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Schooled in America: ESL & The Assimilation of Mexican Immigrant Children

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Schooled in America:
ESL and the Assimilation of Mexican Immigrant Children in Red Hook,
New York

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
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Chapter 1

Introduction: Language and Immigration

The process, reaction to and results of immigration to the United States have always caught my attention. I struggle with understanding why it is that a person should be excluded from entering a country. The laws of the United States government have historically had racial and religious discriminatory standpoints, making it nearly impossible for citizens of some countries to enter, and much more difficult to gain citizenship. In order to enter, a process consisting of many steps, regulations, and assurance and proof that one will be a ‘helpful’ member of the American society must be conducted. The Department of Homeland Security lists the main ways to obtain a green card: one can apply if a family member petitions for it, if he/she has a job offer or employment in the United States, if he/she is granted refugee or asylum status or “other ways” (USCIS – Green Card). But even once granted permission to enter the United States, the battle is far from over. An immigrant faces the struggle of learning a new language, being seen as and feeling like an outsider, possible discrimination and the feat of trying to find his/her rightful place of belonging.

The contemporary United States was founded on the idea of immigration. There has always been a common national narrative: one can come to the United States and take part in the ‘American dream;’ the ability to have a happy family, a successful job, a home, and the ability to sustain yourself and your family (described in the common saying as having “a house in the suburbs, white picket fence, two-point three kids” (Fogg). This dream can appeal to many people

of varying cultures, encouraging people to think of the US as a land where their economic dreams will be realized.

Latin Americans make up a large part of the current immigration wave (Immigrant Incorporation into U.S. Society). Along with Asians, Latin Americans have been consistently immigrating to the United States post- World War II and are considered to be the fourth wave of immigration (Pedraza). Throughout the history of the United States, there have been many waves of immigration from varying locations; many of these immigrants have not been well received by American citizens. The American government has reacted to Latin American immigration, resulting in the formation and sometimes oppressive implementation of laws.

I approached this ethnography with an acute awareness to this oppression, using it to guide many of my questions, meanwhile assuring the avoidance of stereotypes that may have influenced my own beliefs throughout my life. I maintained an awareness of cultural differences, accepting the fact that these differences, in most cases, are what feed the racial and cultural tensions. These differences affect the way that either party perceives an act, question or observation. Therefore, like any ethnographer, I approached the project with as little bias as possible.

I have studied the Spanish language for nearly eight years and during that time I studied abroad in Oaxaca, Mexico and Madrid, Spain. With my education of the language came an education and recognition of the cultures. Hispanic cultures have always fascinated me, leading to my concentration in Latin American/ Iberian Studies -- I am drawn to the way in which people interact the organization and assignment of value, the celebrations and language. A major difference that I have noticed between the United States and Latin America, generally speaking, is the way that members of Latin American cultures interact with each other. Through personal observation, I have noticed a very strong sense of community, both in cities and rural settings,

which many Latin American cultures have in common. And during the time that I spent in Mexico I noted various differences between American and Mexican cultures. It appears that many Mexican people know and understand their neighbors and peers in a way very different than do Americans. Of course these generalizations may be rooted in my romanticizations, yet I do perceive an overarching sense of livelihood and happiness that is much stronger in Latin America than in the United States.

I currently volunteer with the Bard TLS program (The Trustee Leader–Scholar Program), Red Hook ESL, a community drop-in center. Every non-English-speaking member of the local community is welcome, however, most of the students are of Mexican descent. Bard students run and volunteer at the center, giving non-English-speakers the opportunity to learn English in a way that not only introduces the student to the language, but to the culture and community as well. This interaction has a unique twist to it due to the fact that Bard students are often not originally members of the Red Hook community. We have entered the setting of the ESL center in a position of being outsiders to the world that we are attempting to introduce the students to. However, we are able to do so because although we technically are outsiders, we still have a greater understanding of Red Hook, as it most likely shares traits with our places of origin. I work with the children at the center, whom range in age from three to fourteen. This has given me the opportunity to witness the various effects that being a Mexican immigrant to the United States has on a child and more specifically, the interactions that occur between a child and his/her schooling and education, socially, culturally and academically.

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be a teacher, specifically an elementary school teacher. The thoughts, creativity and openness of children have always inspired and fascinated me; children seem free and unaffected by society and others' opinions – attributes that

I wish every person in the world had. But eventually, after being socialized into the culture, these traits disappear and people are inevitably shaped by the thoughts and opinions of others, therefore, making a society much more rigid. For this reason, I am especially interested in the integration of immigrants into the society and educational system of the United States; immigrants must overcome even more changes in order to become a part of the society, representing a frisson of fear and intimidation. Often, school is the first place in which children become aware of being embarrassed and self-conscious, possibly developing a feeling of being an outsider or different from others. This can cause a child to become unhappy with his/her individual qualities; children who come from different cultures can be even more easily isolated from their peers I have witnessed these changes occurring as I have come to know the children that I work with at the ESL program

In many cases, the children's lack of knowledge of the English language is the main hindrance to their education, but the differences in cultural values and lack of availability of help from their parents also affect their educational experiences. In his research-based analysis of bilingual students, Eugene E. García blames the incongruous lifestyles that these children live due to their duality of identities as the main source of difficulties in school. García quotes another work of his, *Hispanic education in the United States: Raices y alas*:

Garcia challenges any perspective that accounts for educational inequity in terms of supposed intellectual and/or cultural shortcomings of children/families. An alternative explanation relates to the cultural mismatch that frequently occurs between language-minority students and the schools they attend. (159)

Rather than blaming solely the family for barriers that exist between the families and the schools, Garcia suggests that it is from both the schools' and the families' inability to properly align the two that this difficulty of bilingual identity arises.

Assimilation

Patterns of immigration have changed numerous times over history, with periods of large immigration waves from different areas of the world. These changes of patterns are usually associated with the immigrant's country of origin's stability, the presence and lure of American culture (due to its seeping into other countries) and most of all, one's personal needs and desires. Although the overarching American culture and amenities are often widely known throughout the world it is still difficult to assimilate into the United States for many reasons. Western and American hegemony create this lure for foreigners toward the United States.

This seemingly miraculous infusion of American values into other cultures did not happen as innocently or coincidentally as it may appear. The capitalist qualities of the United States have been so forceful and active for a very long time that the presence of American culture around the world has been inevitable, leading to America's possessing a form of global hegemony. Even American products have become hegemonic. They are sold world-wide, exposing others to products that are 'American' in their being, for example, Coca-Cola is a well-known American product that goes beyond being merely a product of American manufacturing to being seen as a product *and* symbol of American culture. The United States, and all that it represents, have become a site of desire. These types of knowledge can spark one's assimilation process into the American culture.

When using the term assimilation, I refer to the transfer of one's definition of personal culture and identity – a process that may never be completed in entirety. Every person identifies himself/herself with certain cultural groups. Each cultural group is associated with its own beliefs, rituals and place-based identity. But even more specifically, a cultural group can be

identified by a certain way of dress, physical and non-physical tendencies, gestures, language, dialect, activities, and much more. This group then forms some sort of community, be it large or small, in which there is some form of understood, overarching connection. The shift from one cultural group to another is one of the beginning steps of assimilation. Beyond that, one must become a part of the new group, not only culturally, but linguistically, socially, institutionally, etcetera, to be 'assimilated.' Assimilation does not have to be absolute, but it usually does coincide with many personal changes, in order to satisfy the various factors of the new community with which one begins to associate him/herself. It can be perceived that in hopes of assimilation, a person may leave behind certain components of his/her original community group in order to replace them with those of the new. The completion of the assimilation process occurs when the person feels comfortable in the new community, as if he/she is a true member. He/she feels a sense of belonging, often in addition to a belonging in one's natural community; the assimilated person is now a part of that new community.

Assimilation is a process that puts an immigrant in an awkward position. In fear of losing one's 'native' culture the new culture becomes almost threatening in the way that it surrounds the immigrant, seemingly forcing the immigrant to choose one over the other. For an immigrant to the United States, there are many cultural boundaries to overcome in order to assimilate, if that is what is desired. The immigrant must become familiar with the social, governmental and cultural ways of the society and all that they encompass. Familiarizing oneself with the commonalities of the culture will therefore lead to some form of adaptation, whether or not it is consciously done. Being engulfed by a society is the most common assimilation force, a one-directional force that streams from society and directly onto the immigrant. At one point, the community in which one resides and interacts will inevitably take on a new meaning to the immigrant, becoming his/her

own, a community to which the immigrant relates and finds comfort in, therefore resulting in an assimilation.

Immigration, Community & Language

For Latin American immigrants, one of the greatest difficulties is the challenge of learning English, especially for adults. English, being the dominant language, is a large part of the society and culture of the United States. Language has the capability to influence the society in which it is used, coming to represent various cultural factors, visible through the use of certain vocabulary or grammatical tendencies. Rosemary Salomone states in *True American: Language, Identity, and the Education of American Children* that “There was a time when linguists commonly believed that language predisposed us to a particular way of thinking about the world, popularly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” (71). Even though contemporary linguists are not commonly supporters of this hypothesis, there is validity in the fact that language and grammar connect to the culture within which they are used. When words or phrases are translated from one language to another, the translations can imply different ideas or values, proving the strong connection that language and culture have. Bourdieu also comments on the relationship that language has with culture. He states, speaking of a teacher of language and his students: “He is already inclining them quite naturally to see and feel things in the same way; and he works to build the common consciousness of the nation” (49). A common consciousness includes traditions, beliefs, values, common knowledge and teachings that are all associated with a society. A linguistic education, like my experience with Spanish, serves as an introduction to certain aspects of culture. The immigrant population that most easily adapts to these linguistic and

cultural changes is children. Besides the fact that children have an innate ability to learn foreign languages much more easily and quickly than adults do, children are exposed to the language very intensively through education, an opportunity that many adults do not have. Being in school forces a child to be immersed in English for tens of hours every week. Within this context, a student's success is severely inhibited if he/she does not learn English. Therefore, much of the child's English-learning takes place in school due to the necessity of its use, enabling schools to become centers of linguistic and cultural influences and mixing.

In addition to the culture affecting language, language also influences the culture in which it exists. Language encompasses many variants depending greatly on location and social stature, including dialects, gestures and accents. In "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language" (1991) Pierre Bourdieu describes the influences that language and culture have on each other.

In the area of pronunciation, diction and even grammar, a whole set of differences significantly associated with social differences which, though negligible in the eyes of the linguist, are pertinent from the sociologist's standpoint because they belong to a system of linguistic oppositions which is the *re-translation* of a system of social differences. (54)

Bourdieu puts forth the idea that the variants and sub-groups of a language are reflective of a reproduction of a system of social hierarchy. The dominant language and the power that it brings with it is one that is enforced by the state, however it is not accessible to all except for a limited, distinguished group. Traditionally, different social groups are associated with different linguistic traits. For example, accents and dialects are mainly dependent on regional differences but within the locations there are variations of the accents based on one's class. For example, New York accents are known for having dramatized 'a's and dropped 'r's at the end of words, yet, these are traditionally traits, specifically, of members of the lower classes. Historically, the educational

level of the lower classes are perceived of as being less than that of the upper class, in part, because of the lower class' placement on the periphery of society; this educational difference is one cause of these linguistic inequalities.

Given that there is so much variation within one language, the assimilation process to a new language becomes even more difficult. It is often mistakenly assumed that in order to become completely engulfed by a new language (and its community) successfully, one must also abandon his/her mother language. I believe that a person can feel a legitimate connection to multiple communities, maintaining relationships, language and culture from each. One should not be replaced by another, but instead, lived in conjunction with and equally valued. Occasionally, an immigrant may consciously decide to abandon his/her original language and culture in hopes of wholly assimilating to American society. Society and all that it encompasses cannot be separated from language. There is a mutual exchange between the two – they are co-constitutive. Once an immigrant is able to adapt to the language, he is much more likely to be accepted into a culture and its overarching society. However, an immigrant's original culture and language greatly affect the relationships that are developed with the new culture.

Language can act both as a barrier of and an encouraging force toward the building of community, as referenced by Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power*, the normalized language “is suitable for transmitting and decoding by any sender and receiver, who may know nothing of one another” (48). Language acts as a bridge, connecting people even if they are not personally involved in any way. Language can also function as a barrier in the way that it creates exclusivity and tightens the availability of acceptance into a community. Bourdieu comments on this power and exclusivity that result from one's use of language: “The constriction of a linguistic market creates the conditions for an objective competition in and through which the legitimate

competence can function as linguistic capital, production a *profit of distinction* on the occasion of each social exchange” (55). For example, within a group of Mexican immigrants to the United States, those who already speak English on their arrival are more likely to feel comfortable in the United States and readily accepted by Americans who exclusively speak English.

On the contrary, language can also act as a bridge to build community and comfort. Those who speak Spanish and no English are much less likely to interact with English-speaking Americans due to the seemingly impassable boundaries and lack of similarity between the two groups. However, Mexicans traditionally have a very strong sense of community and acceptability rooted within their culture. Although I only spent one month in Mexico, therefore my opinions are based on my immediate reaction to my findings, I quickly picked up on the fact that Mexicans, no matter their class, gender, age or beliefs, readily accepted me and were very excited to get to know me. Most likely, this is due to the fact that I do come from a different culture (possibly because I am American, specifically, – furthering the point that the United States carries hegemonic importance and influence abroad). There was a dual fascination – as an American, I was surprised by this acceptance due to the fact that it is different from what I would expect to come across in my culture, and on the contrary, the Mexicans were interested in me *because* I came from this foreign culture. This willingness and openness is what surprised me, as it is taken for granted and assumed in Mexico, creating a connection to people who would not have necessarily had an opportunity to interact before.

This trait of community is transferred over to their American lives and therefore, Mexican communities are commonly established in America, to the point that Mexicans in the United States have become their own subculture (also due to the large number of Mexican immigrants at this time). This sense of community and familiarity transfers over to the happiness and well being

of the immigrant population. However, there is also a negative aspect to this community formation. As a generalization, the creation of a strong community can create comfort within the group resulting in their feeling an even stronger disconnection from American people and culture.

These contrasts that revolve around language differences relate to Bourdieu's discussion on 'language unification.' In "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language" Bourdieu references Étienne Bonnot de Condillac's studies on 'language unification,' connecting language unification to revolutionary action and thought and the idea of a 'new man' (47). This idea that language unification connects to revolutionary actions places it in a positive light, portraying it as a way to connect, rather than separate various communities. In support of this positive aspect, Bourdieu states: "Visible in all areas of practice (sport, song, clothing, housing, etc.), the process of unification of both the production and the circulation of economic and cultural goods entails the progressive obsolescence of the earlier mode of production of the habitus and its products" (50). Bourdieu uses the term 'legitimate language' in his referral to the new, standardized language within a society.

However, language unification can also have negative consequences in a society; it can isolate a group that is unfamiliar with the 'legitimate language.' Bourdieu explains language unification through a small-scale perspective; he explains it as a unification of the many different uses of diction, slang, accents and gestures. However, when looked at through the frame of the various languages used in America, it would result in a unification process that would be very different from a revolutionary language adaptation. It would, in fact, isolate many groups and force many people to not only convert to a different language completely, but to turn their backs on their cultures and identities. Language does have a strong connection to the way a person thinks and

interacts with the world, in the same manner as culture affects a person. Consequently, a country's dominant language shapes the dominant beliefs and values of the country.

