If You're ESL, Can You Be Anything Else?: Exploring the Local Production of ESL Students

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Adam C. Rambow

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Dr. Martha Bigelow, Advisor

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Abstract

In the field of education, there are numerous categories that identify students based on their abilities and aptitudes. Two such terms are "ESL" and "gifted." However useful these labels are for the purposes of identifying students' needs and creating instructional programs, the fact remains that they are also steeped in hegemonic discourses surrounding learner identity (Lightfoot, 2001; Schulz, 2005). Therefore, it is crucial to examine how these broad institutional categories are produced locally. Employing the theoretical frames of disciplinary technology (Foucault, 1977), cultural production (Levinson & Holland, 1996) and figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998), this ethnographic study explores how teachers and students in a single middle-school classroom, through their daily practices, created a specific, local understanding of what it meant to be "ESL."

Findings indicate that in this classroom, the teachers were aware of the social stigma their students faced by being labeled ESL. Part of their strategy to counteract this stigma involved using the language and artifacts of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IBMYP) to position their students as gifted. The teachers encouraged their students to adopt habits associated with a gifted identity; however, many of these habits were related to maintaining order in the classroom and positioning the students as "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977). The process was fraught with contradictions, but ultimately opened up the possibility for students to reposition themselves as both ESL *and* gifted.

Little research exists on the way that the institutional category ESL is locally produced in classrooms. There is even less research on how the IBMYP program is implemented in schools with large contingents of linguistically diverse students. Given the disparate implications for academic success that accompany the labels "ESL" and "gifted," this study begins to bridge a gap in an important area.

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"Why do you think a Negro would want to be a communist?" she said, running a finger down the list. "Isn't it enough for them, being colored? Why would they want a communistic tinge added on?"

"Are you saying why be greedy?"

"I'm saying don't they have enough trouble. Besides, if you're colored, you can't be *anything else."*

—*Don Delillo,* Libra

Chapter One: Imagining "ESL"

The handmade sign taped to the wall read, "Gifted and Talented." Written on a sheet of white paper, it covered the original number plate, which was faintly visible beneath. This gave me momentary pause as I crossed the threshold of room 422. Based on my previous visit to Butler Middle School,[1] I had expected to find the English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) program housed here, and I experienced the disequilibrium of doubt—had I taken a wrong turn to find myself in another wing of the school? I peeked inside the classroom, and a wave of relief swept over me as I recognized Anna and Eleni, the two ESL teachers who had agreed to participate in my research project. When I later learned that Anna had created the sign, I mentioned to her the confusion I had experienced when I first encountered it. She seemed pleased, allowing that this was precisely the reaction she had hoped to provoke. She jokingly remarked that students who typically viewed themselves as gifted sometimes noticed the sign and wondered why they were not enrolled in this particular class. Anna would simply reply, "Because you don't speak two languages."

By taping a sign to the wall outside her classroom, Anna had—if only for a moment—shifted the way that others in the school perceived her class of ESL students. Her desire to shift these perceptions underscores the extent to which institutional

[1]All specific names of places and people in the study are pseudonyms.

designations such as “English Language learner” or “gifted student” are as much about molding particular identities as they are about identifying and fostering previously existing skills or aptitudes. The students who participated in my study were clearly gifted in unique ways, yet were not labeled as such. Instead, their gifts were subsumed into a single category based on English proficiency. I didn’t meet Noble and Ed because of their soccer prowess, or Sam because he was a voracious reader, or Charlie because he could cross-country ski in circles around his peers. I met the boys in room 422 because they had all come to be categorized and labeled as ESL. And I wonder: once they bear this label, what other possibilities are foreclosed? If you’re ESL, can you *be* anything else?

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Although my initial encounter with Anna’s sign raised these questions in my mind, I had contemplated them before. In my own career as a secondary ESL teacher, I was not so different from Anna and Eleni. Like them, I was once a novice teacher with a newly minted teaching license from a local university (the very same university, in fact), working in an urban setting with a group of energetic adolescents who had all been categorized as ESL students. I began to question the efficacy of subsuming these learners with distinct languages, backgrounds, cultural perspectives and interests under a single label based only on the fact that they were not considered to be native English speakers. Looking across the back row of desks in my classroom, I could spot Abdi Abdul, a recent immigrant from Somalia who had basically parented himself since his early adolescence, and Raider Moua, a Hmong-American born and raised only a few miles from the school

where I taught. How could "ESL" begin to encompass the differences in their experiences?

When I was a new teacher, my own misgivings about the label ESL certainly mirrored the sense of alienation some of the students in my classroom felt. One of these students, Xiong, was particularly self-conscious about being enrolled in my course. For some reason, he seemed more affected than most by his placement into the ESL program. He was often truant from class, and when he did show up, my limited classroom management repertoire was no match for his oppositional behavior. He was obviously mortified to be a member of my class, and he continually worked to save face with his friends who were not enrolled in ESL. As part of this strategy, he aligned his status with the gifted program, International Baccalaureate (IB), by referring to my course as "IB ESL." His classmates and I all appreciated this inside joke, but Xiong's gallows humor also reminded me that the consequences of institutional labeling are not lost on students. Xiong understood that adopting a gifted identity, even in jest, made a powerful statement about the possibilities open to him as an English learner.

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The above vignettes illustrate the point that while it may be practical and often beneficial to categorize learners according to perceived differences, the fact remains that these categories have the potential to *produce* the very differences they purport to describe. More than simply identifying pre-existing educational needs, "institutional categories are constitutive of how we construe entitlements and obligations of social actors" (Hjörne & Säljö, 2008, p. 137). An English learner, for example, may become an

"ESL student" through a process of testing and placement. Likewise, a learner may become "gifted" through a similar process. But once these individuals are designated as ESL or gifted, the material conditions of their school experiences are altered. Policies are formed, instructional programs are designed, and schools are structured according to institutional categories. Once the boys in room 422 became "ESL," their school experiences diverged from those of their peers as they were tracked by the district, enrolled in English language classes, and given English tests designed to measure their proficiency. Thus, the category designed to better identify their pre-existing differences in language proficiency also set them on a distinct academic pathway, mapping out further differences.

No less important than the material effects of these categories is their social impact. Bourdieu (1991) argues that institutional language is not merely descriptive of difference between individuals, but also constitutive of how individuals view themselves. For the boys in room 422, the label ESL does more than simply identify them for the purpose of providing services for their educational needs. It also marks them as specific types of individuals with a specific set of educational possibilities. This marking has a public side: the boys must come to Anna and Eleni's classroom each day and they are subject to a specific testing battery for ESL students. Yet the marking also has a more private and internal aspect. Through the daily practices involved with participation in the ESL program, the boys are continually reminded that ESL is an identity that they embody.

Despite the power of institutions to shape student identities through categorization, neither these students nor their teachers are passive recipients of ideology. On the contrary, they are social actors who creatively defy categorization as they appropriate and subvert the labels that have been ascribed to them. Anna's sign and Xiong's joke are examples of the efforts of individuals to forge alternative identities against the institutional grain. Of course, it has been well documented that neither the motives behind such efforts nor the results they produce are necessarily straightforward (Canagarajah, 1993; Demerath, 2001; Talmy, 2008; Willis, 1978). The ripples that Anna and Xiong created could build into larger waves or merely lose momentum as the water returns to calm. Institutional structures like schools are often resistant to change, and while students and teachers alike may chafe against the structures around them, it is often the case "that 'resistance,' for example, to hegemonic socializing forces (e.g., into an infantilized ESL student identity) may not necessarily be transformative, but culturally and socially reproductive" (Talmy, 2008, p. 639). Students and teachers alike may resist particular local conceptions of school identity, but behind and beyond their actions is always uncertainty.

The Cultural Production of "ESL Students"

Precisely because of this uncertainty, it is crucial to examine the processes through which students and teachers, at a local level, not only make sense of the institutional designation ESL and the consequences that accompany it, but work actively to construct specific ESL identities in their local context. The daily practices in room 422 were constitutive in producing locally specific conceptions of the typical ESL student.

This study explores the tension between these practices and broader social structures, focusing on the moments when institutional constructions of the ESL student intersect with the ways that specific individuals subsumed within this category make sense of their own experiences. This necessarily involves examining the various ideological functions of the category ESL, and the extent to which it constitutes broad conceptions of student abilities even as it forecloses other possibilities. It also necessitates investigating the everyday practices of students and teachers who are affected by the ESL categorization.

In exploring the ways that ESL is locally situated, and how students and teachers in a particular classroom produce their own conceptions of ESL, I find the framework of cultural production to be a valuable interpretive tool. Levinson and Holland (1996) characterize cultural production as "a theoretical construct which allows us to portray and interpret the way people actively confront the ideological and material conditions presented by schooling" (p. 14). Drawing upon ethnography, cultural studies, and critical theory, the authors emphasize attention to the everyday classroom practices that shape individuals. This shifts the research focus from disembodied ideologies toward how specific actions that occur within schools are constitutive of what it means to be educated in a particular time and place. In the context of the present work, adopting this stance enabled me to remain attentive to institutional forces beyond the classroom walls, while simultaneously highlighting the ways that Anna, Eleni and the boys in room 422 shaped and reshaped their own understandings of what it meant to be ESL at Butler Middle School.

