22, 2002, p. 4).

Gina believed Nu was highly capable, "the intelligence is there, that's not a problem" (interview, February 5, 2002, p. 4), and, had there been no language barrier, Gina felt Nu would have done very well in U.S. History. Like Kathy, Gina was generous in granting Nu extra time to complete coursework. She also allowed Nu the use of her text and L1-

English dictionary on all coursework. Going beyond Kathy and Neal's accommodation strategies, Gina modified the language of some worksheets and exams for Nu by using synonyms for words and phrases that she anticipated Nu would have trouble with. For example, on a test question about the Interstate Commerce Act, Gina changed the phrase "it set a precedent that government could intervene" to "it showed that government could become involved" (interview, January 22, 2002, p. 9). In addition, Gina weighted Nu's work differently than other students' by scoring Nu's tests on a 50-point rather than 100-point scale.

Despite her belief that some differentiation in instruction was necessary for Nu, Gina was unsure which, if any, of her accommodations were effective. She was frustrated that she could not work out a way to accurately assess Nu that did not rely on English. When Nu performed poorly, Gina believed the assessment instrument she used may have been to blame. "She may know more than I think she knows. It may be the way I'm writing the test" (interview, January 22, 2002, p. 9). Gina was eager to use Nu's L1 for instruction and assessment, but no L1 materials were available at Eaglepoint.

Gina was unsure what expectations she should hold for Nu and other ELLs, and she felt the school's administration had not made expectations for ELLs clear. Gina questioned whether holding the same expectations for ELLs and EP students was realistic.

You just try to get through as much as you can, but as far as meeting the curriculum and making sure they're getting all the content, I don't know if it's possible . . . if we're expecting a student who's proficient in English to reach this benchmark, where are we expecting the ESL student? (interview, February 5, 2002, p. 5)

Gina knew that ELLs would be required to take the district's new EOC exams like every other student, and the testing regime made Gina question the effectiveness of making any accommodations at all for ELLs. "If you make an A in my class, it doesn't mean you'll get credit for graduation because you must pass that test. . . . We can't modify those" (interview, January 22, 2002, p. 10).

Despite her belief in Nu's academic ability, Gina was compelled by history department policy to give Nu a modified grade. Gina was uncomfortable modifying Nu's grade because she knew the grade would negatively affect Nu's chances for an academic-track placement and eventual college acceptance. However, the history department offered Gina no alternative. Gina gave Nu an M grade and hoped Nu would learn English quickly and not be subject to modified grading in the future.

DISCUSSION

Neal, Kathy, and Gina were not blind to their ELLs' linguistic difference, and each recognized that educational opportunity at Eaglepoint was accessible only through English. Equalizing educational opportunity for limited-English-speaking students frustrated the teachers who had limited experience with ELLs, no training to work with ELLs, and little guidance from the school administration in dealing with language difference. The policy of equal treatment that was implicitly and, in some cases, explicitly advanced in the school community was alternately consonant and dissonant with teachers' own conceptions of and approaches to equal educational opportunity. Equal treatment was viewed by the teachers as both a policy that produced inequity for ELLs and a policy that would ultimately equalize educational opportunity.

The Inequity of Equal Treatment

The teachers perceived inequities for ELLs when the students were treated like everyone else. Two such inequities were the limiting of ELLs' access to the curriculum and the inaccuracy of assessment and grading. First, all three teachers were aware that ELLs had restricted access to the curriculum in their English-medium classrooms, and each teacher struggled to decide if accommodations for ELLs were appropriate, and, if so, which accommodations would be effective.

Sheltered instruction, specially designed academic instruction in English, the cognitive academic language learning approach, and other instructional models can provide ELLs with linguistically appropriate instruction while maintaining curricular standards (Cary, 2000; Chamot & O'Malley, 1996; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000; Gibbons, 2002). However, the teachers in this study, who were unfamiliar with these models, equated most accommodations or differentiated instruction with the dissolution of curricular standards. Neal, Kathy, and Gina felt ELLs needed to be held to the same high standards as EP students if ELLs were to have equal access to educational opportunity. Although they felt accommodations threatened high standards, the teachers did choose to accommodate ELLs in a variety of ways.