This 'legitimate language' that Bourdieu speaks of is the goal of language unification: creating a language that holds power and authority within a specific community. He explicitly describes the goal of language unification; "In short, it was not only a question of communicating but of gaining recognition for a new language of authority" (48). He believes that a legitimate language will create the opportunity for all people to communicate with each other, bridging gaps between people who otherwise would have nothing in common: "The *normalized* language is capable of functioning outside the constraints and without the assistance of the situation, and is suitable for transmitting and decoding by any sender and receiver, who may know nothing of one another" (48). In this aspect, language unification would be a helpful instrument of state power, but the fact that another language is marginalized as a result is problematic.

The School and Language Learning

The challenge of coming to America without being a native English speaker is enough of a burden, but even when the student becomes proficient in English, the language barrier is extended and still plays a prominent role in his/her life. A child with a bilingual identity is caught between two worlds. A Mexican child must toggle between speaking Spanish at home and English at school and he/she must also challenge the battle of living in two cultures, again, one at home and the other at school. This contradiction can make it difficult for the child to feel comfortable in either, feeling a sense of connection with both but therefore, having difficulty identifying with either. His/her life becomes entangled in an array of dualities; the child is faced with the

challenge of being able to recognize both in various settings, yet somehow feel as though he/she fits in either. However, being bilingual can bring many benefits to one's life. If made use of properly, one's bilingual identity makes opportunities of both communities available and one does not have to rely on or feel restricted by either.

The school system, on both federal and individual levels, has made efforts to assure that the transition into American academics and society is made easier for immigrant students. There are laws in place that protect the rights of non-English speaking and bilingual students. The Lau remedies, created in 1975, provide a system through which a student's need for English language instruction is determined, and based on the results, the amount of assistance that the school will provide is decided. It first identifies the language spoken at home; secondly, it identifies the student's individual learning abilities. The third step is listed as the choosing of the program that is the best fit for the child, making him/her able to meet the expectations of every child, English speaking or not.

On the elementary level, the two available programs (each with many variants within it) are the Transitional Bilingual Education Program, which provides the student with the necessary tools toward becoming bilingual, and the Bilingual/Bicultural Program, which is a way of a school stating that it is able to help, if necessary, and is aware that the student may have trouble with becoming a member of his/her new surroundings. Beyond assuring that the bilingual/bicultural students have classes available to them, the Lau remedies also provide guidelines prevalent to more detailed aspects of the schooling system. They require that the elective courses have no discriminatory aspects or teaching and that minority groups are represented. The fifth element to the plan is that faculty whom are familiar with both linguistic and cultural aspects of the student's background is available; in the cases that this faculty is not already a part of the school's

community, training services are not only available, but required. The remedies also state that racially or ethnically uniform schools are not to be instated as a means to provide students with the resources required by the Lau remedies themselves. They additionally require families to inform the school if the student speaks a language other than English at home (LAU Remedies). The systems created by the Lau remedies, although they do not explicitly provide the means to accomplish these goals, do enforce the practice that each student receives the necessary help and therefore, at least according to law, schools are ready and willing recipients of non-English speaking students or students who come from cultures distinct from that of the United States.

Bourdieu comments on the way that language unification comes to exist through schools. However, language education does not necessarily have a relation to language unification. There are some similarities between language unification and language education in The United States, yet the goals are very different. While language unification can be seen as and conducted through an aggressive and forceful process, language education acts as a way to assimilate and introduce non-native English speakers to American cultural values and norms according to the student's desires and needs. Bourdieu states that "It follows that one cannot fully account for the properties and social effects of the legitimate language unless one takes account, not only of the social conditions of the production of literary language and its grammar, but also of the social conditions in which this scholarly code is imposed and inculcated as the principle of the production and evaluation of speech" (61). A teacher of language must take into account that through a new language, the student is also being exposed to new 'social conditions.' Therefore, language is more than words, grammar and speech; it is an important part of a cultural and social order. At school, a child is exposed to both the language and culture of the society in which he lives.

Often, within the United States, a child who does not speak English as his/her native language is put into a program in school that will teach the student English in order to make education (and life) in the United States more accessible and better understood. In most cases, this program is called ESL (English as a Second Language). ESL began with the spread of the British Empire when the English language spread across the globe; as a result, a few centuries later, the instruction of the English language became a priority of many. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the United States government began to institute laws, requiring citizens to be able to speak English. “The Naturalization Act, passed in 1906, for example, required that all immigrants must be able to speak English in order to become naturalized citizens of the U.S.” By the mid-1920s public facets of the country began to introduce normalized English education. With time, the idea of teaching English in the United States has become very popular and prevalent to the society that federal and state governments have begun to finance ESL programs (The History of ESL) and laws restricting and guiding English education in schools have become more regimented, supported and common.

ESL programs go beyond teaching a language, as Bourdieu explained; they allow a student to become familiar with the language in a way that opens doors socially, culturally and academically. Eugene E. García states in *Teaching and Learning in Two Languages: Bilingualism & Schooling in the United States* that “languages must not only be mastered in a structural sense and operate in conjunction with cognitive processes; they must be used as social instruments” (34). García shows that language education is useful in many ways other than as an ability to communicate verbally; it allows a student to become engulfed by and welcomed into the American culture in a way that would not be possible without first mastering English. Later, García strengthens his discussion of language as symbolic capital in stating: “The linguistic,

cognitive and social character of the child are developing simultaneously” (38). As a child learns English, he is automatically exposed to the social and intellectual cultures of America. As a result, the child not only speaks English, but also becomes a part of the cultures surrounding the language, building a direct bridge to an ‘American way of life.’

There are also many political aspects of the country that relate to the question of immigrant education in public schools. Recently, in the context of the greater United States, there has been a lot of debate regarding Latin American immigrants; many view it as a national problem that needs to be tended to immediately. People are worried that immigrants entering the country will lead to a loss of work opportunities for citizens of the United States, an increase in crime levels and an importation of drugs into the United States, aside from, but not disconnected from, the question of illegal immigration. For this reason, there has been a lot of petitioning and efforts made by people in the United States who are against the Latin American immigration wave with hopes of the government enforcing stricter laws. This year, Arizona has significantly tightened its laws regarding Mexican immigrants. Randal Archibold, a writer for the *New York Times* stated in “Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration,” an article from April 2010 that

The law, which proponents and critics alike said was the broadest and strictest immigration measure in generations, would make the failure to carry immigration documents a crime and give the police broad power to detain anyone suspected of being in the country illegally. Opponents have called it an open invitation for harassment and discrimination against Hispanics regardless of their citizenship status.

Nationwide, similar efforts and anger have targeted Mexican immigrants. Due to Mexico’s proximity to the United States, its large numbers of emigrants, and suspected dangerous tendencies (often associated with Mexican society and culture), immigrants from Mexico are often the most rejected. In reaction to these supposed dangers and influx of Latin American

immigrants to the United States, the government has begun to tighten restrictions concerning the number of immigrants that are admitted into the country.

These restrictions and negative reactions have affected many aspects of the United States that are controlled by the government, including the public education system. Although children who are illegal immigrants themselves or whose parents are illegal immigrants do attend public schools, it does not go without complaint from citizens of the United States. There is a lot of debate concerning the tax and federal money that goes into an educational system that supports students with illegal immigrant status (Educating the "other" children - education of illegal immigrants may be necessary). This prejudice acts even more as a hindrance to the integration of immigrant children into schools in The United States. Apart from not understanding cultural norms and regulations, the English language is completely different from the Spanish language and these differences make academic assimilation in America appear to be nearly impassable boundaries. These children have to make additional efforts in order to succeed in school and society, exceeding the normal struggles that confront an average student.

In reaction to this, schools make many efforts to help these students. ESL allows children to bridge a gap between their two identities, meant to integrate rather than isolate students; they are able to interact with people who share a similar culture with them but in their own schools, a place where they often feel alienated but still find comfort within it. In my elementary school (13 years ago), there was an ESL class and the teacher was of Latin American descent (increasing the comfort level and familiarity the students had in the school). The students were able to speak Spanish if necessary but were learning English in a way that was less intimidating than it would have been to be thrown into a classroom and expected to learn English through some form of osmosis.

The focus of this ethnography is on the education of Latin American students in Red Hook, New York's elementary school population. I focus on the social relationships that these students have with each other, with the white students and with their education in general. I am reflecting upon research that I have done through participant and non-participant observation and interviews with children and teachers. Through the compilation of history, anecdotes, analysis and theory, I hope to promote the connection between the Latin American and white cultures of Red Hook and work to facilitate communication between them.

Chapter 2

The Agency of Language

A person's language shapes much of his/her identity, social interactions, comfort, sense of superiority or inferiority and sense of belonging. Learning a language can be used as a way to defeat one's sense and status of being 'inferior' within society. For an immigrant, or someone who does not speak the dominant language of a country, the acquisition of that language can shape so much of his/her experiences. For Mexican immigrants to the United States, the challenge of learning English is often an intimidating, yet necessary feat. Children that are first- or second-generation immigrants most often speak Spanish at home and are surrounded by English everywhere else. Generally, the child learns English through his/her schooling – the immersion acts as an invisible push, forcing the child to learn English, often efficiently and quickly. Diego, a kindergartener in Mrs. Patrick's class and a regular attendee of Red Hook ESL, did not speak any English when he first started going to school. After merely eight months he has become practically fluent in the English language, but not necessarily in his actions. Although he has become an English speaker, Diego is still held back by his emotional and mental discomfort that came about due to his sense of inferiority when he began kindergarten. Both Mill Road and the American government make efforts in order to protect and support a student's learning of English, whether it is through federal laws, or small efforts that teachers make in order to assist

their students in assimilating into the culture and society of both Red Hook and the greater American society in which the children operate.

As one would suspect, immigrating to a country, and preparing to reside, work and live within it is an intimidating act, especially if one is unfamiliar with the dominant language spoken. When Mexican immigrants come to the United States, they learn to speak English out of a necessity (or desire) to become an active member and participant in the culture and society. One must work toward doing so, but once the language is acquired, a certain level of power and comfort are as well. As I have observed, when an immigrant learns to speak English, his/her confidence level increases greatly and he/she feels comfortable with participating in local activities and communities. The children whom I worked with are often very aware of and greatly affected by this. A hierarchical system, invisible or not, connected to one's ability to speak English has a large impact on one's social and cultural connections. One will often be persuaded to stick with a familiar group, tradition or language in order to feel accepted and like an insider, which can often lead to a sort of exclusion from other groups, traditions and languages.

I have witnessed a tremendous change in personality brought about by newly acquired fluency in English. Again, using Diego as an example, he did not speak English at all on starting school. Although I and other tutors at Red Hook ESL speak Spanish, at least a little bit if not nearly fluently, Diego was very shy and hesitant to speak at all just a few months ago. Now, although he is still shy, he is much more willing and excited to talk to us, he shares stories and is more active in games and lessons. Once he began to feel as though he was welcomed and had become a part of the English speaking community, he was much more apt to express his personality and interact with people outside of the Mexican community, whom he was already familiar and comfortable with. His teacher, Mrs. Patrick also commented on his dramatic

progress over the course of the year. Mrs. Patrick is always assigned many ESL students and is therefore very experienced and knowledgeable about how to best integrate them into the class and local (Red Hook/New York/white) dynamics. She told me that Diego rarely spoke (English or Spanish) until January and that it took him a month before he replied “Good Morning” to her, which she attempted every morning. Seemingly simple tasks, such as saying “Good Morning” can be extremely intimidating to one who is unfamiliar with the language, atmosphere and people whom he/she is with. Once these boundaries are crossed, comfort level increases, and therefore one’s openness and willingness to partake in a new task becomes greater and he/she is much more likely to participate. The restrictions of the language hierarchy are overcome.

Juliana (another student at the ESL center) and Diego are both five years old, however Diego and Juliana are not at the same language levels. Juliana has spoken nearly perfect English for the entire time that I have worked with her (Winter 2009 – the present). However, Diego’s skills have only recently become strong, due to his starting kindergarten in the fall. Almost immediately Diego became dramatically more vocal, assertive and confident in his English skills. It was obvious that Diego’s lacking English skills made his school life very difficult. This made me question the different influences that Juliana and Diego may have, affecting their consumption of English in their daily lives. I noticed that Ivan (Juliana’s brother) makes much greater efforts to help Juliana with her English, making encouraging comments such as “She’s so much better at English than me” and helping her to adjust to her new school life. I asked Luis, Diego’s 12-year-old brother, if he spoke a lot of English when he originally started going to school. When Luis told me that he barely spoke any English I asked him about the effects that had on him. He told me that it made school a lot more difficult, but he did not seem upset or regretful, just honest. Children have an amazing ability to quickly learn second languages, lessening, but not

eliminating, the difficulty of becoming accustomed to a new culture. One's family can be a great resource for a non-English speaker to improve his/her abilities. Considering the fact that Luis admittedly struggled in school due to language barriers, I asked him if he helps Diego with learning English, expecting that he would affirm that he does. However, he bluntly stated that he does not, and when asked, he replied that he doesn't know why, he just doesn't. I was surprised that Luis, although aware of the negative effects, did not make an effort to help his younger brother to avoid the struggles that he had himself.

Hegemony

Language is extremely hegemonic, holding power to support a culture, dictating who is welcome and under what circumstances. A system is created in which status can be determined based on one's competency with the language. One's perceived competency, whether by her/himself or by others in the society, dictates many social interactions. The American social hierarchy is organized in a way that puts wealthy white males at the top, who are often the leaders of the nation, other governmental divisions, corporations and other institutions and most basically, families. Non-white races are stereotyped as being of a lesser class and assumed to be poorly educated. This association of class and race or heritage has been present, historically, for nearly all of the existence of the United States as a nation, since its imperialist settling. The succession of the power dynamic is present, creating racial tensions visible to all, whether or not one is part of the dominant class.

As many minorities are associated with a certain language, language can therefore be a demonstration of one's minority status; the lure of learning the dominant language becomes even

stronger. Ivan shared a story with me about a visit to Jade Palace, the local Chinese restaurant; he was outraged by a disagreement between “Jade Palace lady” and himself and his family. Ivan began by telling me that he wants to learn Chinese so that he can “yell at the Jade Palace lady.” Ivan and his family had placed an order that was very different from what they received. The most probable cause of this disagreement is that both the workers of Jade Palace and Ivan’s family speak with accents, making the ability to communicate with each other much more difficult. Ivan told me that he took part in battling with “the Jade Palace lady” about what they had ordered; eventually, “the Jade Palace lady” became very angry and aggressively told them to leave the restaurant and never come back.

Ivan was confident in the fact that if he learned Chinese he would be able to return to Jade Palace to yell at the “Jade Palace lady.” He is aware of the power that language holds, eager to use it to his advantage, using the added power that may come of his being Mexican and speaking Chinese, therefore, supporting the advantages that come with being bi/multilingual. The ferocity of this argument was most likely aided by the fact that both groups belong to minority races, making their power statuses equal, at least in comparison to the race that they most often interact with, whites. Because “the Jade Palace lady” was Chinese and Ivan and his family Mexican, they both made assumptions based on each other’s appearance that they would be able to overpower one another, hoping to prove their point and get what they wanted. In addition to the racially organized hierarchy, the positions of power within the setting complicate the interaction further. The ‘Jade Palace Lady’ manages the eatery, therefore, granting her more power within the setting of the restaurant and, additionally, within the socio-economic hierarchy because she is a business owner. Yet, Ivan and his family still felt that it was a battle that they should be able to win.