Metaphorical Understandings of English Learners

As the cultural production framework emphasizes, individuals are always engaged in an historical process of becoming. Likewise, the categories we use to structure our understandings of the world are embedded within historical structures of signification. The terminology that language educators use both shapes and is shaped by cultural beliefs and attitudes regarding the nature of learning, and more importantly, wider discourses about the role of language in society. These discourses have developed over time and form powerful images in the popular consciousness. As Lightfoot (2001) has written, "imagery…forms a significant thematic note running through, and helping shape, many of our understandings of, and writings about, students of English as a second-language in the United States" (p. 4). While Lightfoot was primarily interested in exploring this imagery from a historical perspective, I am interested in exploring the imagery that students and teachers create through their everyday classroom interactions and discussions.

I am also interested in the metaphorical understandings that Anna, Eleni and the students in room 422 developed to make sense of their experiences. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) emphasize that metaphors are more than literary devices—they are also integral to how we think about and make sense of our world. However, the authors also point out that our metaphors may obscure as much as they reveal—just as the metaphors make certain understandings possible, they prevent other understandings. An emphasis on metaphors is integral to exploring the ways that my participants structured their experiences in this ESL classroom. For example, a common metaphor associates lack of

English proficiency with disability (Lightfoot, 2001). One interpretation of Anna's sign and Xiong's joke is that these were attempts to transform the disability metaphor to one of giftedness. This is a powerful shift, and it introduces the possibility that there are other metaphors with which we might structure our thinking about English learners. I am interested in exploring these other possibilities.

Figured Worlds

Just as the language we use to speak about students creates a particular set of images, these images in turn help to shape the social worlds that students perceive are open to them. They may identify with the world of school and all it entails—attending class, completing homework, and developing peer relationships, for example, are all images that are part and parcel of what many people imagine when they think about the world of school. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) refer to these kinds of imagined social spaces as figured worlds. They define a figured world as "a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (p. 52). These are spaces, both physical and figurative, that we imagine are possible for us to inhabit; moreover, when we enter into these worlds we act as if we are part of these worlds. The power of figured worlds lies in their collective nature, and the authors further explain that "figured worlds rest upon people's abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized 'as if' realms" (p. 49). For instance, as a researcher, I am part of a figured world that I might refer to as an academic community. In order to seek legitimacy as a player in this world I must exhibit certain behaviors, such as attending

academic conferences or submitting papers to peer-reviewed journals. Moreover, others who are legitimate players in this world must recognize my acts as relevant to this world. Thus, one's membership in a particular figured world is dependent both on one's understanding of the correct norms of behavior in this world, and on the ability or willingness of other members of this world to recognize these behaviors as legitimate.

In the context of school, figured worlds take on added significance, because teachers and other authority figures are in a position to construct specific worlds that students might see as viable to inhabit. This is of particular importance in the context of an ESL classroom, where students are often placed because these authority figures have labeled them as in need of special services. In exploring the figured world of an ESL classroom, one might ask questions such as, "What if there were a world called ESL, where students were perceived as deficient because of their lack of English proficiency," or, "What if there were a world in which students from linguistically diverse backgrounds were seen as experts by their teachers and peers?" I am interested in exploring the figured worlds of room 422, both those that the teachers try to construct for the students, and those that the students see for themselves.

Practical Consequences of Educational Tracking

Since the research of Oakes (1985), the issue of tracking has been a major theme in education research. This issue has particular relevance in the context of language learners because of the paradoxical nature of ESL programs. Indeed, the very programs that are designed to assist linguistically divers learners in becoming proficient in academic English often lead to: 1) a social stigma such that students may wish to avoid

these classes and resist ESL instruction, and 2) a "ghettoization" (Valdés, 1998) in which students are effectively segregated from their native English speaking peers, interacting "only with each other and with teachers who taught their classes" (p. 7). This in turn exacerbates the problem of learning English, as students can go through an entire day of school in America without the opportunity to practice English in a social or academic setting.

Harklau (1994) has also noted that once they are placed into ESL, it effectively becomes a track that only the most canny students are able to exit. It was only through Herculean effort that the students she studied were able to "exploit their anomalous position in the system and, through strategic negotiation of understandings of their ability, move upward through the tracking system" (p. 359). While Harklau's study emphasized the potential for students to resist their position within the school track, it also demonstrated how difficult it can be to do so. In a similar vein, Lee (2009) has shown how Asian-American students entered a number of distinct high school tracks, all of which had profound implications for their school achievement. According to Lee, these tracks were racially segregated. Moreover, this segregation was rationalized by many staff, who suggested that if such students "were underrepresented in the top tracks, it was because they were lazy or lacked the academic talent or interest" (p. 86). Interestingly, due to the prevalence of the model minority stereotype at the school in Lee's study, the Asian students were often positioned in the higher tracks, in contrast to those in Harklau's above study.

The salient point in all this research, though, is that when it comes to academic tracking, race plays a significant factor in the experiences of English language learners. Other researchers have observed that the overall structure of American schools is designed to ensure that students newly learning English will not succeed. Cummins (1989) decried the problems of schooling in which "the academic difficulties of ESL students are, in part, a function of transmission models that exclude students' experience from the classroom and suppress the most basic function of language, namely, meaningful communication in both written and oral modes" (p. 35). It is clear that in many instances, programs that are ostensibly intended to ensure that English language learners master academic language instead ensure their position at the bottom of the social ladder.

The students in room 422 were subject to tracking as evidenced by their placement into the ESL program, and the ironic sign that Anna created indicates her understanding of this tracking system. It is important to highlight the effects of academic tracking and to investigate the way that it potentially influences the trajectories of the students in room 422. Tracking has consequences for these students both in their lived experiences as Butler Middle School and in their perceptions of the figured worlds that are available to them.

Overview of the Chapters

In the second chapter, I begin by briefly exploring some of the tropes and metaphors that surround language learners. Then, I provide a review of literature in the areas most theoretically and practically relevant to this project. This includes research

drawn from a variety of academic disciplines and theoretical perspectives, most notably what might be called post-structuralist theories of identity formation, agency, and dynamics of power within modern society. I also explore the concept of giftedness and how it has been constructed, both historically and in a contemporary context. Finally, I situate my study within the context of similar research and explicate the questions that guided this project.

In chapter three, I give an overview of my research methods. This includes a description of the research site, background on the participants, and explanations of data collection and analysis procedures. I also pay special attention in this chapter to the role of writing in ethnographic research, as well as the way my own identity positions influence my study.

Chapter four contains the findings based on my data analysis. As the present introduction suggests, my initial study began with a focus on the local production of ESL identity. But as with any ethnographic research, unexpected themes became crucial to my interpretations of the events in room 422. I trace three of these themes and discuss their significance. First, I examine the tension surrounding language use in room 422. While all my student participants had a reasonably strong command of English, they often used other languages strategically. Moreover, Anna and Eleni had their own unique perspectives on the roles of both English and other languages in their classroom. Secondly, I examine how the daily routines in room 422 contributed to the constitution of the students as "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977). I also explore the role that the language and artifacts of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IBMYP) played

in Anna and Eleni's attempts to inculcate specific attitudes and practices among their students. After exploring these themes, I close the chapter with vignettes about two of my focal participants, Sam and Noble. Ultimately, their stories are illustrative of how the broad category "ESL" cannot begin to encompass the diversity of student experience.

In chapter five, I draw conclusions based on the data, as well as define avenues for future research. One of the great strengths of attending to the local is that it enables us to envision how particular teachers and students understand their experiences, but I also offer a number of possible ways that the story of room 422 is also relevant in a wider social context. Furthermore, I will outline several important avenues for future research and action, including ways that teachers and students can collaboratively work to shift the imagery surrounding the category "ESL."

Taxonomy, classification, inventory, catalogue and statistics are paramount strategies of modern practice. Modern mastery is the power to divide, classify and allocate—in thought, in practice, in the practice of thought and the thought of practice. Paradoxically, it is for this reason that ambivalence is the main affliction of modernity and the most worrying of its concerns. Geometry shows what the world would be like were it geometrical. But the world is not geometrical. It cannot be squeezed into geometrically inspired grids.

—Bauman, 1991, p. 15

Chapter Two: The Skeins of Identity

There is a reassuring symmetry that accompanies the process of organizing, classifying and categorizing a world that appears relentlessly chaotic and random. Zygmunt Bauman (1991) linked this drive for order to what he characterized as a quintessential feature of modernity: humankind's inability to accept ambivalence. Faced with the uncertainty inherent in the world around us, we devise increasingly specific systems of classification, only to experience an unsettling cognitive dissonance when we encounter individuals or phenomena that resist categorization. In this fashion, the cycle continues: we further differentiate existing categories to subsume new individuals or phenomena, only to experience dissonance once again when we encounter those individuals and phenomena that "cannot be squeezed into geometrically inspired grids" (p. 15). The continual drive to classify only leads to further ambivalence, creating an unresolvable paradox.