These accommodations fell into three general categories, which I have labeled curricular, instructional, and procedural. Curricular accommodations are quantitative or qualitative modifications to the curriculum and include lessening the amount of coursework or simplifying the complexity of coursework. Instructional accommodations modify the delivery of the content and include altering speech or texts for comprehensibility by, for example, slowing the rate of speech or adapting or

supplementing texts. Procedural accommodations modify the procedures of the classroom and include extending due dates or allowing ELLs the use of L1-English dictionaries. The three categories of accommodation presented here reflect the types of modifications participants discussed or used, and category boundaries are intended to be permeable, as accommodations may, at times, overlap categories (e.g., group work may be considered an instructional or a procedural accommodation). Likewise, the three categories are not intended to compose an exhaustive list of all possible accommodation categories.

Participants used accommodations with varying degrees of frequency and willingness. Generally, Neal made no accommodations. The rare exception was the limited use of procedural accommodations for his low-proficiency ELL. Kathy and Gina were untroubled by procedural accommodations for ELLs and frequently allowed ELLs extra time or the use of an L1-English dictionary. Kathy and Gina also used some instructional accommodations, although these were made less frequently and more tentatively than procedural accommodations. Kathy refused to make curricular accommodations of any kind, but Gina occasionally, though reluctantly, lessened the quantity of work for her ELLs. All teachers questioned the effectiveness of making instructional and procedural accommodations for ELLs. In Gina's words, "[Students] have to know the information for the end-of-course test, and you can't really abbreviate the amount of factual [information]" (interview, February 5, 2002, p. 3). The teachers struggled to find appropriate and effective accommodations, and this struggle resulted in few accommodations for ELLs beyond the procedural level. ELLs in these teachers' classrooms, therefore, had to learn like everybody else: in English, with little or no curricular or instructional accommodation.

The teachers understood that in addition to the problem of limited access to the curriculum, traditional assessment procedures failed to accurately represent ELLs' content knowledge. However, with the exception of Gina, the teachers did not attempt to alter their traditional methods of assessment. In other studies of secondary ELLs, researchers have found that educators confused ELLs' English language ability with academic or cognitive ability (Fu, 1995; Harklau, 1994, 1999; Verplaetse, 1998). That was not the case in this study. Neal, Kathy, and Gina generally did not assume that a lack of academic ability lay at the heart of ELLs' poor assessment scores; the teachers attributed poor scores to ELLs' limited English proficiency. For example, Kathy was confident that Joy had the intelligence to do well in Marketing I, and she knew that Joy's grade suffered only as a result of her English ability. Likewise, Gina believed that Nu's poor performance was likely a result of Gina's inability to write comprehensible test questions. The three teachers understood and, in varying degrees of discomfort, accepted that ELLs' test scores

and grades would not be valid until the ELLs were able to learn and perform through natively like English.

Adherence to Equal Treatment

Eaglepoint's school community advanced an equal treatment approach in equalizing educational opportunity. Gina was unconvinced that the approach was effective, particularly in light of the impact modified grading and EOC testing would have on Nu. However, despite their recognition of the resulting inequities, Neal and Kathy remained committed to a policy of equal treatment. Not only did they both feel equal treatment was the only equitable way to give ELLs access to content, Neal, in particular, strongly believed equal treatment contributed to the rapid acquisition of English.

The assumption that equal treatment would assist in ELLs' rapid acquisition of English was predicated on misconceptions about L2 acquisition. Neal's assertion that continued native language use in school and at home would slow English acquisition is not supported by research (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Teachers' misconceptions about L2 acquisition were likely a result of their own limited experience with L2 learning and their lack of training to work with ELLs. However, the teachers' perception that natively like English proficiency was essential to the equalization of educational opportunity was based on their experience as Eaglepoint community members with up to 37 years of experience.

The teachers' collective concern that equal educational opportunity would be denied to students with limited English proficiency reflected their understandings of the school community. From their knowledge of their educational institution, the teachers saw that students were eligible for equality of educational opportunity only after gaining full English proficiency. Despite their varying levels of comfort with this reality, all three teachers continued to instruct, assess, and grade ELLs in ways that assumed English proficiency to encourage English proficiency and, in turn, put ELLs on the English-only pathway to educational opportunity. The resulting inequities the teachers observed in ELLs' access to the curriculum and valid assessment were tolerable because only through English, in the teachers' view, would ELLs be able to achieve success and find access to equal educational opportunity.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study reveal how one school and three of its teachers attempted to equalize educational opportunity for ELLs. The

findings are local and particular to these teachers and this school. However, implications drawn from this study may provide insight into the schooling of linguistically diverse students in other contexts and into ideas about equality of educational opportunity in general.