These unspoken class divisions are what directed the interaction and, ultimately, what permitted the 'Jade Palace lady' to 'win' the battle and prohibit the Ramirez family from returning.

Language, especially in conjunction with race, has an associated power, unequally distributed amongst racial groups and categories. Ivan is aware of the fact that with his English skills he adopted more power within the English speaking community, therefore, his plan to learn Chinese in order gain sovereignty over "the Jade Palace lady" illustrates the connection made between language and power, especially by those put into a position of inferiority due to a lack of competency in a language. Learning to speak the dominant language has profound significance and can change one's experiences so much, it opens doors and creates access to many new opportunities – which is my main inspiration to teach English, hoping to bring communities closer and lessen the distinction made between two groups.

Nationality and Familial Relationships

Every Monday evening I tutor at the Red Hook ESL Center; I work with the children who attend, most of whom are of Mexican descent. There are two families with children that routinely attend the center. The Ramirez family consistently comes every week, and the other family, the Cruzes, is waiting to return until the warmer weather begins. Ivan and Juliana are Ana Ramirez's son and daughter. Ivan is in third grade and Juliana is in kindergarten. Ivan usually brings his homework to the sessions while Juliana is eager to do puzzles and color, activities, which the other tutors and I gear toward teaching linguistic skills. Although most of the children that attend the center already speak English reasonably well, they are bilingual which gives us the opportunity to make distinctions between English and Spanish grammar, pronunciation and linguistic cultural

influences. At ESL I often joke around with the children, maintaining an informal relationship, and a focus on academics, as well, therefore, creating a comfortable and productive environment.

While doing my fieldwork I observed the interactions that the children have with one another, with my fellow tutors and myself, as well as remarks that they make concerning their surroundings or 'American' experiences. I also asked direct questions concerning the cultural or linguistic challenges that they face. Most often, I asked Ivan questions about his experiences; he was happy to answer questions such as "Where were you born? How long have you lived here? How often do you help your parents with speaking English?" It was most effective to ask Ivan due to the fact that he is older and therefore more aware of his surroundings and experiences, in comparison to Juliana. I did ask Juliana if I could ask her some questions, hoping to note the differing opinions or stories that they may have. She agreed to my asking her questions; I asked if she speaks Spanish in school. "No." "Not even with Diego?" (they are in the same class) "No." "Do you help Mom and Dad when you go to stores?" No answer. I repeated the question a few times. Then she said that she speaks Spanish with her Mom. Ivan piped in by saying that Juliana speaks better English than he does. They agreed that it was because Ivan was born in Mexico and Juliana was born in The United States. This distinction between where each was born dictated much of how they chose to present themselves and with which nationality they identify with.

According to their categorization of nationalities, Ivan was purely Mexican and Juliana American. Juliana identified herself as an American, yet, later she made a remark that proved her sense of belonging to the Mexican community and nation. Juliana told me that her family lives here but their real home is in Mexico. It seemed almost as if it were a prepared speech, something that she's already heard and said multiple times. Juliana does not know what it is like to live in Mexico but she confidently feels that it is where she belongs. The strong feelings of Mexican

community and pride are very present, at least, in the Ramirez family. Although they are residents and active members of the Red Hook community, both the dominant and the local Mexican communities, they uphold this connection to Mexico, and therefore, its language, culture and beliefs. However, this does not seem to constrain their desire to be a part of the American community. All members of the family seem to be committed to learning English and participating in American culture and society.

Given that they are often more proficient in English, the children in the families often have to help their parents or other family members in certain situations in which English must be used. One of the most common questions that I asked the children was whether or not they had to help their parents with speaking English in certain circumstances; surprisingly, many said that they do not, but also, many said that they do help their parents, especially with small, private matters, such as understanding certain documents or items, rather than when they are at stores, et cetera.

Ivan told me that sometimes he has to help his parents to understand his materials from school. One day at the end of ESL class Ivan took out a Scholastic Book order, a small publication regularly distributed throughout the school so that families can order books. In Spanish, Ivan explained to Ana that it was an order for buying books and that he wanted to get some. Ana said that they would discuss it later. Although it did not seem that Ana was completely unfamiliar with the book order, it was obvious that Ivan understood it more and due to the fact that it was in English, he was able to guide his mother through using it. The exchange of power here is interesting, and opposed to normal distributions of power within families. Although the book order does not hold a great deal of significance on its own in terms of its academic importance, it was distributed by the school to the parents (but for the children) and exists as a connection between the two. However, Ivan had to explain it to his parents, changing

the most common order of power: school-parent-child becomes school-child-parent. Through schooling, the child gains a certain amount of social power over his/her parents in two ways: the child will expectedly become more academically powerful (more educated, more scholarly) but this school-related power can also transfer over into the home. The book order was dealt with outside of the physical school, deeming it a matter of the home although it is originally related to the school. Although unintentional, and most likely unconsciously, Ivan was able to hold some form of power over his mother because he had to assist her in understanding something, even if what is done with the book order is ultimately her decision.

Identity

On a visit to Mill Road I went to the cafeteria after visiting Mrs. Costello's first grade classroom. Lunch periods are separated by grade; I observed the 1st grade lunch. In the cafeteria I was able to observe a social aspect of the children's school lives. I spent most of my time with Mrs. Costello's class, but I also walked around, observing the lunchroom dynamic of each class. Paulina and Victoria (the Latin American students in Mrs. Costello's class) sat together, squirming and giggling like the rest of the children. I asked them if they always sit together and they said that they do not. While they ate I asked them questions about their speaking Spanish, both with each other and with their families. Paulina told me that she speaks Spanish with her mom, but stated that she does so only because she has to. Paulina has become adapted to the English language so much, that even in her own home, where the dominant language is Spanish, she would rather speak English. I find it curious that she rejects this aspect of her culture. Assumedly, within a household of Spanish speakers, all members of the household would choose

to speak Spanish within it. Yet, in this case, Paulina is choosing to replace an aspect of her Mexican heritage with one of her American heritage that she now feels more connected to. Mrs. Costello stated that, additionally, Paulina wanted to change her name to a more American sounding name; Mrs. Costello also noted that Paulina did not carry through with this change because her mom “was *not* all right with that.”

I question if Paulina chooses to change these small, but very important, details because she wishes to become a larger part of the American society or because she already feels as though she has assimilated completely, and would prefer consistency in her lifestyle. Victoria, on the other hand, does not speak Spanish at home because she doesn't have to; her mom speaks English, so therefore they carry their use of English from the dominant society into their household. Assuming that their parents are both first generation immigrants, I would suspect that they would be more inclined to speak Spanish in order to uphold the traditions of their original identity and heritage. Again, as in Paulina's case, I question the deliberateness of the act. What instigates this change from Spanish to English, even in the home? There is also the possibility that it is not a replacement of one identity or culture by another, but instead a way to use English in addition to one's knowledge and use of Spanish, hoping to immerse oneself in the dominant language of the country in which he/she lives in order to aid the assimilation process. Although the children are most challenged by this duality because they spend so much time in school, which is a remarkably effective and expeditious way of becoming fluent in a second language and assimilate into the society in general, this inconsistency and lure of two lifestyles affects immigrants of all ages.

Language In the Classroom

After observing the Latin American population in Mill Road Elementary School, I noticed that the main hindrance to their academics is language. Although this does bring the children problems regarding how well they are able to receive and give information, it does not have a dramatic effect on the way they process or interact with such information. In most cases, they are able to participate in class activities and be thoroughly included in the class's social and non-social atmospheres. Even Diego, whose language was an impediment to his schooling, especially in the beginning, is capable of succeeding within the classroom. Mrs. Patrick mentioned the possibility of having to hold him back from first grade for a year, and instead enroll in the pre-first program, yet she mentioned that it was due to his lack of emotional and social progress, rather than his ability to participate academically. Admittedly, I had expected to find a lot of challenges facing the Mexican students due to clashing cultural values and practices regarding education, as I am preconceived to deeply imagined ideas of fundamental cultural difference. Yet, just as the white families, the Latin American students and their families are eager to take part in the education process, valuing the same things: academic success (grades), social integration, intellectual and cultural growth and respect and cooperation given to teachers and fellow students.

The success of the school system is largely based on the active participation of the student, his/her family and the teacher. The teachers make many efforts, between working together with other teachers, applying specific techniques to their teaching, allowing students to find and build their own comfort within the school, and using as many resources as are available in an attempt to make their students' transition into American society less stressful or intimidating. Mrs. Detroia, the ESL teacher at Mill Road, speaks and understands some Spanish but rarely uses it. She does

not forbid the use of Spanish in her classroom but she does not necessarily encourage it either. She allows the students to speak Spanish in order to help each other but prefers that they use English as much as possible. This adds to the students' comfort in the classroom; the dichotomy of home life and school life becomes less extreme because they do not have to exclusively use either language in her classroom. To increase and facilitate this comfort, the school tries to give each student 'a buddy' who speaks the same language in his/her classroom. Mrs. Detroia commented that students speak Spanish, the kindergarteners, particularly, with each other, especially in the beginning of the year. The fact that the school makes efforts catering to each individual bi-lingual student by pairing them up within the classroom proves that they are concerned about the immigrant children, individually, determined to make their experiences and entrance into American culture easier and decreasing the likelihood of feelings of separation and isolation.

Teachers also have a type of power related to their specific use of language. The language that Mrs. Costello used with her students had a large impact on the way they interacted with her, the class and the lesson. She used terms such as: "Give him a chance, we're learning," "You're a good reader, give it another try," and "Stay with me," all encouraging the students while engaging them, making sure that they are not only focused but confident in their ability to answer a question or resolve a problem. Although this use of language is not a contrast of one language versus another, it is the *way* in which the language is used that gives it so much power. Any language can be manipulated; Mrs. Costello uses specific words or terms when and how they are necessary; her choice of language carries a power capable of completely changing each of her students' experiences in school. Therefore, it is not only the language that is spoken that affects

so much of its use, and response to it, but in addition the way it is chosen to be used and the manner in which one facilitates its use.

Mrs. Patrick also mentioned the permission she grants to the Latin American students to speak Spanish in the classroom; although Mrs. Patrick's expression of this permission did not show that she allows as much Spanish speaking in her classroom as Mrs. Detroia does, she does, however, also use it as a means of creating a comfortable environment, which she expects will eventually inspire the children to exclusively speak English. Mrs. Patrick explained to me that it is rare that Mexican students speak Spanish to each other. In some instances, the children will speak 'Spanglish' when they are unsure of the English words; Mrs. Patrick referred to this as 'Pidgin English,' which is a combination of two languages spoken when two groups do not share a common language, but are still capable of communicating with each other.

The mere comfort of knowing that one can speak Spanish if necessary, or even just desired, empowers the Mexican students, giving them freedom to express themselves as they desire to, it even gives them a sort of prerogative within the school. For example, while I walked with Mrs. Detroia's class to the buses at the end of the day, Cindy and Maria, two fourth grade students, were walking at the back of the line, where I was also positioned. They were talking in Spanish with each other. In a playful manner Cindy asked "Que tomas?" (What are you drinking?) Maria replied, "Que?" (What?) and with a giggling response, Cindy asked, "Una cerveza?" (A beer?). I snickered at Cindy's final response, amused by her ability to use Spanish almost as an act of rebellion, getting away with a conversation that may normally be deemed inappropriate by the school. She is able to avoid the need for using the dominant language and in a way is able to be a part of an exclusive Spanish-speaking 'club.' They both turned around with a surprised look on their faces when they realized that I understood Spanish. I avoided bringing

up the topic of their conversation, being that it was a harmless, comical act and instead asked them if it is common that they speak Spanish to each other. They confirmed and said that they always speak in Spanish when they are having informal conversations, but other than that, they speak English.

Mrs. Detroia used similar tactics to encourage students. When Mrs. Detroia pushed in on Mrs. Raegan's third grade classroom I observed both teachers using techniques that inspired curiosity and interest in the students. When a student asked Mrs. Detroia a question that the student did not necessarily need help with, Mrs. Detroia responded by saying "You have to think of a way to solve that problem. What other options do you have?" Rather than giving in and throwing the answer at the student, Mrs. Detroia was able to show him that she believed that he could resolve his issue on his own. As with the example of Mrs. Costello encouraging her students, Mrs. Detroia is also using language as a tool, implementing its use to fit her desired outcome, which ultimately, is an increase in independence instilled in the students.

In addition to manipulating the language, Mrs. Costello also encourages her students through the use of a variety of other methods. During the lesson, Mrs. Costello was very encouraging when speaking to students, assuring that each felt comfortable in the space, not afraid to give up and to not be afraid of answering incorrectly. It was obvious that the students felt very secure in the classroom and with Mrs. Costello and that her style of approaching students led them to respect her and the space. For the same reasons, they were overall very well behaved; when I entered the room, all of the children spun around in their seats, almost perfectly synchronized, but very quickly turned around to face the board. They knew where their attention had to be, so as soon as Mrs. Costello approached the front of the room again, they did as well. It was obvious that the children acted this way not out of fear, but respect. Mrs. Costello was excited and willing to work

hard for the class and they reciprocated completely.

ESL's Resources

On my first trip to the elementary school, I followed Mrs. Detroia, the ESL teacher, on a push-in in Mrs. Reagan's third grade class (Ivan's class). A push-in, the opposite of a pull-out – when students are taken from their general education classroom and into another for extra help, allows the students to gain ESL education without having to leave their general education classroom. Mrs. Detroia went to the class to co-teach a lesson with Mrs. Reagan, something that she does once or twice a week. This time that Mrs. Detroia spent in the classroom counted toward the ESL students' required number of ESL hours per week. As a writing assignment, each student had to make an advertisement for an object lost, found or for sale; for example, they made advertisements for lost puppies, rings for sale, or rockets for sale. They had to make a clear title for the advertisement, describe the item (use and recognition of adjectives) and draw a picture of it. Mrs. Detroia and Mrs. Reagan worked together, each helping both ESL students and non-ESL students to complete their advertisements. This familiarized both groups with Mrs. Detroia, making ESL seem less daunting and unfamiliar. Often, when students are pulled from their classrooms to go to an extra-help program throughout the day, it can be alarming and hard for a non-involved student to understand. However, with this familiarity, ESL becomes a school-wide resource rather than being hidden from normal sight.

In addition to spreading the resources of ESL, Mrs. Detroia also makes many efforts that cater to the individual needs of her students, again easing their process of assimilation, giving them a connection to and comfort within the dominant community of Red Hook. For example,

she invites her second grade students to eat lunch with her in her classroom once a week. During these lunches they often compare the foods they eat at home to the foods that they eat at school. She commented on the fact that the Mexican students usually receive free lunch (lunch paid for by the government due to low income status of the family). Additionally, she adds that they all like pizza (a very American food). She also comments on the fact that the Asian students usually bring their own foods, which are usually very specific to their culture. Richie, a student from West Africa does not like to eat chicken because he is used to a diet based on grains. Giving the students the opportunity to eat with her in her classroom is another factor that increases the students' comfort level, but it is also a promoter of multiculturalism, not only through sharing the American traditions but also sharing their own traditions, both with Mrs. Detroia and with each other.