The identification and placement of English learners into the category ESL is a prime example of the phenomenon that Bauman describes. Indeed, one of the realities for English learners is that they must continually negotiate between competing views of their identities and abilities. As researchers, policymakers and teachers strive to better understand the needs of English learners, they devise an ever-increasing array of

categories to describe this diverse group of individuals. This ultimately contributes to a greater sense of ambivalence among these groups. Block (2007) defines the type of ambivalence that linguistically diverse learners may experience as "the state of being intimate with one's surroundings while remaining, metaphorically, outside them" (p. 865). Drawing upon the work of Bauman (1991) and Papastergiadis (2000), he advances the notion that one limitation of an emphasis on individual agency in social theory (such as that found in the work of Giddens (1991), for example) is that it fails to account for the fact that "the cultural supermarket is not a completely free market where any self-identity under the sun can be assumed; nor is it reality in an equal way for all the inhabitants of this planet" (p. 865). Thus, although individuals have some measure of agency to take up various identities, they are always conditioned to some extent by social structures. Students from diverse linguistic backgrounds may understand in the abstract that they need English to survive in America; nevertheless, they may feel that it has no connection to the identities they imagine for themselves. Caught between acceptance of their real needs for language proficiency and the equally real stigma associated with the category "ESL," they face a profound set of tensions as they negotiate their school environments.

In the spirit of Bauman's inquiry into our penchant for classification, I begin this chapter by asking, "What is an ESL student?" The category ESL was designed to delineate a particular group of learners with similar educational needs, but it also serves the function of reassuring us that a diverse group of language learners can be classified neatly into a single mass. My experiences at Butler Middle School raise a corollary set of questions: What does it mean to be "gifted"? How do we decide which gifts to honor and

which to ignore? Just as any other educational category, "gifted" serves particular purposes and shapes particular realities. On another level, my strong belief that fiction is an instrument with which to make sense of human experience leads me to explore how narratives shape classroom reality. As writers create worlds, so do we in our everyday lives, create fictions that order our lives. What are the narratives that institutions create for their students, and what are the counter-narratives that students themselves create to cope with the realities that are often forced upon them?

I find Bauman's theoretical approach to be useful in conducting this kind of examination. Likewise, examining the roles of imagery and symbolism in the categorization of English learners can shed light on the power of classification. Using theoretical frameworks borrowed from literary analysis, Lightfoot (2001) examined the tropes and metaphors underlying institutional documents and demonstrated that "imagery…forms a significant thematic note running through, and helping shape, many of our understandings of, and writings about, students of English as a second-language in the United States" (p. 4). Her research chronicled the rise of applied social science in the United States during the post-World War II era, as sociologists and anthropologists were increasingly called upon not only to document various facets of culture and society, but to remedy social problems as well. The shift in the role of social science was accompanied by developments in the armed forces, where language learning became a means for many possible ends—intelligence gathering or interrogation, for example—rather than its own end. Learning language thus came to be viewed as a technical issue, where it had previously been regarded as an academic endeavor. Ultimately, these

developments dramatically shifted the way language learning was viewed by the public and policymakers alike. Learning English became a technical "problem" to be solved, and the identification of English learners became akin to diagnosing an ill within the body politic. Lightfoot argued that although we commonly believe that "it is natural that various sub-groups within a nation's population should be identified and labeled as in need of fixing," such a belief is actually indicative of a kind of dead metaphor—that is, a metaphorical understanding that has become so commonplace that it is no longer viewed as such (p. 69). The idea that English learners are in need of identification and special service is accepted as a self-evident fact, when it is in fact a shared cultural understanding.

Pavlenko (2001) also stresses the importance of stories in the development of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory, and the way identities are created in and through personal narratives about language learning. She writes, "It is possible that only personal narratives provide a glimpse into areas so private, personal, and intimate that they are rarely—if ever—breached in the study of SLA, and at the same time at the heart and soul of the second language socialization process" (p. 167). It is therefore essential to examine the ways that impersonal categories like "ESL" and "gifted" become quite personal as they shape the ways that students and teachers think and talk about themselves.

Below, I explore the ways that educational researchers and social theorists have explored such questions of identity and belonging. First, I discuss literature that deals with institutional classification and its consequences for learners. Second, I examine

educational research that seeks to strike an analytical balance between social structures and individual agency. Finally, I present literature on the concept of "giftedness" and its social construction. Taken together, this diverse body of scholarship informs my own inquiry.

Disciplinary Technology and Institutional Classification

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) explores numerous social practices that comprise what can called disciplinary technology. Embedded within a variety of social institutions—particularly the military, the prison system and the educational system—are practices that serve to codify a set of normative behaviors. These practices are codified in a variety of ways—for example, institutional surveillance, which often takes the form of documenting behavior. Disciplines such as education utilize a complex process of documentation in order to fix individuals within a system of hierarchical relations. The academic examination in particular is integral to "procedures that constitute the individual as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge. It is the examination which, by combining hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgement [sic.], assures the great disciplinary functions of distribution and classification" (p. 192). Through the processes of examination and documentation, the individual (in this case a student) undergoes a simultaneous process of individuation and totalization; that is, the student becomes at once a specific case and a member of a group of like individuals.

A corollary effect of this "normalizing judgement" is the proliferation of further categories used to identify individuals and place them into distinct groups. As Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) note, "disciplinary technology works to set up and preserve an

increasingly differentiated set of anomalies, which is the very way it extends its knowledge and power into wider and wider domains" (p. 198). In a sense, disciplinary technology creates a continuing cycle of differentiation that theoretically has no end point. There are always further differences to be mapped and recorded, always distinctions to be made. As long as anomalies can be found, disciplinary technology continues to catalogue them.

The preponderance of labels and categories in language education is the example par excellence of this phenomenon. Even a cursory examination of the literature surrounding language education reveals a wide array of labels. While some relate to language ownership (e.g., native speaker (NS)/non-native speaker (NNS), first language (L1)/second language (L2), English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL), English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)), others differentiate learners based upon their language proficiency (e.g., limited English proficient (LEP)) or their previous education level (limited formal schooling (LFS)). Still others divide learners based upon their length of residence in a particular country (e.g., first- and second- generation, generation 1.5). Each of these categories serves to delineate a certain set of individuals and establish a set of norms against which other language learners are judged.

Integral to this labeling process is the documentation of linguistic ability through various means, including surveys and placement testing. Local school districts and the federal government alike mandate proficiency testing for English learners. Although these tests are ostensibly used to gauge English proficiency in order to better serve

students, they also serve the function of placing students within a hierarchy of ability groups. In Mica Pollock's (2004) ethnographic study of an Ohio high school, the author noted that, "the debate over 'labeling' the LEP/ESL students at Columbus was both ideological and practical, as addressing English learners' particular language needs required documenting and analyzing their English proficiency" (p. 132). If students at Columbus became labeled as ESL, they were then entitled to special academic services designed to meet their needs. However, they also became marked as members of a disadvantaged group whose academic progress was subject to institutional monitoring. As Pollock illustrated, the dual-edged sword of identifying educational need is that although determining a student's level of English ability in order to provide appropriate instruction is important, the process of documenting this ability further ensnares the language learner in a web of discourses that tend to push her farther outside the mainstream of school experience. Moreover, the term LEP itself implies a twofold presumption that is at the heart of the notion of disciplinary technology: first, there exists a normative conception of an *unlimited* English speaker, to whom the *limited* English speaker is compared; and secondly, by administering an examination to determine a learner's English proficiency level, the characteristics of the speaker's language can be fixed permanently in the documentary record.

Even programs that are created in order to reduce disparities for English learners often reinforce existing linguistic boundaries. Grinberg and Saavedra (2000) drew upon the frame of disciplinary technology to trace the formation of the field of ESL/bilingual education in the American southwest. The authors implicated ESL/bilingual education

(subsuming the two as part of an argument that the goals of each instructional model are similar) in a larger project of "symbolic domination" that originated with the Spanish colonization of what is now the Southwestern United States, and continued with the advent of the formal schooling system that is currently in place in New Mexico. Using primary and secondary historical sources, the authors traced the genealogy of ESL/bilingual education in New Mexico, concluding that it has become an integral part of the mechanism to reproduce the social inequalities faced by the Latino population. Instead of being a force for resistance and change, "bilingual/ESL education constituted itself as a settlement and formulated itself as a palatable co-optation within the mainstream political and ideological agenda, placing itself within the bureaucratic interest game" (p. 437). The authors argue that despite the best intentions of teachers, bilingual/ESL education as a field is designed to maintain existing linguistic and racial hierarchies. Moreover, such programs reflect a view of "limited English proficiency as a handicap or deficiency that must be overcome and corrected through a focus on intensive English instruction and a remedial approach to instruction" (Mora, Wink & Wink, 2001, p. 420). This illustrates the tenuous place of bilingualism within the dominant discourse of American identity. Ironically, as Zentella (1997) points out, "classrooms that honor the usefulness, rule-governed nature, and validity of the dialects and ways of speaking that students acquire at home, instead of attacking them as ungrammatical or illogical, are more likely to expand students' linguistic repertoires successfully" (p. 280). This highlights the political aspect of bilingual education—despite the fact that honoring

students' home languages will actually help them achieve success, this practice is not seen as a viable political alternative.

Thus, a seemingly innocuous or even beneficial process of establishing a learner's English proficiency level becomes, in practice, a mobilization of power that results in an institutional classification that materially affects that learner's school experience. Marshall (1992) notes that any thorough examination of how power operates in the school setting necessitates a focus not only on actions that we would normally associate with harm to the child—abuse, corporal punishment, denial of love—but also on "a host of shaping processes—learning to speak, read, and write, for example—which the liberal framework would not normally identify as acting contrary to the interests of the child" (p. 25). With such a focus, taken-for-granted assumptions about the importance of learning may be displaced, and we may begin to see that in fact, "what is in the child's interests, for example, acquiring the concept X, is far from clear" (p. 25). Applying this logic to the ESL classroom begs the question, "What is inherently beneficial about categorizing students and placing them in academic courses based on these categories?"