English proficiency was a prerequisite for equality of educational opportunity in the school of this study, and the school community did not consider non-English ways of learning, knowing, and performing to be viable pathways to educational opportunity. Although full English proficiency and high academic standards are goals that our public schools should hold for all students, withholding educational opportunity until ELLs reach nativelike English proficiency is not a pedagogical necessity. Linguistically appropriate programs that offer equitable educational opportunity to students regardless of English proficiency have been observed (Echevarria et al., 2000; Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; Montero-Sieburth & Batt, 2001; Walqui, 2000). Furthermore, adherence to a neutral image of students, one that assumes English proficiency, is out of sync with our increasingly multilingual school-age population. As Deschenes et al. (2001) assert, there is a mismatch between “the multicultural character of American society and the culturally monochromatic environment of most schools” (p. 537). Educational opportunity accessible only through a monolingual pathway denies the multilingual reality of schools and raises the possibility that continued commitment to an English-only pathway may be a political rather than a pedagogical stance.

My interpretation of the equal, difference-blind treatment of ELLs based on observations in the school suggests that it was used as an instrument of normalization. Although equal treatment was recognized to produce inequities for ELLs, the teachers considered the inequities temporary and tolerable because English proficiency and subsequent access to educational opportunity could best be gained through universalism. Long-term study of the students in this school context would be necessary to determine whether these tolerable inequities resulted in the eventual equalization of opportunity. However, previous research into the normalization of linguistic newcomers suggests that the inequities will likely persist even after newcomers have linguistically assimilated. Not only has native language loss resulted from normalization (McCarty, 2002), newcomers have also been required to adopt subordinate social, economic, and racial roles (Cummins, 1994; Olsen, 1997; Tollefson, 1989; Toohey, 1996, 1998; Wiley & Lukes, 1996). Such normative practices have the potential to “fuel feelings of exclusion, anger, and alienation for many children and their families” (Larson & Ovando, 2001, pp. 173–174). If, as these findings suggest, linguistic difference is viewed as undesirable and correctable, it is subject to normalization in ways that other social differences may not be. “We do not, cannot under

our laws, ask people to change the color of their skin, their religion, their gender. . . . We have no such compunctions about language, however" (Lippi-Green, 1997, pp. 63–64). In response to this view of linguistic diversity as something to be corrected, Nieto argues for a reconsideration that places language diversity "within a multicultural education framework and redefin[es] the benefits of linguistic diversity for all students" (2002, p. 81).

This study points to a need not only to rethink traditional approaches for equalizing educational opportunity but, perhaps, to rethink educational opportunity itself. For equality to be realized in educational opportunity, all students must have access to opportunities that are not just real, but authentic and participatory, and authentic and participatory educational opportunities should not require the normalization of students into white English-speaking monolinguals. Rather than the erasure of difference or the pretension that difference does not matter, schools should work toward a view of educational opportunity that represents their multiplicity. This participatory version of educational opportunity must be one that can be accessed through multiple pathways that require neither the dissolution of high academic expectations nor the devaluation of nondominant languages and cultures. Participatory educational opportunity would, in the words of Young (1990), "denormalize the way institutions formulate their rules by revealing the plural circumstances and needs that exist, or ought to exist, within them" (p. 134), and, as Howe (1997) suggests, it would be "rooted in equal respect for different views on what worthwhile needs, interests, and capabilities are" (p. 32). Equalized educational opportunity is not achieved by simply choosing between universalism and differentiation or inclusion and separation; it is achieved through a process participated in by all community members, a process that identifies and pursues "alternative ways to frame student success and failure" (Deschenes et al., 2001, p. 544) while simultaneously holding high expectations for all students and affirming plurality.

In light of the flaws of traditional approaches to thinking about and equalizing educational opportunity, a reexamination of current educational policies may be warranted. Recent reforms built on universalism, in particular, require careful examination if the goal of providing all students "the best possible education" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) is to be achieved. In a multilingual and multicultural world, the best education cannot be one standardized to a neutral image of students as English monolinguals. As McNeil (2000) argues, "Standardization equates sameness with equity in ways that mask pervasive and continuing inequalities" (p. 10). Careful and continuous inquiry into the impact of educational reforms on linguistically and culturally diverse

students is critical to ensuring that ELLs do not become the “predictable losers” (Sacks, 2000, p. 6) in the push to equalize educational opportunity.

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