Apart from the lunches, Mrs. Detroia makes many efforts toward introducing her students to American traditions. Mrs. Detroia most often teaches the students about American holidays through art projects. She often compares celebrations and holidays between cultures, for example, she teaches about 3 Kings Day, which is commonly celebrated within Hispanic cultures. This, like the Thanksgiving dinner, which she plans for all of the ESL students and their families, is a very effective way to introduce the students to American culture; holidays and celebrations take place in any and every culture -- comparing the holidays, traditions and manners of celebrations familiarize the students with them, and therefore, the greater culture of the United States.

Mrs. Detroia hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for her students and their families; all of the families attended. As Thanksgiving is a holiday celebrated exclusively in The United States, the opening of the tradition to immigrant families builds a bridge between the two communities.

They share traditions outside of an academic context, rather than solely learning about the holidays, the families are able to truly experience them. The dinner is a way in which she extends her welcoming and introductions to American society beyond her students and into their families. Apart from the interactions at the dinner, Mrs. Detroia says that she is not in constant communication with the parents, but does speak with them at least once a month.

Another way in which she familiarizes her students with American culture is by choosing a proverb each week that contains common American expressions; almost every Friday Mrs. Detroia distributes a test on the proverbs. Similar to Mrs. Detroia's reasoning for teaching the proverbs, Mrs. Lewis, the remedial reading teacher, has a regular lesson, which she calls "What Mama says," which introduces the students to popular sayings. On the day that I observed in her classroom they discussed "Don't count your chickens before they hatch." Giving the children these insights into small factors of the culture help them to assimilate into the culture beyond talking, dressing and learning, et cetera, as the rest of their demographic does. They are able to take part in larger cultural traditions. As Mrs. Patrick often has many ESL students in her class, she too has developed techniques to aid in the students' ease with which they assimilate into school life, such as her dedication and meticulous attention she gives to her students, especially those that have most recently immigrated.

Mrs. Patrick's class was the most diverse of the classes that I observed. There are two Mexican children, one boy and one girl, two black children, one boy and one girl and one Asian boy. Mrs. Patrick always has the majority of the kindergarten ESL students in her class. She speaks some Spanish and after her years of experience in this situation is well prepared to take on the challenges that come with a child who does not come from an English-speaking background. As Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa explains in *Raising Multilingual Children: Foreign Language*

Acquisition and Children, “Teachers’ preparedness in dealing with speakers of different languages is vital to the students’ success” (124). Although Mrs. Patrick only has two students from Mexico this year (Juliana and Diego) she has had many more immigrant children in the past; three years ago there were eight Mexican students. She also used to have many more immigrant students from the Unification church in Barrytown, New York, which she suspects has since closed because the number of Asian students has dramatically decreased. Mrs. Patrick told me that the Unification church brought many Japanese, Korean and Chinese students to the school, diversifying the population greatly. She noted that having non-English speaking students takes a lot more work and that she has to demonstrate and model a lot more, affiliating symbols and objects with their titles. For example, she recalls that she had to literally walk Diego to the bathroom, showing him what and where it was. Although it may be a lot more work than most teachers have, Mrs. Patrick did not seem at all bothered by this added work, instead she described the work she did proudly and seemed to relish in her ability to take on this diversity of students.

When non-English speakers learn English, there are some genres of vocabulary that come easier and are acquired more quickly than others. There is a generally common process that English learners go through. Mrs. Detroia explained that the younger students learn faster, quickly acquiring an understanding of the use of social and academic languages. The students first master the oral language and then their reading and writing skills develop. The process begins, first by learning the social language from their peers and subsequently learning the academic language in their classrooms. She explained the specific terms used, BICS – Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (social language) and CALP, an acronym for Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (See Chapter 3). Mrs. Detroia expressed that a student does not become fluent in an academic language until he/she has been studying for five to seven years.

This is an incredibly long period of time, especially in a situation in which the child does not learn English until he/she begins kindergarten and therefore, will not be efficient in his/her use of academic language until middle school. She also described additional factors that affect the ways in which a child becomes proficient in English. She explained that if the student knows how to read in Spanish, the literacy skills transfer over to English, however if Spanish literacy skills were never developed, reading and writing become much more difficult because not only must the student be educated on the processes of reading and writing, but additionally must come to recognize new sounds and letters with which they were never familiar before. As Tokuhama-Espinosa explains:

The *Native Literacy Approach* is based on the idea that the most efficient way of teaching children the community's dominant language is to first teach children to read in their native language, then (or simultaneously with the teaching of reading in the first language) teach the second language orally, and finally teach reading in the second language... The *Common Core Approach* teaches the new language through classes which depend more on physical demonstration or on numbers rather than on actual words... children who are learning the community's language for the first time can do so in the 'language of numbers.' Or through 'kinesthetic' means which require a demonstration of physical qualities (128).

Although Mrs. Detroia supports the *Native Literacy Approach* the school does not give her the resources nor the time to develop the children's literacy in this way and instead teaches using techniques more similar to the *Common Core Approach*. In order to develop listening skills, Mrs. Detroia utilizes pictures as resources; she also has a listening center but does not use it very frequently because it is often difficult for the children to understand. With the knowledge of these common characteristics and the availability of resources, teachers are able to assist in students' learning of English at a faster and more efficient pace.

In honoring the Lau remedies¹, there is a process that assesses a student's possible need for ESL based on several factors that are affected by their home life and any other cultural or social influences they may have. Mrs. Detroia explained that every student who speaks a second language in their home is required to take a Home Language Questionnaire and go through an interview process, which screens the extent of the use of both English and the main language spoken in the home. For example, the students are asked if they watch television in English or Spanish (or whichever language is spoken at home). Based on the results of the interview, the students also take a LAB-R (Language Assessment Battery – Revised), a basic English test required by the state government that each non-native English speaker must take once, at the beginning of his/her entering school. The test consists of listening, reading, writing and speaking tasks; the score the students receive on the test determine the amount of minutes of ESL a student must have each week.

Students must go through screenings given by both the individual school and the state, which assures that the students' skills are thoroughly tested. At the school, the ESL status of the students is closely monitored; a second test is given every May to determine whether or not a student should continue with the ESL program and how many hours of ESL the student should receive each week. If a student does well on the test but still receives a low score on the reading aspect of the test, rather than continuing with ESL, the student will go to remedial reading, encouraging the extra help, but not overwhelming a student (or his/her classmates and teacher) with a schedule full of extra instruction hours and assignments. Unfortunately, another factor determining whether or not a student stays in ESL is availability of spaces in the ESL program at that time. Another option is that a student can be enrolled in both ESL and remedial reading if

¹ The Lau remedies, as discussed in chapter one, organizes a system that identifies a student's English proficiency and determines how many hours of ESL the student will need each week.

he/she is slightly above level in ESL, yet, again, not capable of succeeding academically without this extra help. The children are screened often and in different ways, this keeps a constant watch on the students, keeping those that need to be in ESL enrolled, and allowing those who no longer require the help to leave the program.

Although the school requires that ESL and remedial reading resources are available to the students that need them, unfortunately, it does not assure that the programs are respected and used correctly by all members of the school community. While I was in Mrs. Caggione's fourth grade class, she gave the students a math test. During the test, Mrs. Caggione was talking to me about the children going to reading. She hesitated in the middle of the sentence, deciding on how to describe the remedial reading students; she called them 'that group.' She said, "When that group finishes you can go with them." I was confused by her hesitancy -- she appeared to be apprehensive of using any offensive or politically incorrect terms, but still projected a disapproving and unaccepting tone. I went with 'the group' to remedial reading with Mrs. Lewis. I noticed the large overlap of the ESL and remedial reading programs. All of the students that are in remedial reading from Mrs. Caggione's class are also in ESL.

The Role of Teachers

This attitude with which Mrs. Caggione approached discussing the remedial readers can also be applied to the way in which teachers' actions have a great effect on racial tensions within the classroom, especially due to the fact that the remedial readers are a minority in the classroom. As described by Rebecca Schaffer & Debra G. Skinner in their article, "Performing Race in Four Culturally Diverse Fourth Grade Classrooms: Silence, Race Talk, and the Negotiation of Social

Boundaries,” the teachers’ forms of expression and ways of interacting with certain groups influences their students ways of doing the same. The authors argue: “Despite the school’s efforts to foster a ‘politically correct’ environment in which race talk was for the most part limited to teacher-facilitated discussions of race relations, we found that most students were continuously engaged in racial boundary projects, which included, for example, forming racially homogenous friendship groups, accusing others of being racist, and employing racial stereotypes (e.g., ‘ghetto’) to describe people and to police appropriate behaviors.” Although a teacher may attempt to create a ‘politically correct’ atmosphere within his/her classroom, seemingly extraneous factors dramatically affect the children’s way of thinking or approaching a situation.

Mrs. Caggione was not the only teacher who displayed some sort of disrespect toward her students. Mrs. Costello, who made me feel slightly uncomfortable since the start of my visit – when I came into her classroom she told me to take my “coat off and sit unobtrusively;” then, she quietly said to me “We’re having some problems.” I was first discomfited by the word ‘unobtrusively;’ although I obviously planned to not interfere with the lesson in any way, the fact that she stated it made me feel unwelcome and disruptive. Additionally, I was uncomfortable with the fact that she was talking about the children, as if they (both ESL and non-ESL students) were unaware of her speaking or are habitually uncomprehending. I often came across this feeling while I was observing; the teachers acted as if the students were unaware of what the teachers were saying and doing, as long as it was not announced from the front of the room. They seemed as though they had the right to disrespect and talk negatively of their students, almost as if it were gossip, as long as it was ‘kept’ between adults. Through this act, the teachers assume even more power in the classroom, furthering the distance between them and their students, rather than creating a classroom in which teachers and students both have agency and some degree of power,

allowing them to actively participate in running the classroom, a relationship which I believe to be a vital part of creating a pleasant and respectful classroom environment and dynamic.

However, I noticed more actions that increased the students' jurisdiction rather than decreasing it. For example, Mrs. Detroia gives each student a book in which they record their own grades; she explains that this makes them aware of how they are doing and from that know how to improve what they need to change to do so. Giving the students an important role in their own schooling and grading teaches them independence and to take credit for their own actions, be it positive or negative. In addition to allotting power to the students, teachers must make efforts in order to include the students' families. For example, the students' report cards are distributed in both English and Spanish to Spanish-speaking families. For the most important documents, the school has translations of each, in four different languages. Mrs. Detroia also has a book of basic forms in Spanish that she, personally, uses. The school makes the important resources available to bi-lingual families but those with less official importance are not as readily available. Mrs. Detroia also makes sure to maintain contact with her students' families, showing them that she can be used not only for academic purposes, but also as a resource for more general aspects of their lives, such as various experiences they may have related to the Red Hook community. At the end of every grading period Mrs. Detroia meets with the parents of the students; she speaks Spanish when she can but most often, a translator is present, assuring that both Mrs. Detroia and the families are able to communicate all that they need to each other. The school and its teachers make efforts to create a comfortable environment in the school for not only the students, but their families as well, such as through the Thanksgiving dinner.

Mrs. Detroia also makes additional efforts in order to respect her students' and their families' privacy. Mrs. Detroia explained that she is unsure of the legal status of her students, and

refrains from asking questions about it. However, she is aware of the fact that many are most likely living in the United States illegally. She articulated that she has heard stories of the harsh realities of the struggles that immigrants go through to arrive in The United States. She explains that her students and their families had to make extreme efforts to enter the United States. A specific example she recalled is of a student telling her that his/her family members had to walk across deserts during their journey here. Knowing that her students have already had to battle so much in their lives must be terrifying and worrisome, yet gaining perspective on and understanding their experiences can help to strengthen the efficiency and value of her teaching.

Silent Influences – Decoration & Organization

Another effort that teachers can make in order to respect students and facilitate recognition of and appreciation for multiple races or ethnicities is through decorating the classroom with objects that present multiple types of people, situations and beliefs/attitudes. A person is subconsciously, yet heavily, affected by that which surrounds him/her. By simply having a poster depicting multiple cultures a student becomes aware of these cultures, and due to an enhanced familiarity will come an enhanced understanding of and comfort with those who are different from the student. Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa states that in international schools, “Signs will be posted in all relevant languages showing that each one is considered important” (118) in *Raising Multilingual Children: Foreign Language Acquisition and Children*. In nearly every classroom that I visited, the decorations were not at all supportive of multicultural education. People, in general, were rarely depicted and if they were, they were representative of American symbols and beliefs. For example, in Mrs. Costello’s classroom there were five posters of presidents (the only posters of

people in the classroom). There were posters of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln (two of each of these presidents) and one poster of Barack Obama (the poster of Obama was slightly hidden behind a movable metal cabinet). Although the placement of the poster in relation to the cabinet may not have been intentional, the message that it was conveying was clear to me, as an outsider to the classroom.

Mrs. Reagan's class also has an overwhelming sense of 'Americanness.' In Mrs. Reagan's classroom there is a huge American flag that measures approximately nine feet in length and six feet in width. Everyday, as a school-wide event, the Pledge of Allegiance is recited over the loudspeaker and it is expected that every student and teacher stand and recite it as well. When I came into Mrs. Reagan's classroom I arrived during the pledge; all of the students were standing and I immediately felt the need to place my right hand over my heart and recite the pledge, a response that my public school education had engraved in me. This allegiance to The United States of America that the entire school devotes time to each day is a part of an 'Americanization' process that students go through. It teaches students to be loyal to and proud of their country, but does not necessarily take into account the fact that not every member of the school's community is American. It is a forced Americanization; everyone is expected, even required, to demonstrate this loyalty. In my experience, reciting the pledge eventually loses any significance and becomes nothing more than a routine. I am not trying to portray any political beliefs regarding the use of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools, but instead I am expressing a way in which students who are not native to American culture go through a process of Americanization in school, becoming familiar with social, cultural and academic traditions, but also being exposed to various political and non-political perspectives and beliefs.

Mrs. Detroia's classroom was the only one that had explicitly multicultural decorations. There are a lot of posters in Mrs. Detroia's classroom, one is a 'World of Flags' poster, and another is a Hispanic heritage month poster, which has both English and Spanish on it. The 'World of Flags' poster does, at least, expose students to the fact that there are multiple nations in the world and that each can be represented by a flag; it does not, however, depict any cultural or racial differences that might distinguish the nations from our own, or any others. Mrs. Detroia's Hispanic heritage month poster also illustrates the presence of another culture, without essentializing Hispanic culture. These posters demonstrate and introduce various representations of cultures to the students, but they do not necessarily instill respect for or increased understandings of the cultures, nationalities or races, et cetera.

The other classrooms that I observed in have posters that are more academically related, such as posters with grammar rules. In Mrs. Reagan's classroom there is only one poster with pictures of children, the others are motivational or writing/reading related. The one poster with the children depicts children of multiple races. There is also a poster about the Arctic (which is related to the subject matter of the current Social Studies unit); on the poster is a picture of an Inuit woman. This poster effectively presents a culture other than that of The United States to the students. Mrs. Caggione's classroom is generously decorated with posters focused on reading and writing skills, and inspirational posters with sayings such as "You can do it!" Mrs. Patrick's classroom was full of self-made decorations. There was a series of three-foot tall paintings, each representing a letter of the alphabet; for example, there was a Native American for the letter 'N.' As in the other classrooms, there was an absence of posters with people in it, neither promoting nor obstructing ideas of multiculturalism, but rather avoiding the topic.