Although few scholars have explicitly adopted the framework of disciplinary technology to address this question, a number of scholars have examined the role of classification in language education. In so doing, they have raised skepticism about the efficacy of some of the most prevalent labels in ESL/EFL education (e.g., Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Leung, Rampton & Harris, 1997; Nero, 2005; Widdowson, 1994). Perhaps most widely criticized is the native speaker/non-native speaker dichotomy, which is commonly used to identify individuals according to their presumptive "native"

language, and positions learners as insiders or outsiders based upon their status as "native speakers" or "non-native speakers." As Rampton (1990) notes, this characterization is based on several spurious assumptions, including the belief that "a particular language is inherited, either through genetic endowment or through birth into the social group stereotypically associated with it" (p. 97). In addition to privileging biological over social facets of language use, the NS/NNS classification also creates a binary relationship in which "people either are or are not native/mother-tongue speakers" (p. 97). Thus, the label fixes learners into immutable categories of language ownership. Although SLA research has begun to address this dichotomous view of language ownership, Ortega (2010) has pointed out that such bias still persists in SLA research that elides from analysis the multilingual capabilities of English learners. Moreover, "by erasing bilinguals' other languages from analysis, their repertoires as made to look like 'less' instead of 'more.'" Thus, by being labeled as "non-native," English learners are marked as always already behind in their language development.

Indeed, once categorized as ESL, students may find it incredibly difficult to avoid being defined by this institutional status, and students face numerous challenges as they seek to shift perceptions about their linguistic and academic abilities. Harklau (1994) found that through careful planning and exploitation of school structures, students were able to shed their ESL status by shifting from low track to high track classes. Through an arduous process of adopting behaviors that positioned them as ambitious and competent, combined with skillful negotiation with counselors, teachers, and other school officials in positions of power, these students were able to change their course placements, thereby

repositioning themselves as high achievers. Unfortunately, the individuals described in the study were exceptions, as many of their peers who lacked such fierce determination remained in remedial courses. While this study provides a powerful example of the ability of students to utilize the existing school discourses to subvert dominant constructions of them as deficient learners, it also highlights the tremendous difficulties students face in overcoming institutional designations of academic ability.

Likewise, Harklau (2000) examined the persistence of institutional labeling across educational contexts. Investigating the role of schools in producing particular representations of language learners, she followed a group of ESL students from their senior year in high school to their first year of college. While their high school teachers had considered these students to be some of the best in the school, their university professors positioned them as remedial underachievers. This was related both to teachers' discourses about school success and to the students' performance, which led to "representations of these ESOL students as novices in English in spite of their considerable accomplishments in the language" (p. 58). As a result, students *became* remedial upon entering post-secondary education, not because of their abilities but because of how their instructors perceived them in comparison to their peers. Her data yielded the conclusion that "the very same ESL students who had been considered 'the good kids' in high school…subsequently came to be characterized as underachieving and difficult students in their college ESL classes" (p. 36). Thus, while their institutional status as ESL students remained static over time, this status led to disparate ascriptions of ability and identity across educational contexts. The value of Harklau's work is that it

illustrates the tension between students' individual agency and the powerful institutional discourses that they face as they attempt to challenge their status as ESL. Students may succeed in challenging their position as ESL students in the high school context, only to be placed back into ESL courses at the post-secondary level.

A more recent study demonstrates that while it may be possible for English learners to shift teachers' perceptions of their linguistic and academic ability, these perceptions may not lead to increased success in school. Vásquez (2007) conducted a case study involving an immigrant student who was placed into an intensive English program (IEP) at an American university. Because of her high level of oral English proficiency and her familiarity with American classroom norms of behavior (e.g., emphasis on oral participation in class activities), the student, Festina, successfully convinced her English teachers of her high ability in English. By speaking up in class and participating enthusiastically, Festina positioned herself as a "good student," thus earning praise from her English teachers and gaining their permission to enroll in college-level academic classes. However, Festina ultimately failed out of college, and the author concluded that one reason for this failure was that her good student behaviors were not enough to overcome her lack of academic reading and writing proficiency.

As the above research indicates, once an individual is marked as a non-native speaker of English, the possibility of becoming a native speaker is foreclosed, resulting in a permanent Otherness. For Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999), Otherness is based upon the normalization of the NS/NNS construct, and does not represent a natural distinction between language speakers. Instead, "these differences constitute an important aspect of

an understanding of how certain cultural constructions of colonialism become stabilized and, subsequently, reproduced in the discourses of postcolonialism as normal, natural, and universal" (p. 414). The NS/NNS construct is the embodiment of disciplinary technology, as it codifies and preserves a normative relationship in which full mastery of a given language can only be established by inheritance. Although transnational migration and the increase in communication technology has rendered geographic and linguistic barriers ever more permeable (King & Rambow, 2011), this binary construct does not allow for the increasing hybridity resulting from the cross pollination of languages.

With the increasingly global reach of English as a lingua franca, the dynamics outlined above often play out in international learning settings as well. In one example of this transnational perspective, Canagarajah (1993) investigated instances of resistance and accommodation in a Sri Lankan ESOL classroom. The course, designed for first-year university students, was initially very well attended, but as the semester progressed, student attendance flagged. Students also began to resist the American-designed curriculum because of its lack of cultural relevance. However, when Canagarajah interviewed students following completion of the course, he discovered that despite their poor attendance in the university class, many of them had been receiving outside tutoring in English grammar. Far from demonstrating clear-cut attitudes of resistance to or acceptance of the dominant language, the students in this study displayed a much more complex attitude—they understood the importance of English to their futures, but resented its hegemonic position vis-à-vis their own languages and cultures. Rather than

paper over this complexity, Canagarajah drew attention to the ambivalence of the oppositional stance that his students adopted. One of his important conclusions was that "these dual attitudes simply dramatize the conflict students faced…between the threats of cultural alienation experienced intuitively or instinctively and the promises of a socioeconomic necessity acknowledged at a more conscious level" (p. 621). This conclusion parallels Block's (2007) above description of the ambivalence that linguistically diverse students experience as they stand both within and outside their surroundings.

Demerath (2001) explored a similar phenomenon in Papua New Guinea. Drawing upon Fordham's (1999) work on language as resistance, Demerath ethnographically explored the processes of secondary schooling in the Manus province of New Guinea. Like Canagarajah, Demerath found the attitudes of students toward English, and indeed toward school in general, to be quite complex and often contradictory. In particular, many students felt that the individualistic, competitive value system they perceived in the Western-based educational system ran counter to their own idealized national identity, which was characterized by egalitarianism and group cohesion. Inside the classroom and out, the use of English became a pretext for ridicule, as did high academic achievement. Those who sought the approval of teachers and demonstrated enthusiasm for the course material were accused of rejecting their identities in favor of identification with the dominant culture. Essentially, such behaviors constituted the practice of "acting extra" and were equated with assimilation and a betrayal of indigenous cultural values. Likewise, those students who actively resisted their teachers were lionized because of

their perceived solidarity with the community. The participants in Demerath's study clearly understood the practical, economic need for schooling. On the other hand, they experienced a sense of ambivalence that resulted from their desire to better their social and economic status, coupled with "a growing doubt that education could ultimately lead to equality with whites" (p. 225). For these students, the promise of English was a hollow one.

The above work highlights the power of institutional actors to create specific narratives about the nature of linguistic identity. Indeed, as language learners attempt to navigate their paths through the complex social world of school, they invariably confront identities that institutions have already constructed for them. As Bourdieu (1991) argues, institutional discourse is a language unto itself, representing:

> an act of communication, but of a particular kind: it signifies to someone what his identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to him and imposes it on him by expressing it in front of everyone and thus informing him in an authoritative manner what he is and what he must be. (p. 121)

Placing linguistically diverse students into ESL programs is just such an act—it communicates to students a particular message about who they are and who they may become.

A number of scholars have begun to question the viability of categories like "ESL" and "generation 1.5" because of the messages they convey to students about their possible futures. A thread connecting this research is the idea that despite the necessity of naming and categorizing learners, the categories can become reified if their use is not

reflected upon. Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) notes, "the term 'ESL' is not only a descriptor, it is also an institutional marker, pointing to a need for additional services and also the status of someone still marked as a novice in the English language" (p. 390). As this comment indicates, the language we use to speak about linguistically diverse students carries with it ascriptions of ability and proficiency that are not easily shed. Consequently, it is crucial to examine the ideological function of these categories, and the extent to which they create certain representations of student abilities even as they constrain alternative visions.

The above scholarship represents a wide variety of theoretical perspectives. Although much of it is not explicitly concerned with the framework of disciplinary technology, taken as a whole, this work is representative of how disciplinary technology acts to shape students, document their abilities and constitute them as subjects. In the following section, I explore the distinct but related perspective of discourse as it relates to the subject positions that individuals can adopt within the framework of disciplinary technology.