Another feature of the classrooms that had a large effect on the way in which the children interacted with each other was the organization of the desks or tables in each classroom, which are assigned and organized by each teacher. Mrs. Raegan's classroom's seating was organized in rows, separated into groups of two or three, with one long row at the front of the room. ESL students were interspersed with non-ESL students in Mrs. Reagan's classroom. Having the children so well mixed increases the sense of community within the classroom, as does the long rows, giving each student a spot that is not distinguishable from the others beside the fact that one may be in the first row and another in the back.

The seating in Mrs. Caggione's classroom is arranged in tables, which are groups of two, four, or five desks together. The seating of Latin American students is not as well blended as it is in Mrs. Raegan's classroom. In Mrs. Caggione's, the remedial readers were all at a table together and the Latin American girls at another. The tables were segregated by gender, with the two girls' tables located in the center of the room and two tables of boys on either side. It is possible that the Latin American girls are at the same table because there are only eleven girls, four of whom are Latin American. However, due to the fact that the remedial readers sit together I am more hesitant to believe that it was accidental. This separation organized by certain categories or groups isolates certain children and supports the existence of cliques and dynamics of inequality within the classroom. It pushes children to associate with those similar to themselves, according to Mrs. Caggione's classifications.

Mrs. Patrick's class was much fuller and busier than the other classrooms, which is expected given that it is a kindergarten classroom, and therefore needs supplies that cater to young children, such as toys and other playthings. The classroom has a fish tank in it, whose water quietly flowed during the silence of 'rest time,' the only time I noticed it (before the room

became noisy with the bustling of hardworking kindergarteners). There were four clearly designated areas in the classroom: the cubby area where each child has an individual space to hang his/her coat, backpack and other supplies; the rug, an area designated for reading books and group planning and discussions; the play area, which has a small play kitchen, a station for listening to books, a table and two computers, a sandbox, Mrs. Patrick's desk and a small table isolated from the rest; and the main area, which has four large tables, used daily and constantly by the students. The tables do not designate a seat for each, labeled with their name or personal property, but instead the tables are organized by subject matter – art, math, writing and discovery. Additionally, the classroom has its own bathroom and a small kitchen area, with a sink, microwave and pots, pans, and various condiments. This arrangement allows the classroom, and therefore the class, to be self-sufficient and confined. Although it can be seen as a form of isolation from the rest of the school, I consider this to be an effective seclusion, due to the fact that the kindergarteners need to feel an extra sense of comfort and protection in comparison to older children. Because the children do not have designated seats, there is no sense of exclusion or segregation caused by selected seating arrangements. Each child sits with everyone at some point during the week. This is most likely due to the fact that Mrs. Patrick often has so many non-white students, so she is more aware than other teachers may be of small details that may cause racial exclusion or tensions.

Conclusion

A school and its teachers can make many efforts, large or small, in order to cater to students' individual needs. The dynamic and atmosphere that teachers and administrators create in a school

affect students in many ways, on both conscious and subconscious levels. Children strongly react to and learn a lot from the situations and atmospheres in which they live. A teacher can make one seemingly small statement or action and a student may be strongly affected by it. A poster in a classroom can present an entire world to a student. Translated documents can make a child's school life accessible to his/her family when it may have been completely foreign and unknown if it were not for these resources. Mexican students and their families in Red Hook are faced with daily challenges that arise because their culture, traditions, values or routines are different from those of the United States. However, with the availability of help and resources from the students' schools, the outcome of and way of approaching many situations can be changed. Resources, such as ESL, make dramatic differences in a child's experiences in school, increase his/her comfort level (both inside and outside of school), widening the student's understanding of the cultures that surround him/her, bettering the accessibility of more resources and opportunities and most of all, help the student to adapt and assimilate into the society in which he/she lives. Learning a new language can spark the process of becoming more active in the community in which he/she is now a part. A sense of comfort and inclusion is produced, and with language, comes an increased availability of opportunities and possibilities in the English language learner's future and new ways of dealing with his/her world.

Chapter 3

Bilingualism

One's identity and expression of this identity are dramatically affected by the culture with which one identifies, one's personal values and beliefs, the identity of family members and friends, the language one speaks, the activities which one participates in, and the society in which one lives. Each of these variables has multiple variants, resulting in infinite influences on one's sense of identity. A person's influences multiply greatly when he/she enters a new country, exposed to new forms of expression, cultural traditions and formal and informal personal interactions. The students at Red Hook ESL, like everyone, struggle with finding their own sense of being and expression; they experiment with various forms of self-expression and people whom they choose to associate themselves with. But their struggle goes beyond trying to find their own place within society, additionally, they are forced to discover their own identity, dealing with factors from two very different societies, attempting to find their niche in which they can comfortably be a part of each society and culture, while also reflecting a sense of belonging to others, in avoidance of feeling excluded or like an outsider.

Ivan, Juliana, Diego, Luis and the other Mexican immigrants are confronted daily with situations in which they must choose to identify themselves as Mexicans, Americans or Mexican-Americans. They live dual lives, strongly associating their Mexican heritage with their homes and families and, in contrast, are otherwise surrounded by American culture, more specifically,

Red Hook, therefore identifying themselves as members of the society of both Red Hook and the greater United States. In the United States, Mexican children's identities are conflicted due to the presence of the Spanish language and Mexican culture in their homes and English and the American culture outside of their homes. Rosemary Salomone expresses, in *True American*, that, "Among foreign-born Hispanics, only 7 percent speak mainly or only English at home, giving rise to a potential linguistic and cultural disconnect between them and their 'Americanizing' children" (84). Their identities are confused and they become unsure as to which group they more strongly associate themselves with. Paul Christophersen's *Second Language Learning: Myth and Reality* explains, to an extreme degree, "It is true that on the surface he may seem to be 'one of us', but then 'That is precisely the trouble: he is not what he seems to be.' This suspicion may exist in both communities, thus making the bilingual a 'marginal man'" (78). Bilinguals are removed, in some sense, from both communities, prone to difficulties regarding being able to fully identify with either. However, in opposition to Christophersen's argument, distinguishing 'us' versus 'them' is not at all relevant to the bilingual person's identity, instead, this 'us' versus 'them' attitude causes a marginality of identity for members of the dominant culture, perplexed by the disruption of the suspected conformity of their society, which, in reality, does not exist at all. The labeling of a person based on appearance or language has nothing to do with the self-identity of the person whom is being judged, rather it is the person who is projecting these labels who is concerned with identity.

Projection & Understanding of Race & Identity

Subconsciously (or not), bilingual and bicultural people are making decisions that present their affiliation to one group or another, and with these personal choices a person constructs his/her own identity. “Cinco de Mayo, Normative Whiteness, and the Marginalization of Mexican-Descent Students,” an article by Clayton A. Hurd, articulates high school students’ understandings of racial and cultural conflicts and the dynamics that they form in the suburban California high school. Although high school students have a much greater understanding than elementary school students do of boundaries that race and culture create, the same sentiment exists in both settings and both groups are challenged by the same tensions, whether or not they are aware of it. Hurd explains that students of Hillside High (the suburban California high school) consciously make decisions concerning how they identify and present themselves racially.

A Hillside High administrator lamented that even those Mexican students who have been able to cross over and join some of the white-dominated clubs and friendship groups ‘have to be okay with being white.’ By this, she referred to their willingness to assimilate to styles, norms, and behaviors thought to be characteristic of white students (English language, dress, similar preferences for music, leisure activities, etc.) and to minimize expression or behaviors that might be associated with ‘Mexican-ness,’ including regular associations with other groups of Mexican-descent students on campus. In this sense, being ‘white’ or ‘Mexican’ within the context of Hillside High is best understood not in terms of particular groups of students with clear memberships, but in terms of categories of affiliation relationally constructed in battles over definitions, symbols and ways of being by student status groups tied together in mutual definition and in competition. (299)

Hurd’s use of the term “student status groups tied together in mutual definition and in competition” supports the idea that each cultural group consciously supports the division created between the two groups, aware of the consequences of the division, however, they choose to support, rather than overcome the boundaries, therefore continuing the racial tensions that result.

Although it is much less likely to be articulated, Mexican elementary school students do experience the burden of being part of a minority, which immensely complicates the questioning of their identities. They, too, establish forms of racial prejudice in their interactions with one another. Rebecca Schaffer & Debra G. Skinner, in “Performing Race in Four Culturally Diverse Fourth Grade Classrooms: Silence, Race Talk, and the Negotiation of Social Boundaries” reiterate Van Ausdale and Feagin’s point that “preschoolers learned to use race strategically, for example, to include or exclude others or to claim and defend a right to certain toys or other goods” (278). Young children understand the divisions between races and cultures and, as adults do, react to and employ certain powers associated with their superior, or inferior, statuses. In the United States, being a part of the dominant white society is a desirable position, granting cultural capital and automatic acceptance into the cultural and racial group, therefore resulting in one’s feeling connected to the vast majority of people in America, rather than a smaller Mexican community. Like Paulina, who wanted to Americanize her name, the children desire to be a part of the dominant white group in the United States, rejecting, at least to some extent, their Mexican identity, hoping to become completely assimilated into the dominant culture. Factors such as children’s choices of activities to participate in, social groups they are a part of, the clothes they wear and the language they speak formulate the social and cultural identity that they present to the public and themselves.

Historically, racial tensions have caused major social and political upheavals in the United States, dividing communities, even countries. Preoccupations with race are seemingly unavoidable. However, race is not nearly as totalizing for children. The innocence of childhood is affirmed by the fact that children are able to (although it is not always acted upon) surpass these socially created boundaries and live in the more egalitarian world of childhood. Elizabeth Chin

analyzes children's understanding of race in relation to their use of toys in "Ethnically Correct Dolls: Toying with the Race Industry." Chin studied poor and working-class black girls' play and the way in which their conceptions of race guided various approaches that they took to both play and social interactions.

Mattel (the makers of Barbie) produced an ethnically correct series of dolls, whose "bodies had been changed to more accurately represent African American figures. The toys were designed and marketed specifically to reshape a territory dominated by an assumption of whiteness" (305), claiming that they are representative of various races, giving all children the opportunity to play with toys that 'look like them,' assuming that this would improve their self esteem. However, when doing her fieldwork with these girls, Chin rarely noted that the girls were concerned with their dolls' appearance contrasting their own. As children, the girls were instead concerned with playing with the dolls and relating to them that way. They dressed the dolls and role-played while overlooking the dolls' race. For example, "the front section of the doll's long, silky hair is done up in braids, each held at the end with a small plastic barette" (314). The girls were much more aware of the situation of the dolls (pregnant, fat, abused), giving the race less importance. Chin articulates: "Moreover, what these girls are doing emphasizes that they do not need to buy racial difference, or even to buy dolls that look like them; they can create dolls that look like them in fundamental ways through their own imaginative and material work" (316). It is the game that the girls play with the dolls rather than the dolls themselves that are catered to each doll owner.

It is the adults, rather than the children, who attempt to label and relate to the dolls' appearance or presentation and feel the pressure to marginalize races. The doll companies are catering to these adult notions of race, yet directing them toward children. Chin confirms "One of

the problems with all these overt and covert references to the civil rights movement is that they ultimately appeal more to parents – or grandparents – than they do to kids themselves” (310). In reference to Erica Rand’s *Barbie’s Queer Accessories* (1995), Chin reiterates, “children’s experiences cannot fully be recuperated through adult-centric approaches” (307). Children are affected by the society in which they live, but their inability to completely totalize the role of race supports the notion that childhood is a sacred experience, which adults cannot fully understand. This dichotomy causes a strain on the relationships of power amongst bicultural parents and their children. The children of immigrant families are much more likely to quickly adapt to a new social culture while their adult parents are much more engrossed in the politics of cultural marginalization. Therefore, children are not only in a more advantageous position linguistically, but socially as well.

Every one of the children that I observed at Mill Road socialized with both minority and white students. Their being in elementary school alludes to the fact that they are not necessarily overtly aware of the social stigmas that they might be assigned due to racial and cultural differences; however, they are still affected by feelings of inferiority due to their minority status. They participate in activities, both inside and outside of the classroom, with white and Mexican students. Juliana expressed that she plays with English-speaking students at recess, Diego played with white boys during playtime rather than with Juliana, the only other Mexican student in the class, and the various other students communicated that their social groups are not limited by racial or linguistic categorizations in any way. Aside from the group of fourth grade girls, I did not notice any Mexican cliques. When interviewing Mrs. Detroia I asked if she has noticed a strong community of Spanish-speaking students; she replied that there is not much of a community, but the fourth grade Latin American girls do spend most of their time together. She

says that, just as with any other demographic, some students naturally get along well, while others do not. It makes sense that the group to have the strongest sense of community is the fourth grade girls because they are the largest demographically consistent group of Latin American students in the school (there are 12 other ESL students, but are of varying genders and in varying classes or grade levels – factors which determine many friendship groups in elementary school) and they are all in the same class, which only has eleven girls, in total.

Ivan, as well, associates with both Mexican and white students. Ivan's neighbor, Steve, came to ESL with Ivan and his family twice over the duration of my time at ESL. Steve is a white boy, native to Red Hook, and the same age as Ivan. Ivan and Steve worked on their homework at ESL, both asking for help when necessary and interacting with me in the same way. Although Steve is a native speaker of English, he did not seem to feel isolated in any way due to being at an ESL center. I am sure that the Ramirez family had explained to Steve where they were going, making it clear that it was a class for non-English speakers of minority races but Steve seemed to be equally as comfortable at ESL as Ivan does. This could be a reflection of Steve's personality and level of comfort, or it may have something to do with the fact that even Ivan does not associate himself with the ESL class, and rather assumes that it is for his mother and not him because he already speaks English (even though the class is catered to both children and adults, making his participation and presence at ESL equally important as that of adults). This reading of ESL ascribes Ivan and Steve to the same position in terms of their use of the ESL center; instead of creating a racial or cultural divide, ESL distinguishes students according to their linguistic differences.

The Role of Red Hook ESL

The children's understanding of the Red Hook ESL center fascinates me. Some take it very seriously while others view it more as a social atmosphere, opposing it as an academic setting, and would much rather spend their time at the center playing. Being that the children already speak English, they do not use the ESL resources in the same way that their parents do. The ESL center is conducted in a local church's Parish Hall. There is a large, main room located on the first floor of the hall; ESL classes are conducted in the main room. On our arrival, both tutors and students help to prepare the space, unfolding and setting up metal chairs and setting about six plastic tables (varying each week depending on the attendance), generally with four chairs at each. At these tables, the adult students work with their tutors, each supplied with a small white board and dry erase markers. In the back of the hall there is a small room, approximately ten feet wide and twenty feet long. In this room there is a large bookshelf, where all of the ESL supplies are stored, and a small table, which just fits in between the shelf and the other wall.

The children's class is conducted in this back room. The differing sizes of the rooms organizes the power levels in the center, giving more importance to the adult students' experiences and portraying the role of the children as being secondary and less vital to the center. In fact, the center is catered toward the adults and their learning English, the foundation of and reason for the center existing. The children use this to dictate their willingness to participate or benefit from the program. The basement of the church is a large, empty space; generally, in the last fifteen/twenty minutes of class we go downstairs, giving the children the opportunity to run around and take advantage of the informality of the center. Some students, especially Luis, ask to go downstairs immediately on their arrival. This expresses his lack of interest in the program,

dismissing its being an academic environment that is useful for the children students, and instead views it as a place to play, occupying the children while their parents learn and benefit from the program. Luis' feeling that the center is of no use to him because he already speaks English demonstrates his identification with the dominant linguistic group. He does not need help that is directed toward the Mexican community; his fluency in English distinguishes him from the other students (including his mother) and grants him more cultural capital, according to majority standards.