From Discipline to Discourse: The Question of Agency

Schools are sites where particular representations of English learners are often reified through documentation and classification. However, missing in a heavy focus on institutional structures is the notion that although schools exert great influence over learners, these individuals may variously accept, reject, resist or refashion the institutional classifications that are imposed upon them. A number of scholars have employed Foucaultian theories to emphasize the power individuals have to shape their

identities. In particular, researchers have used the notion of discourse. According to Foucault (1972), power is embodied within discourse, a term which refers to the practices by which human beings, through domains such as history or science, produce meaning. More importantly, discourse is explicitly connected to power in that it "governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about" (Hall, 2001, p. 72). While each of us exists as an individual, Foucault argues that discourse constitutes us as subjects, setting the boundaries for how we talk and think about ourselves. This use of the term *discourse* is quite distinct from that typically employed in applied linguistics, which refers to language in use. Instead, the Foucaultian notion leads us to examine how:

> meaning is produced not at the will of a unitary humanist subject, not as a quality of a linguistic system, but rather through a range of power/knowledge systems that organize texts, create the conditions of possibility for different language acts, and are embedded in social institutions. (Pennycook, 1994, p. 128).

The term is related to disciplinary technology, and indeed it is through discourse that disciplines like education exert influence over individuals. However, the multifarious nature of discourse also opens up the possibility for shifting identities, and for students to resist or adopt counter discourses in their quest to forge viable cultural and linguistic identities. In this section, I turn to a body of SLA research that emphasizes the ways individual language learners may act within and against the constraints of institutional structures.

An increasing number of scholars in both applied linguistics and SLA have employed the notion of discourse in research on language and identity (e.g., Kubota,

2001; Pennycook, 1998). Kubota (1999), for example, explored how applied linguistics literature constructs essentialized representations of "Eastern" and "Western" writing styles, drawing upon "a colonialist discourse that seeks to isolate a particular definition of the Other as Japanese" (p. 30). According to Kubota, this leads to a reified characterization of Japanese culture as "traditional, homogenous, and group oriented with a strong emphasis on harmony," as opposed to U.S. culture, which is based upon "*individualism, self-expression,* and *critical thinking*" (p. 12, emphasis in original). The consequence of such a view is that both culture and identity are constructed as static and bounded, closing down the possibility for variability and fluidity and reinforcing the notion of Western superiority.

Perhaps the most central work in SLA to employ this focus on discourse is the work of Bonny Norton (2001, 1997, 1995). Drawing upon the work of both Bourdieu and Foucault, Norton explicitly rejects the view that language acquisition involves merely mastering *langue* and *parole*. In fact, the reality of the language classroom is much more complex:

> Every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. They are, in other words, engaged in identity construction and negotiation. (Norton, 1997, p. 410)

In Norton's view, language is integrally connected to one's sense of self. Therefore, in order to fully address the complex relationship between identity and language learning, it is necessary to move beyond a liberal humanist conception of identity as individualistic,

static and unitary, toward a concept of social identity that acknowledges the complicated, multivariate nature of selfhood.

Based on this theory of social identity, Norton (1995) has also challenged the work on motivation in SLA theory, because it is based on the premise that all the variables involved in language learning are present within the individual. Indeed, motivation "presupposes a unitary, fixed, and ahistorical language learner who desires access to material resources that are the privilege of target language speakers. In this view, motivation is a property of the language learner—a fixed personality trait" (p. 17). While student motivation has been identified as an important factor in language learning, in order to capture the relationship between learners and the wider social world, Norton proposed the alternative concept of *investment*. According to Norton, the term investment better represents the contested nature of linguistic identity, as "an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own social identity, an identity which is constantly changing over time and space" (p. 18). As she followed the lives of two immigrant women, Norton theorized that these women adopted different levels of investment in English, depending on the social context in which they were situated, along with the attendant power relations in each context. When faced with disempowering social situations, each woman remained silent. Yet in other cases, particularly those in which they had a strong stake, the women spoke up for themselves, resisting the ways that those with more institutional power tended to frame their subjectivities.

A number of other scholars have both drawn upon and expanded Norton's work on social identity and investment. For example, McKay and Wong (1996) explored the

ways that Chinese immigrant students invested in several complicated discourses in their interactions with teachers and other students. Through their use of English, they were able to position themselves as variously resistant, accommodating, or ambivalent according to the classroom context in which they found themselves. Using ethnographic research methods, the authors traced the many strategies that their participants used to fashion school identities—and the relative success or failure of these strategies. Over a two-year period, researchers observed classes, interviewed students, their parents, and school staff, and collected participant writing samples and other documents related to the ESL writing curriculum. Students used class projects in writing and drawing to adopt a variety of stances toward learning English and toward their teachers—most particularly resistance and accommodation. For example, one participant used a mixture of English letters and Chinese characters to create an illustrated summary of a class reading that both fulfilled the assignment and mocked it. McKay and Wong's findings echoed those of Norton, as they concluded that the students in their study were not passive victims of hegemonic discourses. Instead, they constantly worked to reposition themselves and their relationship to English in order to forge complex social identities:

> As subjects with agency and a need to exercise it, the learners, while positioned in power relations and subject to the influence of discourses, also resist positioning, attempt repositioning, and deploy discourses and counterdiscourses. In general, they constantly conduct delicate social negotiations to fashion viable identities. (p. 603)

This conclusion has several important implications. First, it shifts learner identity away from the margins of the language classroom and places it firmly at the center of language learning. Secondly, it emphasizes that students' investments in English not only change over time and space, but also are constantly shifting based on daily interactions.

Indeed, the notion of investment becomes a more powerful analytic tool when applied to the micro-processes of social interaction. For example, Angelil-Carter (1997) traced the interpersonal dynamics during a single interview with a research study participant. She found that during the process of questioning and discussion, power continually shifted between both parties. This underlines the fact that "not only do subject positions…change over time, but also that they can change within one encounter" (p. 268). In particular, during her transcription of interview data with her primary participant, she noticed that the relationship changed when topics shifted to those with which her participant, Tshediso, was more familiar. For example, it came to light that the Tshediso had been a political prisoner in South Africa. This gave him insights on prison life that the author did not share—he effectively became the expert, and she the novice. Drawing on this discourse of the expert gave Tshediso more confidence, and authority over the interview context shifted into his hands. She proposed that due to such fluidity of conversational authority, Norton's (1995) notion of investment should be expanded to include not only linguistic resources, but discursive power as well. This is important in the context of a language classroom, because although students may in fact be eager to learn English, "historically constructed investments in prior discourses…may be evident in students' writing and affect their learning of academic or classroom discourses" (p.

284). In short, this extension of investment is significant because it better accounts for individual agency in constant struggle for subjectivity, and the extent to which the decision to invest oneself in a particular endeavor is mediated by discursive power. For example, the students in Demerath's (2001) study above were caught between two discourses—their own cultural values of egalitarianism and cooperative, versus the American values of competition and personal gain. Adopting a focus on discourse would highlight the fact that the amount of resistance or accommodation these individuals displayed would be mediated by their level of investment in one or more of these competing discourses.

In fact, Byrd Clark (2009) pointed out that Norton's original notion of investment should be reconceptualized to account for increasingly complex discourses related to multiculturalism and globalization. In her research, she found that young Italian-Canadians displayed shifting and complicated investments toward citizenship, ethnicity and language. In particular, they demonstrated varying levels of both practical and symbolic investment in the Italian, French, and English languages. Moreover, these investments were shaped by both dominant and subaltern discourses on identity originating from peer groups, teachers, families and community members. For example, Vanessa, who was studying to become a French teacher, embraced the language both as a practical means to gain employment and as a form of symbolic capital that would enable her to gain access to a more cosmopolitan identity. A common tension for other participants surrounded the question of what it meant to be an Italian in French Canada. Ultimately, Byrd concluded that it is essential to examine "everyday linguistic and social

practices, so that we may see that we are not deterministically tied to our worldly circumstances, and that people do challenge dominant discourses in their everyday lives just as they can likewise reproduce them" (p. 196). Byrd's perspective is particularly valuable in light of my own emphasis on everyday classroom interactions.

Other scholars have employed the theoretical frame of discursive power to investigate how young people explore questions of linguistic and ethnic identity through their everyday actions. In an ethnographic study of Somali youth in Toronto, Ibrahim (1999) powerfully argued that these young people underwent a process of racialization upon entering their new country. Having before been only Somali, or perhaps African, they now became Black. Moreover, they quickly came to understand the racial hierarchy in which they were now enmeshed. The most notable aspect of Ibrahim's study was his finding that rather than adopt standard English in order to better their position, these students consciously adopted what the author referred to as BSE, or Black Stylized English, in order to further identify with their marginality. Through identification with popular culture forms, such as hip-hop music and fashion, these students enacted their "desire to belong to a location, a politics, a memory, a history, and hence a representation" (p. 353). This conclusion underscores the extent to which social identity is not a binary equation. The students in Ibrahim's study neither accepted nor rejected the identity marker of Blackness. Instead, they refashioned it according to their own identifications.

Ajrouch and Kusow (2007) examined a similar issue, comparing the experiences of Somalis in Canada and Lebanese in the United States. While both groups in the study

emphasized their religious identities as important, the Somalis also experienced the process of racialization in a mostly white society, while the Lebanese immigrants were able to avoid this situation because they were considered white within the prevailing racial hierarchy. The Lebanese immigrants, who were Shi'a Muslims, had come from a country where identity marking was primarily related to religious affiliation. As such, they had been a disempowered minority. However, when they immigrated to the United States, where identity marking is based on racial makeup, their status became one of majority, as they were identified as White according to demographic data. They embraced the status that came along with this, while rejecting their ties to the hierarchy of their homeland. In contrast, the Somali immigrants to Canada became marked as a visible minority, whereas in Somalia their affiliation with Islam had conferred a majority status on them. Consequently, upon immigration these two groups experienced divergent identity formation. This transnational focus highlights the complex nature of identity:

> suggesting that it is not only race and religion that inform the nature and kinds of identity embraced by immigrants, but also whether or not the immigrant occupied a minority or majority status in their homeland and moreover how such statuses interact with those available in the host countries. (p. 91)

For the immigrants in this study, the subject positions available in their new country were integrally tied to those they had occupied prior to immigration.

Nevertheless, dominant discourses about immigrant identity in the host country remain powerful, and are not often easy to contradict. Bigelow (2008) has investigated discourses surrounding the use of the veil by Somali women—its alternative meanings

and the different discourses surrounding its use in America. She pointed out that although the normative Western discourse of the veil is that it is worn primarily for religious purposes and to hide women from the male gaze, in fact "although possibly surprising to some Westerners, the veil or hijab may serve additional or alternative purposes, including resistance" (p. 31). For many of the young women in Bigelow's study, the decision whether or not to wear the veil was based not only on religious belief, but also on a number of complex factors—nationalism, gender solidarity. This is a prime example of competing discourses: society at large paints Muslim female identity in one way, and the women themselves in quite another.

As the disparate experiences of the participants in the studies of Ibrahim, Ajrouch and Kusow, and Bigelow above suggest, institutional markers play an integral role in the formation of personal identities. It is often in schools where linguistically diverse individuals experience these institutional markers most acutely. Vollmer (2000) examined a school discourse that served to reduce individual differences between immigrant students, leading to idealized constructions of language learners. Specifically, teachers positioned Russian-speaking students as academically motivated, ambitious learners—a kind of model minority. And while the teachers interviewed in the study resisted engaging in an explicit discussion of race, they frequently contrasted the behavior and performance of the Russian students against that of their Latino and Chinese peers. In fact, only one teacher in the study explicitly raised the issue of race, but it was clear that "the brink of a volatile topic had been reached" (p. 64). Vollmer reached the conclusion that race played an integral part in constructing unequal

opportunities for these students, particularly because although the Russian speaking students could pass unnoticed in the primarily White school environment, their peers were always marked by their skin color. Ultimately, in this particular school, constructions of the "typical" ESL student were intimately tied to race as well as language.

Indeed, race often influences the experience of linguistically diverse students in profound but insidious ways. In her ethnographic study, Lee (2005) traced the experiences of Hmong-American students at UHS, an affluent high school in Wisconsin. From the valorization of certain school activities over others to the hiring of staff to deal with the special needs of ESL students, she found that these learners were constantly positioned as outsiders—foreigners who would never be truly American. The students were aware of this, yet found few allies at the school that might have helped ameliorate their position. Moreover, the Hmong students at UHS adopted behaviors of resistance and accommodation in the face of the unequal opportunities afforded them at the school. In a related work, Lee (2009) noted that teachers at her research site frequently conflated race and ethnicity, and also denied the presence of any racial tension at the school, adopting "the discourse of culture and ethnicity that allowed teachers and administrators to overlook structural barriers" (p. 96). Nor were students immune from such discourses, as "interracial tension between African Americans and Asian Americans and between Asian Americans and white, working-class students lay beneath the surface" (p. 118). According to Lee, the school climate exacerbated rather than ameliorated this tension.

Finally, Harris (2006) examined the everyday talk of South Asian youth living in London as they displayed numerous and often contradictory affiliations to local varieties of English as well as their heritage languages. Through a detailed analysis of their speech, Harris showed that these adolescents defied the monolithic categorizations of ethnic and linguistic identity that are prevalent in dominant media and academic discourses. On the one hand, these young people employed many conventions of what Harris referred to as "Global teenage language," such as the use of the word "like" to introduce quoted speech. Amrita, a female participant, did this quite often, as in, "she's like, 'you should speak proper Panjabi'…she's like 'you should speak it this way'" (p. 110). On the other hand, as the previous example illustrates, many of the participants in this study were also invested in using their heritage languages in daily interaction with parents and elders. This was partially due to pressure from their families and communities, but these young also people accepted the need navigate such linguistic boundaries as a matter of course, in order to demonstrate the proper respect. Ultimately, Harris' data showed that ethnically and linguistically divers individuals do not always resist categorization through intentional dramatic action, rather through creative and often unreflective language use.

Cultural Production

The above research demonstrates that the lives of linguistically diverse learners in American schools are fraught with contradictions. The act of identifying and serving the needs of ESL students is connected to broader cultural frames regarding national identity and the role of English in American society. Moreover, the creation of ESL students

exemplifies a process by which "different models of the 'educated person' are historically produced and contested…as both dominant and subordinate groups (and those, like teachers, who often stand 'in-between') carry forth distinctive modalities of cultural production" (Levinson, Foley & Holland, 1996, p. 23). The ESL student thus represents a historically and culturally specific type of educated person. In order to better theorize the process through which ESL identity is produced, it is essential to investigate the process by which particular students in particular schools *become* ESL students, how they negotiate this process, and how they interpret their experiences in ESL programs. Furthermore, this process must be explored in such a way as to avoid dismissing the power of individuals to shape their own educational trajectories, while remaining aware of the powerful roles that institutions play in the shaping of individual identities.

Educational anthropologists have struck this delicate balance between agency and structure. In an effort to focus adequately on the power of institutions while simultaneously exploring individual agency, Levinson, Foley and Holland (1996) have advanced the concept of cultural production. Simply stated, cultural production is an ethnographic framework whereby researchers pay special attention to the everyday processes and practices that constitute the social reality of school experience. This theoretical frame is not intended to minimize the effects of schools upon individuals. Instead, it "allows us to portray and interpret the way people actively confront the ideological and material conditions presented by schooling" (p. 14). The utility of this theoretical stance is that it emphasizes both the power of institutional structures to impose identities on students and the ability of students to at least partially resist these imposed

identities. Furthermore, it attends to the way that broad social phenomena play out in local contexts.

Various researchers have taken up this stance in order to examine the role that schools play in shaping normative social and academic identities. Anderson-Levitt (1996), for example, claims that the concept of graded instruction, which is so popular in the United States and Europe, actually encourages teachers to create identities for children that correspond with their relative progress on an arbitrary scale. As a result, schooling is based upon "the premise that learning takes place in stages along a narrow linear path, as if one could only learn more by progressing further along that path instead of by wandering off the track" (p. 71). Those who follow the designated path are marked as successful, while those who deviate from it are stigmatized. Echoing the contention of Marshall (1992), Anderson-Levitt argues that a set of practices ostensibly designed to benefit learners instead acts as a mechanism to sort them into ability groups that become immutable. Other research has focused on disrupting prevailing assumptions about the reasons underlying the school behavior of particular cultural groups. Foley (1996) explored the construction of the "silent Indian" in an Iowa high school. Interpreting his data against the grain, Foley rejected the common assertion that the silence of his Mesquaki informants in classrooms was simply a culturally learned behavior or a linguistic trait of their culture. Although these were certainly elements in the equation, Foley ultimately concluded that the silence was "part of a much larger discursive or ideological struggle between whites and Indians over cultural representations" (p. 81). His work points to the complex motives and patterns underlying seemingly mundane,

everyday behaviors, like sitting quietly in class. If we examine such behaviors, we may find that the motives behind them are far from simple.

In the context of ESL education, Talmy (2008) has made extensive use of the cultural production framework to explore language socialization processes in American ESL classrooms. For example, he examined classrooms in Hawai'i, and the ways that students reacted to their status as ESL students. Drawing upon Willis' (1978) research on schools as sites of social reproduction, Talmy investigated how the broad category ESL was produced and enacted locally, in relation to specific students and schools. He analyzed data from a critical ethnography conducted in a high school where students were being socialized into a particular type of ESL student identity—for example, one who attends class regularly, completes assignments on time, and participates enthusiastically in class activities. However, certain students rejected this normative identity in favor of oppositional behaviors such as skipping class and publicly resisting their teachers. Their resistance to school tasks affected the class environments and the ESL teachers, who increasingly accommodated these ESL students in their desire to shirk classwork. Ultimately, the students' oppositional practices had contradictory results, as they were still labeled as ESL and placed into a stigmatized program. Talmy concluded that this buttressed Willis' (1978) well-known claim that practices of resistance that are intended to disrupt the status quo often lead instead to the reproduction of existing social hierarchies.