Luis's personal distinction from the other, adult, students gives him a degree of power and agency in the dominant community that the non-English speakers do not have. Due to his speaking English, he rejects Red Hook ESL as a helpful resource, to the point that he expresses that there is nothing of interest to him besides being able to run around and play in the basement.² He views ESL as a social and unregulated environment, giving him the freedom to do what he wants. Luis's self-made separation from the resources of the ESL center show social and cultural decisions that Luis is making. Through rejecting the center as a necessary academic environment he is escaping from being labeled 'un-American.' He chooses the identity that he presents, separating himself from other Mexicans by not needing to learn English at ESL, but through the act of attending ESL classes, his identity is also labeled as a non-English speaker. Luis bestrides the American and Mexican worlds, creating an ambiguous identity within the context of the ESL center.

² Interestingly, Luis is enrolled in the ESL class at Mill Road; his English skills surpass those of his fellow Latin Americans outside of school, but are not equal to that of the dominant English-speaking community. Indeed, Luis is marginalized in both communities, possessing qualities of both, but he does not have complete rapport with either, yet still holds power over his parents.

Interactions With Red Hook's Dominant Community

Through voluntary attendance and learning of English at Red Hook ESL, the students gain new forms of cultural capital interconnected with language, and thus, are more likely to actively engage with the resources and advantages of Red Hook's dominant community. Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall explain in "Language and Identity":

Within linguistics, this hierarchical structuring of difference has been termed *markedness*, a concept that has been borrowed and extended by a number of scholars of identity within the humanities and social sciences to describe the process whereby some social categories gain a special, default status that contrasts with the identities of other groups, which are usually highly recognizable. (372)

The center strives to facilitate the students' integration into the dominant community through assuaging the students' linguistic assimilation. Bucholtz and Hall continue, "Marked identities are also ideologically associated with marked language: linguistic structures or practices that differ from the norm" (372). These marked identities increase the status of an individual; through speaking English in the United States and specifically Red Hook, English language learners obtain much more agency within the dominant culture.

The children at the center who already speak English, therefore, hold a power over their non-English speaking parents. Luis's knowing of English grants him a position in the dominant English-speaking culture, but because his parents lack English skills, they are not granted access to that same sphere of the dominant culture. This reversal of normalized patriarchal power distribution can be disruptive to a bilingual family's dynamic. Children's aptitude to quickly learn a second language complicates a family's social assimilation into the dominant community; the child is much more likely to assimilate into and create a stronger bond to the culture, the social culture in particular. The child's ability to fluently interact with members of the dominant

English-speaking community allows him/her to make friends and acquaintances much easier than his/her parents, therefore, assimilating into the social sphere of the dominant society. Although this causes a power reversal, it does not dictate the parent-child relationship. The parents, indeed, are making conscious decisions to give their children opportunities. Mrs. Detroia affirms that Latin American parents always come to meetings and are willing to do whatever they can to help their children, they want to make opportunities that they did not have themselves available to their children. Therefore, although the children may be in a better position than the parents are socially, it does not necessarily mean that it creates familial tension or jealousy.

Assessing the social agency of language, William Labov studied “Black English” amongst school children during the 1960s, analyzing the reception of their diction and the social consequences resulting from these receptions. Susan Philips recounts:

Labov’s argument for the inappropriateness of blaming Black English for the school problems of the children who spoke it entailed all of the elements involved in the relation between language and social inequality that have been central to discussions of this topic in linguistic anthropology since the mid-twentieth century. His argument entails *language features*, in this case a dialect, a dialect that is *ideologically* disvalued by the wider society, compared with a dialect that was valued. These dialects, and their positive and negative valuing, were associated with particular *social identities*, in this case the racially opposed identities of black and white. (477)

The language itself, and the way in which this language is spoken hold great cultural value; through mastering it, one’s associated cultural capital is enriched, leading to an increased security within the dominant culture, as well as affecting the presentation of one’s position to the members in this dominant culture.

Red Hook ESL allows its students to begin the process toward gaining this power and agency associated with the English language in the United States. Like the cultural capital granted to the children, English proficiency allows the adult students, as well, to become members

in more than just Red Hook's Mexican community, but rather a part of the dominant society. The effect that coming to Red Hook ESL has on the students is incredible. The center has come to be a well-known resource throughout the community and has proven itself to be a beneficial resource that is available to every non-English speaking person. Most of the Mexican students that I met at Mill Road School are also members of families that come to Red Hook ESL. This overlap really encouraged me, demonstrates that Red Hook's Mexican community views Red Hook ESL as being effective and easily accessible. It proved that the large majority of the community, or at least the families, are interested in integrating themselves into the greater community.

The efforts to learn English, participate in the town/state/country's resources and take part in standard American cultural traditions (Thanksgiving dinner at school, children's knowledge and use of current videogames, popular culture, fashion, etc.) help immigrants in Red Hook assimilate themselves and overcome barriers that can be extremely intimidating and discouraging. Speaking the dominant language of a country makes one's comfort level and participation in one's community much more active, therefore encouraging the transition from 'alien' to 'insider,' changing the identity of an immigrant, not necessarily one's cultural or national identity, but rather the way in which one perceives him/herself and therefore, the projection of oneself onto others.

I believe that I support this connection between the Mexican and white communities for the Mexican children with whom I interact. During playtime in Mrs. Patrick's class, Juliana invited me to play with her and the baby doll; she was changing its outfit and afterwards hosted a tea party for the three of us. While we were playing she told me that she was going to tell her mom that I came to her class. She made a connection between school life and home life, a connection that I helped to foster, and since, she has continued to bring up the fact that I was in

her classroom, as did the other students. I aspire to build a bridge, even if it's me personally, between the children's lives at school (American) and lives at home (Mexican). Through this connection, I hope to represent a part of the white community of Red Hook (whether or not I am originally a part of the Red Hook community) with whom they feel comfortable, therefore extending their comfort in the community as a whole, having the ability to connect with multiple members and multiple cultures/heritages/races.

To me, the ESL center is a community space, useful to non-English speakers *and* those who do speak English. It is a bridge between the two worlds and has formed relationships between immigrants to Red Hook and natives to Red Hook, specifically, but also United States citizens from a variety of locations (due to Bard students' active participation). A student of the center attends class two times a week, and within those four hours is able to be unaffected by any form of cultural marginalization. The center is available to members of both groups (English speakers and not); non-English speaking members of the community come as students, while English speakers participate as tutors. Although most of the tutors are Bard students, there are a few tutors who are members of the Red Hook community whom are not at all associated with Bard – the center is known and holds a position of power in both communities. Steve, Ivan's friend, is another example of the ESL center validly being a part of the Red Hook culture and community, even for those who speak native English.

This mixing of members of the community of Red Hook proper and Bard students who are not necessarily associated with the Red Hook community leads me to question our (Bard students') positioning and agency within the center; how are we suitable connectors for members within the dominant community in Red Hook? What is the extent of the marginalization that

exists between native members of Red Hook and Bard students' ephemeral position in Red Hook? And how do the students of the center perceive this marginalization?

Bard students and Mexican immigrants are essentially marginalized from the same group – white community members who are native to Red Hook. Although the marginalization occurs for very different reasons and according to differing levels, the pursuit of integration into the community is present in both circumstances, creating a situation in which Bard students are assumedly able to sympathize with the Mexican community. Members of the Red Hook community whom are non-English speaking immigrants with plans to reside in Red Hook for an extended period of time are more apt to develop a sense of belonging in the community. Bard students temporarily reside in Red Hook and are much more independent of the community, therefore only loosely connecting to the Red Hook community. Red Hook citizens are mainly white members of the lower to middle class economic group (12571-Fact Sheet), while the Mexican immigrants are associated with the lower class and Bard students are generally categorized as being in the upper middle class. According to common standards of teacher-student relationships, the teacher occupies the position of power. This class difference (whether or not class ascendancy is a valid demonstration of power) aids in assigning the tutors more power in comparison to the students, even though, according to traditional standards, the older person in a relationship is the possessor of greater power. Valid or not, (both inside and outside of the center) Bard students are given power over the Mexican students due to this cultural capital associated with class. The fact that (many) Bard students are of higher economic class level in comparison to most white Red Hook community members, our high level of cultural capital holds power with both immigrant and non-immigrant groups in Red Hook. Furthermore, our being educated in a respected higher education institution supports our abilities to teach, in comparison

to Red Hook residents who may be less educated. This dynamic is what validates our holding this position of power within the ESL setting.

The Systemization of ESL

My understandings of and experiences with ESL communities have generally been through informal interactions, based on experience and research rather than professional study or institutional education. However, a professionalized system does exist and within it are various terms and understandings associated with bilingualism and ESL education. Bilingualism is approached from multiple perspectives, viewed as more than linguistic capacity, but due to its extensive study, is furthermore seen as a cultural attribute, political variant, and personal identification. These various roles lead to the need for the systematization; one's bilingualism affects nearly every part of life, focusing on one aspect and its specific variants allows for bilingualism to be easily studied and employed.

For this reason, differentiating, categorizing, testing and providing necessary resources is crucial when approaching bilingualism in terms of education. For example, there are various classifications applied to English language learners based on original and current English language skills. There are two classifications regarding one's position as a bilingual; a child bilingual is a person who successively learned two languages, and in comparison, are infant bilinguals, who acquire two or more languages simultaneously from birth (Tokuhama-Espinosa 117). Ivan, Diego and Luis are examples of child bilinguals; their native language is not English, but Spanish; due to their living in Red Hook, they had to learn English in order to become a part of the American society, and especially for their education. Juliana is considered to be an infant

bilingual; because she was born in the United States, she was exposed to both English and Spanish since birth. Within both categories, the proficiency of the languages is measured and classified.

Jim Cummins, a professor at University of Toronto specializing in language development, created a series of categorizations. He created a system of organization and identification based on a bilingual's capabilities with both his/her first and second languages. This is one of Cummins' more basic bilingual classifications; from here he assesses the bilingual's expected strengths and weaknesses and ultimately, the various possible affects and effects of bilingual students' education are determined.

Cummins	First Language	Second Language
Limited Bilingualism	Low Proficiency	Low Proficiency
Partial Bilingualism	Native-Like Control	Low Proficiency
Proficient Bilingualism	Native-Like Control	Native-Like Control

In *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*, Cummins explains the benefits of bilingualism and bilingual education. Cummins was the founder of the terms BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) (See Chapter 2), assessing students' intake of language and movement toward proficiency of the English language within the school setting.

Through educationally systemizing a bilingual identity, the effectiveness of bilingual education drastically increases. Each student's education needs to be approached from a different perspective, even if in the slightest way; no two students enter or exit a lesson with the same experiences or capabilities. Through identifying each student's needs, then understanding and

comparing the many variants of learning style amongst students, a school system, its teachers, parents and students can create a much more effective learning environment. Once a linguistic level is determined, the student's path is chosen. Like Mrs. Detroia's explanation of the ESL evaluation system at Mill Road, the students' language assessment in education is meant to provide the student with the most enriching and successful education available. Due to the extensiveness and detail of this system students are labeled and grouped together, placed under specific categories and thus, become a part of the system. The New York State Testing Program's School Administrator's Manual describes the test:

The New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) is designed to measure the English language proficiency of students who have been identified as English language learners. Test questions included in the NYSESLAT have been selected from previously field-tested questions. As a result, the test has undergone strict and extensive content and statistical analyses to ensure its validity and reliability. In developing the test, input has also been provided by selected educators across the State. (1)

The testing administration assures that the test is meant to evaluate and therefore provide the proper support to each ESL student. The teachers and administrators are provided with a chart, described as containing "the grade bands and modalities of the test, the number of questions in each test, and the estimated testing time for each of the five grade bands" (1). The test, with such a variety and large count of questions and question types, aims to specify the abilities of each student, resulting in proper placement in classes and overall continued education track.

Grade Band	Test Modality (Subset)	Number of Questions	Estimated Testing Time in Minutes
K-1	Speaking	16	15
	Listening	19	30
	Reading	15	22
	Writing	6	10
	- Writing Conventions - Writing	9	3
2-4	Speaking	16	15
	Listening	24	35
	Reading	24	50
	Writing	12	15
	- Writing Conventions - Pre-Writing - Writing	3 1	10 15
5-6	Speaking	16	15
	Listening	25	35
	Reading	27	55
	Writing	15	15
	- Writing Conventions - Pre-Writing - Writing	3 1	10 1
7-8	Speaking	16	15
	Listening	25	40
	Reading	27	55
	Writing	15	15
	- Writing Conventions - Pre-Writing - Writing	3 1	10 20
9-12	Speaking	16	15
	Listening	25	40
	Reading	27	55
	Writing	15	15
	- Writing Conventions - Pre-Writing - Writing	3 1	10 20

As with many state or federal instituted education tests, the student is not able to advance unless the results of the test permit. The manual states, “All public (including charter) schools must administer the NYSESLAT to all English language learners in Grades K–12 regardless of physical location of the student, classification as disabled, or number of years of service (including six or more years), until proficiency is attained as reflected in the score achieved on NYSESLAT” (4). Rather than test the students’ capabilities within the classroom setting, the true academic setting, the students are assessed based on their test-taking capabilities. Inside the classroom, students interact with the setting as a whole and their education is strongly influenced by these interactions. Furthermore, a test measures the students’ memory and ability to retrieve this information immediately, in a classroom there is much more room for a student to use creativity and problem solving without the stress that accompanies a test. The outcome of the test is based on the student’s score and improvement in the various sections (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing). The superintendents and principals of the schools receive a letter from the Assistant Commissioner of the State Education Department, currently David Abrams, describing the scoring of the tests. The letter explains:

To move from one performance level to the next, the student must score within the range of the higher performance level in **both** the Listening & Speaking and Reading & Writing components. Students who have moved in only one combination of modalities remain at the lower performance level. To move from any performance level (beginning, intermediate or advanced) to the English proficient level, the student must score at the proficient level in **both** the Listening & Speaking and Reading & Writing components. (9)

Once a student succeeds on the test, he/she is therefore permitted to move within or out of the ESL program at his/her school.

Although the systematization of bilingualism and its education exists in order to improve the academic life of students, it also aids the process of marginalization that the students already

experience and puts them in a group rather than standing as individuals. Even an extremely thorough identification system with a great deal of care and attentiveness to the student's needs has to be put within a system whose categories are preexisting. The student will have to fit the model, rather than vice versa. Labeling a student's level of English proficiency is *labeling* the student, therefore grouping him/her with other students with similar learning situations, leading to the isolation of students based on preexisting conditions. Through an increased availability of social and cultural spheres due to a proficiency in English, the ESL program aids in the assimilation (socially and culturally) of the student, however through the labeling and requiring of additional academic attention, the students are inevitably marginalized.