In other work, Talmy (2009) examined the way that respect was constructed in classrooms. Here, he found that through the practices of socializing ESL students about

respectful classroom demeanor, teachers were also juxtaposing the image of a disrespectful or ill-behaved ESL student against a normative well-behaved successful "mainstream" student. This reinforced an institutional hierarchy whereby these mythical mainstream students were the model against which ESL students were judged. Through their daily classroom routines, the teachers in Talmy's study sought to model their ESL students into respectful members of the classroom. These practices included upbraiding the students and continually reminding them of their remedial status, while assigning classwork that did not challenge the students academically. Thus, a model student came to be seen as one who followed directions and listened to the teachers at all times, and who didn't "act dumb" in the words of one teacher participant. Talmy found that this environment created a self-fulfilling prophecy, a vicious cycle wherein "a perplexing irony emerges: for students to transition from ESL to its preferred corollary, the 'mainstream,' they must 'respectfully' accommodate their teacher's efforts at facilitating the assimilative process. However, a constitutive feature of such respect is…*disrespecting* ESL" (p. 248, emphasis in original). As we shall see below in the discussion of gifted learners, just as "ESL-ness" can be socially constructed as a deficit, "smartness" can also be socially constructed as a set of behaviors that reinforces the status quo, and has consequences as powerful as the construction of ESL.

While not explicitly adopting the framework of cultural production, other ethnographic work has focused on the daily practices that produce particular kinds of students. In her study of first-grade ESL students in Canada, Toohey (1998) drew attention to "practices so commonplace in classrooms as to be almost invisible" (p. 77)—

students' movements, practices of sharing materials, and practices of cooperation on tasks—as powerful sites of resistance to the teacher's discourse She found that that the minutia of classroom practices were integral to producing particular student identities. By moving from their assigned seats, surreptitiously sharing materials when explicitly directed otherwise, and working together on assignments designed to assess individual performance, these youngsters subverted the teacher's discourse of individualism over collectivism. Although Toohey drew from a number of theoretical stances to frame her research, this conclusion is in keeping with the framework of cultural production.

Ultimately, the above research illustrates the importance of examining the ways that individual agency and social structures refract each other, and over time function dialectically to produce social identities. Because of its attention to this dialectic process, I find the construct of cultural production useful for three reasons. First, it provides a focus on how broad social phenomena are played out in local contexts. While it is important to utilize broad theoretical frames to make sense of classroom practices and behaviors, without attention to the specifics of local practices research remains limited in its potential to make sense of students' and teachers' experiences. Secondly, as previously mentioned, the cultural production framework avoids the blindly optimistic stance that individuals have unlimited agency, while also avoiding what I will call the "poststructural trap" of placing undue emphasis on monolithic socio-political structures in the shaping of individual identities. Finally, cultural production lends itself to an interdisciplinary focus on the cultural forms both consumed and produced by both language learners and teachers as they negotiate the worlds of schooling. As Levinson &

Holland (1996) write, "reshaped by the…focus on practice and production, the larger question is now one of how historical persons are formed in practice, within and against larger societal forces and structures which instantiate themselves in schools and other institutions" (p. 14). In the context of ESL education, this entails an in-depth examination of how local actors experience being "ESL," as well as how these actors accept, resist, refashion and appropriate the meanings of this cultural category.

Becoming "Gifted"

As part of their drive to close an achievement gap[2] between White students and students of color, Butler (and its parent district), was part of a push to implement the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IBMYP). In order to better understand the dynamics at Butler Middle School, it is necessary to examine the way that the construct of giftedness functioned in room 422, particularly as it juxtaposed with the construct of "ESL-ness." In this section, I explore background of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) and its implementation in American schools. I also explore the concept of giftedness, and the ways that giftedness, much like ESL, is socially constructed, context-dependent, and intimately connected to identity formation. It is significant that much of the research on the concept of giftedness takes for granted that these gifts are innate in children, and the job of educators is to simply find and nurture these gifts. However, a small but important body of research has developed which calls this view into question and emphasizes the socially constructed nature of giftedness.

[2] While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the discourse surrounding the term "achievement gap," I acknowledge that this is a loaded term, which carries meaning related to race, gender, as well as linguistic diversity. Although this is relevant to my own interest, it was not a topic that the teachers or students at Butler brought up during the course of my research.

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) had its roots in the 1960s in Geneva. During this time period, international dignitaries and United Nations personnel were concerned that due to their continual mobility, their children would receive a less rigorous, more disjointed educational experience. Centered in the core academic subjects of math, English, social studies, science, art and music, the IB diploma program was initially designed for secondary education. The intention of its founders was that IB could provide a common curriculum for "internationally mobile students preparing for university" (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013). An outgrowth of this original IB diploma program, the Middle Years Program (MYP) is designed to further prepare students for the demands of the high school IB program. It shares with IB the focus on a common curriculum and a focus on the core academic subjects. Moreover, it focuses on specific "areas of interaction" (AoI), as part of a holistic curriculum. These five AoI include: community and service, human ingenuity, health and social education, environments and approaches to learning. According to IBO (2013), "these [areas] provide the main focus for developing the connections between the disciplines, so that students will learn to see knowledge as an interrelated, coherent whole."

One important aspect of the IBMYP program is its explicit focus on diversity. Integral to the mission statement of the IBO is "to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect" (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013). In fact, this mission statement proved controversial as schools in the United States began implementing the program. According to Bunnell (2009), the IBO was criticized

by community organizations and lawmakers in a number of U.S. states precisely because of this intercultural focus, which many conservatives labeled "un-American" due to its focus on "promoting universal values above American values" (p. 65). Partially as a response to such criticism, the IBO attempted to clarify its aims and philosophies by devising a "Learner Profile" consisting of 10 specific, interrelated concepts and skills that students should understand and be able to demonstrate. This codification had the effect of making the IBO's mission more transparent, although many in conservative quarters still viewed the IBMPY framework as "part of a long-term move toward global governance" (p. 65). As these debates clearly illustrate, discussions about educational enrichment programs like IBMYP are embedded within contentious cultural and political discourses.

Indeed, a crucial aspect of the discussion of IBMYP is how it intersects with popular conceptions of giftedness. While there is a substantial body of literature surrounding the concept of giftedness, much of it treats giftedness as a pre-existing condition within students that educators must find and nurture. Initially, the concept of the gifted child was related to IQ testing in the United States in the early twentieth century. Indeed, as early as the 1950's, it was already taken for granted in many educational circles that "for all practical school purposes, the term 'gifted child' has become synonymous with the expression 'child with a high IQ'" (Getzels & Jackson, 1958, p. 75). Consequently, identifying gifted children became a simple matter of IQ testing and identification. For both educational experts and the public alike, giftedness was assumed to be an innate condition, and creating educational programs for gifted

children was simply a matter of identifying these innate gifts through testing and then building programs that developed these gifts.

Of course, this assumption is highly problematic, in that it ignores multiple factors such as the cultural bias of IQ tests. Indeed, scholarship during the last three decades has problematized the concept of innate giftedness, focusing instead on the social construction of giftedness. Borland (1997), writing as a self-professed advocate of special educational programs for the gifted, nevertheless acknowledges the socially constructed nature of giftedness, asserting that "giftedness, especially in children and adolescents in the schools, is something that we in the field have constructed or invented through our writing and talking, not something that we have discovered" (p. 7). He goes on to point out that as the concept of giftedness has become reified, it has also become more exclusionary, ultimately doing a disservice to both those students who have been labeled as gifted and those who have not. Schulz (2005) was more harsh in her assessment of the function of giftedness in Australian schools, arguing that rather than identifying exceptional gifts in all children, the concept was used to further reinforce hegemonic power relations and normative views of what constituted intelligence. By conducting life histories of her participants, Schulz utilized discourse analysis to examine the subject positions her participants adopted vis-à-vis giftedness. For her key participants, the gifted label had become a form of cultural capital that could enable them to gain access to higher status and increased opportunities for their children and themselves. Schulz concluded that gifted programs in Australia did little to combat material inequalities in the society, and instead reinforced the status quo:

> Gifted education imparts individualising practices which support hegemonic power structures by discrediting difference and allowing for only a partial view of the world. That means those students who reign from cultures such as the "least advantaged" are forced to either assimilate with the hegemonic centre or remain marginalised. By focusing on the decontextualised and innate capacities of the individual, gifted education takes up a stance which deflects attention from disparate social contexts, thereby maintaining hegemonic power relations. (p. 126)

She found that not only did the concept of giftedness tend to exclude children from less privileged backgrounds, but it also framed gifted children as isolated elites who were at risk of social and psychological harm due to the pressure that greatness had placed upon them. Moreover, as her words above indicate, the way that giftedness is structured reinforces existing power structures within society, as it rewards those whose values align with the dominant culture, and offers those from minority cultures only the option to adopt similar values or remain in their current status.

In addition to reinforcing normalized conceptions of school performance, gifted programs are often used as tools to increase the prestige of schools that implement them. There has been increasing research into the concept of corporate branding as it relates to programs like IBMYP (Cambridge, 2002). Visser (2010) studied the implementation of IBMYP in the Dutch school system. Just as Schulz found that the gifted label became a form of cultural capital for parents and their students, conferring upon them a privileged status, Visser found that schools used the IBMYP label as part of their branding. In the

cultural marketplace, it became advantageous for schools to be associated with IBMYP, as it helped them attract a more elite student body and position themselves as more rigorous than their competitors. Building upon Schulz's (2005) findings about gifted education in general, Visser's research indicates that in addition to being a substantive program of study, IBMYP is also a badge of prestige for a school, marking it as more desirable and potentially attracting more desirable students. Furthermore, Conner (2008) points out that because of the way that schools often implement the IBYMP program, it tends to reinforce the elite status of students already marked as gifted, thus reproducing existing social hierarchies within the school.