Chapter 4

Becoming American

Assimilation is a broad term, conceived as describing one's adaptation to, comfort in and consumption of a culture or society that was unfamiliar before. It is the entrance into and embrace of a new world, accepting it as yours and being accepted into it by others. Assimilation is used when analyzing the personal progress of comfort and understanding of a person that is becoming a part of a culture that is new to him/her, a process conducted by both children and adults. The word culture, another broad term, encompasses interactions, institutions, beliefs, values, norms, language, understandings, holidays, celebrations, dress, food, art and much more pertaining to one community of people. In order to assimilate into a culture one not only becomes familiar with these customs, but also becomes a part of them, participating in events, enrolling in the institutions, socializing with other members of the culture, et cetera.

I present assimilation as a feeling that the person feels him/herself, a personal accomplishment, rather than a perceived characteristic that one can identify in another. The process of assimilation is long, nearly infinite, and complicated, yet, once a person feels an overarching sense of membership within the culture, he/she may consider him/herself to be assimilated. In terms of education, assimilation is the process of a student becoming a member of the world in which he/she studies, adapting to the social, academic and cultural factors of the school. The process of assimilation begins immediately as an immigrant enters a new culture and continues as the immigrant is exposed to more; through daily activities, excursions, interactions,

self-education, institutionalized education, etcetera, a person slowly becomes engulfed by the new culture, most often preserving his/her original culture in the home.

In Red Hook, New York (as in any place), Mexican immigrants' assimilation takes place in many situations and locations, under various contexts. The most notable spheres that I have observed are social assimilation, cultural assimilation and academic assimilation, all of which occur both inside and outside of the school. My informants' social assimilation mainly took place in school, where they are exposed to the largest number of peers; additionally, one is socially assimilated through religious institutions, familial interactions, community events and in informal situations as well, such as casual unorganized, unplanned interactions one may have, in a store for example. Cultural assimilation surrounds every experience that one has in the society; not one aspect of life is unaffected by the culture of the society, therefore, just through residing in Red Hook, the immigrants are undergoing a constant process of assimilation. For the children, academic assimilation, like social assimilation, occurs mainly within the school environment. Any kindergartener beginning school must go through a process of academic assimilation, moving away from informal educational interactions to institutionalized formal education within a setting that caters to this assimilation. An immigrant's academic assimilation is slightly more complicated due to the fact that social and cultural assimilation are occurring simultaneously. These three processes, together, foster the student's overall experience within the context of Red Hook, and the larger American society as well.

Social Assimilation

The friends that students choose, the manner in which they interact, their use of play, teacher influenced interactions and the student's individual personality contribute to his/her social

assimilation. As stated in chapter three, the students that I worked with had friends whom were and were not Spanish speakers. For example, while I was with Juliana in the play kitchen in her classroom I asked her whom she plays with at recess. She replied “Brian and Sophia don’t have recess today. I play with my friend Diego, that’s two” “Who besides Diego makes two?” I replied. “Samantha.” “Is Samantha in this class?” “No.” “What class is she in?” “Kindergarten. ... Another kindergarten class.” “Does she speak Spanish?” “She speaks English. I speak Spanish with Ivan on the bus.” In multiple instances, the Latin American children whom I spoke with told me that they rarely speak Spanish with each other, and if they do, it is in informal settings, such as at recess or on the bus. They do not seem to use it as an avoidance of English, but rather as a way to comfortably converse with each other, even though they normally do in English. The rarity of their speaking Spanish in school promotes their social assimilation, avoiding possible causes of marginalization due to language differences. Instead, the children are presenting themselves as English speakers, no different than their peers.

In fact, even without constantly speaking English, the Mexican students are well received by their white peers. Although Diego exclusively spoke Spanish on his arrival to kindergarten, he was still able to form friendships and gain respect from his classmates. When Diego returned to Mrs. Patrick’s classroom from Mrs. Detroia’s class, the children were at the tables, in the middle of working on the assignments. Juliana was excited that he had come back, specifically because she wanted to tell me that he came, knowing that we already know each other from Red Hook ESL. Juliana announced, “Diego is here! That’s Diego!” I replied, “Yes, I know Diego!” Riley, who was also at the art table said, “Everybody knows Diego.” This suggested that the Latin American students are socially integrated with their fellow classmates. Although Juliana was the most enthusiastic about his return, all of the students were excited to see him. I also noted this

social blending during playtime, which happened after they completed these activities. As soon as playtime began, Diego and four other boys were playing with Duplos (a large version of Legos). Diego was making tall stacks with the Duplos and then knocking them over so that the stack broke on its collision. The other boys found this incredibly amusing and were hysterically laughing when he did this; they asked him to do it again, multiple times and were very excited by his play. Later during playtime Diego was playing on the computer. His classmate, Alex was watching over his shoulder and telling him which games he should choose. Diego did not respond to his requests, but did not seem bothered by his insistence either. These interactions show that Diego is respected, appreciated and welcomed into the classroom dynamic and is an essential part of the classroom's social environment. Even though he spoke no English at all at the beginning of the year, and is still very quiet, his classmates barely seem fazed by it.

Juliana, however, based on my observations, is not as well integrated into the informal social interactions within the classroom as Diego is. When Juliana finished her astronaut assignment, she ran into the play kitchen and grabbed a baby doll; she called over to Diego, asking him to play with her. When he did not, she independently played on the computer instead. Juliana was much more comfortable playing with Diego, a fellow Mexican student than she was playing with the other classmates. In the academic situation (creating the astronaut) Juliana was happy to work beside and interact with the other children; during the social and unstructured situation, she was much more content to play with Diego, and if not, by herself. Diego rejected Juliana's offer to play, which can be effects of multiple understandings and creations of social boundaries. Diego may have chosen to play with the other classmates as a rejection of Mexican seclusion within the classroom, eager to be included in the games of the non-Mexican children. Furthermore, the gender difference most likely affected Diego's choice as the children that he did

choose to play with was a group of boys. It appeared to me that Juliana benefited more from the school's effort to put children in a class with another speaker of his/her native language than Diego did.

Later, during playtime, I was playing with Juliana in the play kitchen. At first it was just the two of us, but soon, five more students came into the area. Juliana barely responded to their presence and continued to play by herself and with me. She did not interact with them until Jeremy, the black boy in the class, approached her with a peach. He playfully said, "Juliana, have a peach." Each time she grabbed for the peach he quickly retracted his arm so that she could not get it. They repeated this a few times, each enjoying the game, until finally, Jeremy gave her the peach and walked away. Besides her interactions with me, this was the only playing that Juliana did with anyone else during playtime. It is hard to avoid wondering if the fact that both she and Jeremy are minorities in the class affected their willingness to play with each other, or it could simply be that they are classmates, and therefore enjoy each other's company.

Mrs. Patrick informed me that the white students are not only accepting of the Mexican students, but they aid in their assimilation as well. She told me that the English-speaking children are very active helpers to the non-English-speaking children, especially at the beginning of the year, without any push from Mrs. Patrick. They are eager to guide them through the assignments, showing them how to do, write and understand what they are faced with. This eagerness proves to the ESL students that they are a part of the community and that even if they need some extra help it is available and that they have both their peers and their teachers to help them. It is a demonstration of social, cultural *and* academic acceptance and assimilation, on both sides of the spectrum.

In addition to being socially integrated through play, the Mexican students are assimilated into the social scene that exists within the academics. During Mrs. Detroia's push-in in Mrs. Reagan's classroom, the students almost never stopped talking. They were constantly turning around to talk to a friend behind, in front of, or next to them, eager to share their ideas and drawings with one another. Although it was an individual assignment, they were using each other as resources. The ESL students were active participants in this just as much as the non-ESL students, the class was working as a unit, seemingly unaffected by the fact that Mrs. Detroia was there as an ESL teacher. Not only did the children work together, Mrs. Detroia and Mrs. Reagan worked together, as well, presenting a unified front to the students, making no differentiation between the two groups. This regulated social interaction in the formal setting of the classroom aids in the comfort that the children have in informal environments, such as the playground or events unrelated to the school.

Cultural Assimilation

Apart from interactions, the students are also socially assimilated through their actions and hobbies. As Mrs. Detroia noted, they quickly become active and engaged in American pastimes. When I asked Mrs. Detroia about the social Americanization of the Mexican students she told me that they "get into toys, games, videogames and movies very quickly." She added that they usually wear the same clothes as other students. The Mexican students' use of videogames and toys was also made clear in Mrs. Lewis' class. At the end of the day, after completing the grammar exercise, they read the book *Snow Day* on the rug then discussed what they like about snow days. The boys (one Mexican, one Chinese and one Japanese) all said that they liked using the computer on snow days; they mentioned that they enjoy commenting on Youtube videos,

using Facebook “a little” and “chatting with girls online.” The three boys of differing background all take part in these forms of media. Youtube and Facebook have become pertinent in various cultures at this point, but their “Americanness” is undeniable. In addition to the point of assimilation, this situation also intrigued me in the context of youth. At least from my perspective, uses of such social networks on the Internet are generally reserved for older demographics. The same websites are popular among college students, however; the elementary school students’ use of them show that they are integrated into aspects of the popular culture beyond what they are exposed to at school or strictly through their peers (this is done by children of all races, yet when a child’s family is not part of the dominant community, it is the child, specifically, who must make the effort to expose him/herself to these cultural factors).

Additionally, Mrs. Detroia noted that Mexican girls always have very long, beautiful, black hair. This was the only cultural factor that Mrs. Detroia mentioned as being remarkably different from that of the dominant culture. Yet, this is merely appearance; the length of the girls’ hair does not say a lot about the Mexican culture, however, it is a common and noticeable practice. The fact that Mrs. Detroia chose to mention this specific detail leads me to question her awareness of the cultural differences between the Mexican and white children. Maybe it is her years of experience and closeness to the Mexican community that makes it easier for her to overlook various differences that may exist. Children are clearly affected by various influences; beyond being assimilated through formal and institutionalized interactions, the students are confronted by social and cultural influences from their various surroundings.

As with social interactions, I noticed few cultural differences between the Mexican students and the white students that impinged either social or academic experiences for either group. During the interviews that I conducted with Mrs. Detroia and Mrs. Patrick, the most

common cultural differences they mentioned concerned the way that the Mexican students interacted with the teachers. Interestingly, they both quickly compared the Mexican students to the Asian students, which may show that in comparison to the Mexican students, Mrs. Detroia and Mrs. Patrick notice more cultural differences between the Asian students and the white students.

Mrs. Detroia commented that ESL students are often a lot more respectful than their peers and are usually very polite. She states that they have a very strong work ethic, especially the Asians – “Their work is just amazing.” Speaking of the Asian families, she says that the parents make a lot of effort toward and put a lot of importance on education. She articulates that Korean and Japanese students will often have homework from their parents, often the learning of an instrument, and are involved in many outside activities, in addition to homework from school. She states that this leads to driven and structured students.

Mrs. Patrick, as well, spoke of the Asian students as a model minority. She expressed that Asian students’ parents are more concerned with respecting her than they are with their academics; when the parents come in for meetings, almost always, their first question is whether or not their child is respecting her, then they ask about how he/she is doing in school. Once, in keeping with the cultural traditions of respect, as Mrs. Patrick interpreted it, a Japanese mother would not look at Mrs. Patrick and instead her husband did all of the communicating. She also commented on the fact that the Asian students generally “have extremely advanced fine motor control.” Asians are often seen as being model minorities; they are rarely looked down upon by the dominant population as other minorities are. The dominant population and society, stereotype minority groups – the black and Hispanic races are often stereotyped negatively, while the Asian race is often associated with having positive characteristics.

In “Behind the Model-Minority Stereotype: Voices of High- and Low-Achieving Asian American Students,” Stacey Lee describes the common perception of Asian American students as being

depicted as academic superstars or model minorities. According to the model-minority stereotype, Asian Americans are successful in school because they work hard and come from cultures that believe in the value of education. Scholars and the popular press have contrasted the success of Asian American students to the underachievement of other minorities” (413).

The teachers with whom I worked with at Mill Road expressed this same sentiment that Asians are more successful in school than Mexicans, or other minority children. Mrs. Detroia stated that supplementary work assigned by their parents is what causes Asian students to be better organized and productive. Neither she nor Mrs. Patrick seemed to be hesitant about discussing this stereotype, however, neither commented on Mexican stereotypes, demonstrating a reluctance to do so, most likely due to the fact that the stereotype would have been negative. Although cultural differences may not have large, visible impacts on a child’s academic experience, many small factors do follow a child from his/her home life into his/her school life (and vice-versa).

For example, due to different exposures of cultural resources, the Mexican students understand different cultural references than the white students do. For example, in Mrs. Patrick’s class, while the students were working, Riley (a white classmate) began singing “California Girls” by Katy Perry, a popular pop artist. The children knew the song and were giggling as he sang. I asked Michael, another white child, if he was familiar with the song, he told me that he was and that he listens to it on the radio. I asked Juliana if she knew the song and she quietly and quickly replied with a short “yeah” and put her head down to return to her work. Her response and gestures proved to me that she, in fact, was not familiar with the song, but rather affirmed that she did in order to not feel or seem alienated. I suspect that due to the fact that her

family does not primarily speak English in the home, they do not listen to English radio stations either. Although Juliana's ignorance of the Katy Perry song did not alienate her in any way from her classmates, her stating that she did know the song when she did not demonstrated her awareness of cultural differences and her desire to avoid and erase their existence.

Academic Assimilation

In order to be academically assimilated a student must become familiar with the workings of the school: schedules, power hierarchies, and discipline, and additionally he/she has to be integrated into the standards and expectations of schoolwork. Both are necessary; however, it is difficult to achieve one without the other, and they need to be attained simultaneously. This greatly complicates a student's experiences, causing his/her process toward academic success to be hindered and slowed. Even for an infant bilingual, like Juliana, academic assimilation is difficult because it is complicated by cultural and societal values within the academic umbrella.

While I was in Mrs. Patrick's class, after 'rest time' the class congregated on the rug to prepare for the next assignment. At each table, there was a different assignment for the students to complete. At the art table they made astronauts by tracing each body part onto large white paper, cutting out each piece and gluing them together; in the middle of the helmet they pasted a picture of themselves, which Mrs. Patrick had taken earlier in the day. At the listening center, there was a tape of *Good Night Moon*. At the Math table there was a backward counting assignment; the children cut out the numbers 1-10 and then had to paste them to a line drawing of a spaceship in backward order (10-1). At the discovery table they were reading facts about the sun. From the rug, Mrs. Patrick gave them each a paper associated with which table they would visit; over the course of the day each student had visited each table.

Juliana was at the art table, making an astronaut. She was working much more quickly than the others at her table, and consequently, had a much more raggedly cut astronaut. She was socially integrated with the other students at her table, interacting and informally talking, just as the others were. The middle of the astronauts' heads had a rectangle drawn in it – marking the place where their picture should be glued. Understandably, Juliana cut the rectangle out, assuming that, as it was another line, no different from the others, it should be traced and cut. Once she came to gluing her picture on she continued as though her picture had just the place to go. She put a dot of glue on the back of her picture and placed it right in the middle of the rectangle. As expected, her picture was glued to the table rather than her astronaut; Juliana, however, did not understand why her picture was not properly sticking to the helmet. She repeated the original gluing process multiple times; after a few tries of her failing to glue it, I helped her. I explained to her that her picture has nothing to stick to so she had to cover the hole with a new piece of paper. I had to repeat myself multiple times, demonstrating to her how to solve the problem. Eventually, she recognized what she had to do and did it. Her classmates, however, understood that the rectangle should not be cut out.

As Mrs. Detroia stated in her interview, some of the academic difficulties that the ESL students have are not related to language differences. However, it is difficult to look at some of these misunderstandings without taking language into account. Non-English speaking students begin their schooling process slightly later than their classmates because they first have to accustom themselves with the language and America in general, possibly causing them to miss the essential preliminary lessons from the beginning of the school year, such as the basics of gluing and cutting.

After the astronaut was completely glued together, with an American Flag drawn on its chest, the children were assigned to write a space-related word on the bottom of the astronaut's body. Another student wrote 'Space' (correctly and on her own) and Juliana wanted to write 'Alien.' Juliana asked for help with the spelling and I was happy to help her sound it out. She quickly recognized the first letter 'A' but had a much more difficult time with the remaining letters. She looked at the alphabet posted on the wall and thoughtlessly spelt the word as 'Afcwr.' Juliana had a difficult time with associating a letter with its sound. She seemed frustrated and uninterested in attempting to spell 'alien' so she used the letters that came to her first and was happy to be finished with her astronaut. Later, after most of the children had begun playtime, Mrs. Patrick pulled Juliana aside and helped her correctly spell the word, giving her time and patience to complete the task.

The teachers' lessons, however, are catered to the ESL students' needs, and the teachers are very attentive and aware of the specific approach needed for each lesson. Mrs. Lewis, the reading teacher, positioned the children and herself at a round table, where the students could easily see Mrs. Lewis and each other. She was using flashcards with vowel combinations on them, teaching the pronunciation of words that are not phonetic in the English language, as an example she used the combination of 'oa' as in 'boat.' First, Mrs. Lewis used the flashcards in a group, and then she went around the table, individually asking the students to say the sound the combinations make and give an example of a word that they are used in. After each student had four turns they paired up and did the same activity with each other, reusing the same cards. Next, the class reviewed vocabulary terms. Mrs. Lewis distributed index cards; each card had either a word or a definition on it with its coordinating match. Through these lessons the children gained important insight into the workings of the English language; the vowel pronunciation is especially

helpful for Spanish speakers because the Spanish language is very phonetic, therefore making aspects of the English language seemingly illogical and difficult to comprehend.

As expected, Mrs. Detroia focuses her lessons on language; during my visit to her class, the activity of the day was centered on the identification and recognition of topic sentences. Mrs. Detroia first read a sample paragraph twice, then the students chose which topic sentence was the most relevant to the three to four sentence paragraph from four multiple choice answers. Mrs. Detroia then read four more paragraphs to which the students had to answer quietly and individually. As the paragraphs progressed the choices became more difficult, referencing pieces of information used in the paragraph, but in an irrelevant manner. After the independent responses, they went over the correct answers in a group. The students were eager to call out their answers. Mrs. Detroia made reassuring comments after going over each question. After completing the activity, Mrs. Detroia stated that it counted as a listening test. The children were surprised and all replied with a “Really?!” Some commented on how easy it was and Mrs. Detroia stated, “I’m glad it was easy.” I appreciated this answer because it made the test seem less intimidating for the students, therefore, increasing their comfort level in school. Rather than testing for what the students do not know, it was a test of what they did know, skills that they were confident in. Mrs. Detroia’s manner of interacting with and encouraging the class helps to improve the ESL students’ academic comfort level and confidence.

I was present for many other language lessons in the classrooms. In Mrs. Reagan’s class, during Mrs. Detroia’s push-in, the children were assigned to make advertisements, after completing the advertisements, Mrs. Detroia and Mrs. Reagan gave a lesson in transforming sloppy copies into final copies. The visual they used was an outline of a hand; each finger represented a different step in the process. The first step is to search for the use of capital letters

and make sure that they are used where they should be. After each step the students were asked to put their hands on their heads to communicate that they had finished. The second step is to scan the description, making sure that the spaces between words and sentences are present. Thirdly, the students had to circle all of the words that they were unsure of in terms of accuracy of the spelling. The fourth step concerns handwriting, the students had to make sure that “‘o’s are closed, ‘u’s are open” and that letters are distinguishable, ‘r’ and ‘b’ was the example that Mrs. Detroia gave the class. Lastly, they had to scan the descriptions, making sure that the proper punctuation was present at the end of each sentence. This lesson was directed at both ESL and non-ESL students; the assignment was appropriate for both groups of students, but Mrs. Detroia’s presence in the classroom allowed for the ESL students to take advantage of her resources, therefore gaining more out of the lesson than they would have otherwise.

Mrs. Costello, the first grade teacher, suggested that I come in for the English portion of the day, assuming that the lesson relating to language would be the most helpful to my project. Specifically, the class was learning about vowels: the ways in which other letters in words affect the sound that the vowel makes, for example, she was teaching about ‘bossy ‘r’s;’ words that have the letter combinations: “‘ar’ ‘er’ ‘ir’ ‘or’ or ‘ur.’ The ‘r’ changes the sound of the vowel, as the ‘a’ makes a different sound in the words ‘bat’ and ‘bar.’ As a connected lesson, Mrs. Costello was teaching about “magic ‘e’s.” After the long/short vowel lesson she wrote the words ‘cap,’ ‘mad,’ ‘hat,’ ‘tap’ and ‘slid.’ After having asked them to pronounce each word, she added an ‘e’ to the end of each sentence. The class was eager to participate in answering her questions. The two Latin American students in the class, Paulina and Victoria, were equally active participants as the rest of their classmates. Each raised her hand voluntarily and correctly answered the questions; Paulina participated for the ‘tap’ to ‘tape’ problem and although she did answer

correctly, she seemed to lose her concentration after being called on, therefore needing some extra encouragement and guidance from Mrs. Costello. Instances like this demonstrate the ESL students' capabilities, but also illustrate the necessity for ESL classes. Although the ESL students in Mrs. Costello's class did participate, the accuracy with which they did so was not equivalent to the non-ESL students'; with the help of ESL, they will soon be able to comfortably and accurately participate in activities such as this.

The importance that Mrs. Costello gave to language transferred over to the children's excitement for the language aspect of their education. For example, the day I was in her class she was conducting a spelling test, for which the class was very excited. When Mrs. Costello began the second part of the vowel lesson, a student asked "But what about our spelling test?" Later, after the lesson was completed, Mrs. Costello announced that they were going to go over their spelling words many children got excited and shouted "Yay! Spelling test!!" Their excitement for the test surprised me. In school, the tests are hardly the part that students look forward to; they are usually an intimidating and unwanted exercise. The fact that the weekly spelling test is something that they look forward to shows a lot about their feelings toward their education. They were excited to show Mrs. Costello, themselves and their families and friends what they have accomplished and the success with which they have done so. One day at ESL I casually asked the children about their English and how long they have lived in the United States. Ivan boasted about the fact that he had taken pre-kindergarten classes and that it helped him a lot. He was proud of the fact that he did not have to take a second level of kindergarten (pre first grade) like some children do and said that this proves that he is smart. He was proud of his success in school, confident in his progression through school thus far.

In many other instances, the children's academic pride was obvious through their excitement to participate and share their answers with each other and their teachers. During another assignment on topic sentences in Mrs. Detroia's class, they were told to identify words that repeat and from there form a topic sentence. They read the sentences quietly aloud to themselves. Luis tapped his pen on the table and Charlie asked him to stop. Luis responded, saying that it helps him to concentrate. After they finished reading and writing their topic sentences they were all excited to share their answers, shouting out "Can I share mine?" Paulina, like a few other students in her class, did not wait for the question to be asked before raising her hand to answer it. Although this does show eagerness toward education and knowledge it also demonstrates the importance that she puts on the act of participating in school and each individual lesson. This expression of pride and excitement Paulina's academic assimilation; just like the other students, she, and other Mexican students, are important to the class dynamic and are eager to express their related pride.

The only active impediment toward a students' academic assimilation that I noticed took place when I was in the computer lab with Mrs. Caggione's class. Mrs. Caggione's students went to the computer lab to take the spelling test. They completed and printed their scores and after they were allowed to choose from a wide variety of computer games to play. There were games covering nearly every subject matter; however, they were not necessarily encouraging games. The introduction of one game was fiery with a scary, deep voice announcing the name of the game. On another game, after Lisa, a Latin American student, completed it announced "Your score- 54, Score needed- 55. Not good enough," animated with a cartoon falling and slumping into the ground. Although these games are mainly recreational, they are still in an academic setting, which should be encouraging and inspiring, rather than defeatist and intimidating.

Although the school and the teachers make effort toward encouraging the students' academic pride and success, the Mexican students still showed feelings of academic self-consciousness. The Mexican students participated less actively than the other students, showing an uneasiness and fear of incorrectly answering a question. For example, Veronica never participated in class, except for when it was required that her row answers a question. Diego rarely spoke at all in school and was especially quiet while completing his assignment. Ivan constantly puts himself down when he has trouble with his homework or with reading. These students are receiving help in various ways; however, their academic success is not fully attainable until they are completely assimilated into the system, a process that is daunting, and sometimes very slow.

Conclusion

Language, immigration, education and children's role in society are topics of great importance to me, beyond this senior thesis. I strongly believe that people should be exposed to a variety of cultures and societies in order to have a more expansive knowledge of how the world works and how people interact. Everyone should be exposed to new ways of thinking, celebrating, expressing and daily practices in order to understand not only those of others, but of themselves as well. Within the world, there are myriad of cultures, constantly changing and adapting to new factors – social, economical, ecological, and so forth. Many of these changes are prompted by the introduction and influence of other cultures; ideally, once this introduction takes place a culture expands and is able to move to new levels of awareness and, furthermore, members of that community automatically become more conscious of and interested in the new culture. Immigration will inevitably lead to the blending of multiple cultures. Not only will the immigrants gain knowledge of and experience within the new culture, but also the individuals that already live in this dominant culture will benefit from the exposure to the culture that the immigrants bring with them.

This exchange is what, in many ways, but not solely, modernizes the world. Each culture has aspects that others do not possess. Through an exposure to them, one can choose which to adopt, therefore bettering oneself and one's culture. However, this exchange does not often

happen easily or quickly; generally speaking, cultures develop over time and in small ways, unless a conscious and often aggressive effort to change is made. Additionally, it is rare that people are very welcoming to these changes; they must be open to change before it can occur. When people are not open to these changes, the introduction of a new culture into their society is often unwanted and even rejected. This rejection is what causes conflict between immigrants and members of the dominant society, causing both parties to be uncomfortable and alienated. The immigrant population is alienated due to a perceived rejection of its presence, while the dominant society feels a sense of alienation because of this sudden new presence in the population.

Although schools are often seen as ideal places whose sole purpose is to support the growth of innocent, moral and worldly students, schools are not at all exempt from these prejudices, which is exactly why I chose to write about Mexican students in a mainly white school. Unfortunately, no matter the age, gender and class of the immigrant, many Americans and aspects of the mainstream American culture discriminate against non-whites. I looked to the ESL program at Mill Road for a renewal of hope in the treatment and perception of Mexican immigrants in Red Hook. Although most of my findings showed that the school system does make efforts toward integration and positive perception of immigrants, the personal biases of teachers and students are unavoidable.

Before embarking on my fieldwork I expected to find a social distinction and separation between white and Mexican students. I expected that the social hierarchy would revolve around race and class, as in the dominant society. I predicted that Mexican students would be friends with Mexican students, that white students would play with white students and that the social spheres would be clearly demarcated. However, I was completely wrong. Some distinctions were made; however, they did not dictate the social interactions at all, or at least that I noticed.

Instead, friendship groups were usually organized by gender and class (not economic) and the children seemed to be very open to playing with and befriending almost anyone. Spanish-speaking students were in cliques with English-speaking students – even students with low levels of English proficiency were accepted into friendship groups and granted the same position as the others. I was shocked, yet very delighted by this. It can be proof of a greater appreciation of Mexicans in Red Hook felt by the younger generation, or it can simply be an effect of child innocence. If I follow the idea that it is due to the generation's greater acceptance, which I would much rather support, then projects like mine can indeed have a positive outcome in continuing to inspire one to acknowledge and be accepting of cultural differences. In conclusion, my vision of a better society is one that is unaffected by racial and linguistic boundaries, and instead each individual *is* recognized as being an individual and *not* a stereotype.

Through studying the dynamics of ESL I am able to analyze a site in which class and race struggles play an important role. Although the students may be treated as outsiders in their regular classrooms, ESL students are all of equal stature. Inside the ESL classroom (both at Mill Road and at the Red Hook ESL center) racial boundaries are broken and the clear goal is the bettering of the students' English and therefore (hopefully), their lives in Red Hook. ESL is meant to teach a person skills that will help him/her integrate and assimilate into the dominant society, providing the student with resources and opportunities that may have been unavailable or unknown to him/her before.

In looking at ESL, as a system and the realization of it, I organized my study in a way that would allow me to gain access to the goals and accomplishments of ESL in order to critique and analyze its flaws and strengths. The most prevalent problem that I noticed was that although the students are given the tools to further assimilation, these tools are not always relevant to their

lives. For example, in Mrs. Detroia's class the students are taught proverbs and sayings that she considers to be useful in understanding American values and customs, however her exposure to these customs is drastically different from that of her students. However, due to her age, the proverbs that she knows and teaches are sometimes out of date to the point that they are unrecognizable to me and, therefore, unnecessary for her students to learn. Another problem with the execution of ESL is that the lessons are not always vital to the student's understanding of the society and instead, are superfluous to life in Red Hook. The Red Hook ESL center does make efforts to avoid this, such as asking the students to bring in questions or concerns that they have come across in the past few days and asking what they want to learn about rather than the tutors projecting their own values onto the students. However, due to the fact that the tutors and students, as well as the teachers and their students, live in such different worlds, the lessons can never be completely guided by the students' needs.

This is especially true within the school environment. Due to the existence of an organized system of ESL lessons and an expectation of certain learned skills, the lessons are rarely framed in terms of an individual and instead at the greater American public. The ESL system in schools is where I experienced the most frustration while working on this project. Although the ESL system's ultimate goal is to better the lives of its students within the context of the United States, it is not always successful nor inspiring to its students. However, I am sure that much of this is due to the fact that the system of ESL is fairly new and, therefore, constantly being studied, refigured and reorganized. It was merely 32 years ago that Jim Cummins founded the terms BICS and CALP. This relative newness suggests that there is much improvement to be made in the field and assures that it is not at all stagnant, but instead undergoing constant analysis and critique.

Through the study and analysis of ESL programs and Mexican children's position within Red Hook's public education I have been exposed to the lives of these children and although it is impossible for me to empathize with their situations I am much more conscious of their daily struggles and benefits. I have become aware of the ways in which one can help the local Mexican population and I have witnessed, first hand, the reward of these efforts, for both parties. ESL students benefit greatly within the dominant society due to English proficiency. Through learning English, they are assimilated into the dominant society linguistically, and from that are able to participate in events that would have otherwise been unavailable, which aids cultural and social assimilation. Once the children have gained proficiency, their educational experience is bettered and they are able to truly academically assimilate. The tutors and teachers, as well, go through a process of assimilation, although it is not nearly as drastic as the students. As I stated before, immigrants bring their culture to the United States upon their arrival. Resulting from regular interaction with Mexican immigrants, cultures are exchanged and tutors and teachers can adopt values, traditions and beliefs that are characteristic of Mexican culture.

This project's intention is to promote this exchange and valuing of cultures that are different from one's own. I wish to demonstrate to my readers that even seemingly small efforts can ease an immigrant's entrance into the United States and American culture and society.

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