The idea of giftedness as a component of social reproduction is certainly not new. In fact, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) refer to what they call the "ideology of the gift." As part of their discussion about how educational systems contribute to the reproduction of status quo social and economic hierarchies, they argue that the idea of innate giftedness is endemic to school culture. They further argue that this ideology masks social and educational inequalities in the society by making differences based on institutional hierarchies—particularly social class—seem to be innate differences in ability. Students are thus awarded not according to their actual accomplishments, but instead according to their academic and social behaviors that conform to White, middle class norms. In fact, this ideology has become so commonplace that teachers in places like the United States share a widespread belief "that children of professionals manifest effortless, natural talent" (Anderson-Levitt, 1996, p. 60). Such a belief becomes a

circular argument, as it reinforces prevailing ideologies about what it means to be gifted, and whose gifts are celebrated.

Figured Worlds and the Production of Giftedness.

Recently, researchers have adopted the theoretical framework of figured worlds to make sense of the complex social construction of giftedness. For example, Rubin (2007) found that in the urban high school she researched, students were positioned in such a way as to minimize their gifts and talents, while highlighting their perceived deficiencies. Importantly, Rubin points out that the categorizations used to frame students were integral to this positioning within the world of the classroom. Through the everyday discourses and practices of teachers and staff, students were positioned as deficient learners who lacked the basic skills and knowledge to succeed in high school or beyond. The teachers in this study tended to assign worksheets, standardized tests and other context-reduced forms of work, which led to a disjunction between meaningful learning and academic success. Students who were able to complete these assignments succeeded, but did not necessarily gain mastery over the concepts they were studying. Furthermore, teachers were seldom willing to deeply explore some of the complex questions students raised during classroom discussions, and often treated students disrespectfully if they did not comply with classroom rules. Thus, "to be a good student in this figured world called for compliance with rote, repetitive tasks that were distanced from meaning, amid humiliating interactions and unflattering categorizations" (p. 240). Rubin certainly found evidence to support the contention of Holland, et al. (1998) that "categories…originate outside their performers and are imposed upon people, through recurrent treatments and

within interaction, to the point that they become self-administered" (p. 62). Indeed, through previously assigned categories and repeated interactions with teachers, a number of Rubin's participants came to identify within themselves the very same negative attributes that were continually assigned to them in this specific school-based figured world.

Just as teachers have the potential to create figured worlds of deficiency for students, it is also possible for them to create figured worlds that construct specific images of what it means to be smart. Hatt (2012) found that the concept of "smartness" serves to produce certain individual and group identities, and tends to reinforce the status quo. Employing the concept of figured worlds, Hatt explored the way that smartness was enacted in a kindergarten classroom. She used the term smartness to describe an attribute, but also the practice of positioning students in the classroom based on their perceived characteristics. She found that in this classroom smartness was not necessarily connected to academic knowledge—instead, it was intricately tied to class, race and behavioral norms. Such behaviors as learning to tie one's shoes or following the teacher's directions in class became tied to smartness, and by the same token, failure to adopt these behaviors became tied to a lack of smartness. Drawing also from Foucault, Hatt noted that "smartness operates as a *tool of social control* since it was defined as maintaining a docile body and modeling authority figures" (p. 456, emphasis in original). Rather than reflecting any innate ability, smartness only served to reinforce particular behaviors.

The above section highlights the extent to which the concept of giftedness mirrors that of ESL. Giftedness is socially constructed as an innate quality that it is the educator's responsibility to find and nurture. Furthermore, it confers a privileged status upon those students whose gifts are identified, and it excludes those students whose gifts do not align with normative academic and social behaviors. Finally, like ESL, the process of identifying students as gifted further reifies the concept itself, thereby continuing the cycle.

Situating the Present Study

An important gap in the above research is the investigation into how English language learners experience the categories that are used to define them. Despite a wealth of scholarship into the school experiences of students that focuses on issues of racialization, linguistic diversity, and the use of literacy practices to fashion viable academic and social identities, there is little research into the function of institutional categories. Nevertheless, the fact remains that schools do not only exacerbate the problems that linguistic minority students face (though they surely do this!), but they also *produce* minority status (Valenzuela, 1999). As much of the above literature illustrates, it is often in schools where students first come to understand that they are Black, ESL, bilingual or gifted. In order to explore the extent to which the categorization of English language learners cements their position in a racial and linguistic hierarchy inside the school walls and without, it is essential to investigate the identities that these categories help produce, as well as the ways that students who are subsumed under the categories

make sense of their experiences and enact agency in order to speak back to those who have named them.

My own research is concerned with just these questions. By investigating the cultural production of ESL students at a U.S. middle school, I will engage with the imperative to investigate how those students who are subsumed under this category make sense of their experiences. Additionally, my work throws light upon the dilemma that ESL teachers face as they are occupy a unique position vis-à-vis English learners: they are representatives of a wider educational community that often categorizes linguistically diverse learners as a monolithic mass, and they are also the adults who work most intimately with these learners and often share the same frustrations and concerns about their place in the linguistic hierarchy of American schools.

There is precious little existing scholarly research about IBMYP and how teachers and students experience the implementation of this program in their schools (Conner, 2008; Visser, 2010). This is a particularly important area of focus as it relates to the educational success of linguistically diverse learners. Typically, such students are underrepresented in gifted programs, and this fact has only recently begun to receive more attention (Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008; Harris, 2009). Given that as part of its mission statement, the IBO works to "promote intercultural understanding and respect" (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013), educational researchers must begin to examine how IBO programs are implemented in schools with high populations of linguistically diverse learners. IBMYP represents a potential avenue for students

categorized as ESL to refashion themselves as gifted, but as yet there is little evidence about whether this potential can be realized.

Such a contextualized focus also heeds the call of educational anthropologists who advocate for more rigorous investigations of school cultures, student identities, and the nature of education itself. Mica Pollock (2008), for example, calls for analysis that can "show how specific people forge specific reactions to specific schools in real time" (p. 372). In conversation with Pollock, Hervé Varenne (2008) outlines a practice that attends to "a cultured world constructed in a contingent history that has made something totally concrete" (p. 356). The value in this kind of work is that it allows for a focus not only on how students classified as ESL experience this category in the present moment, but how they are caught up in historical processes of meaning making that offer both possibilities for transformation and the reproduction of discourses on linguistic identity.

The paradox of ESL education is that simultaneously has the potential to reposition and reinforce dominant representations of linguistic and ethnic identity. This paradox is neither inherent nor inevitable; on the contrary, it results as educational institutions attempt to address the complex academic and social needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student population. During this process shifting, dynamic and multifaceted ethnic and linguistic identities are often papered over in an attempt to create coherent representations of difference. It is crucial to scrutinize the processes that lead to institutional designations of language ability, and to question whether these processes displace or reproduce dominant discourses about the uses of English and the role of ethnolinguistic diversity in U.S. society. A study such as the present one offers the

potential to engage in such scrutiny, and to investigate ways that linguistically diverse students might disentangle themselves from the "webs of significance" (Geertz, 1973) that are spun by the discourses underlying language learners in American schools.

Research Questions.

1) How are the daily classroom practices of students and teachers constitutive in producing locally specific conceptions of the typical "ESL" student?

2) What sense do these students and teachers themselves make of these conceptions of what it means to be an "ESL student" at a particular school site?

3) What metaphors about English learners do these conceptions invoke?

Even in this world more things exist without our knowledge than with it and the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there, like a string in a maze, so that you shall not lose your way.

—*Cormac McCarthy,* Blood Meridian

Chapter Three: Fumbling Toward Ethnography

As far back as the beginning of the twentieth century, when formal schooling became more common in the industrialized nations, social scientists were studying its relationship with the wider society. In exploring the importance of both informal and formal education, Emile Durkheim (2000) remarked that "society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that collective life demands" (p. 61). Indeed, it is this push toward homogeneity that creates the greatest tension for schools in a pluralistic society. Jules Henry (2000) noted that contrary to the professed aims of schooling in the liberal tradition, "the function of education has never been to free the mind and spirit of man, but to bind them; and to the end that the mind and spirit of his children should never escape, *Homo Sapiens* has employed praise, ridicule, admonition, accusation, mutilation, and even torture to chain them to the cultural pattern" (p. 55). As Henry's words indicate, the line between inculcation and indoctrination is frequently blurred, and the relationship between school and culture is complex.

In order to explore this complexity, it is essential to examine the ways that everyday classroom events are connected to broader structural issues. As the literature in the previous chapter illustrates, the process of categorization and labeling of linguistically diverse students is intertwined with complex metaphors surrounding immigrant identity

and the role of language in society. Moreover, the ESL classroom is a site where broader discourses intersect with locally situated constructions of language and identity. Miller (2004) notes that, "schools comprise particular sites of representation where linguistic minority students often struggle to be authorized as members of the mainstream, and to be heard as legitimate speakers of English" (p. 294-295). In conducting the present study, I treated Butler Middle School as a specific "site of representation" in order to explore the way that the category ESL was produced in a local context.

Because ethnography allows detailed attention to both locally specific and broader cultural implications, it was both a theoretical and methodological fit for my research focus: the ways that an apparently coherent and uniform ESL identity is both handed down from above and constructed from below. In particular, I found the framework of cultural production essential to helping me make sense of an ethnographic project that dealt specifically with the school environment. According to Levinson and Holland (1996), "schools provide each generation with social and symbolic sites where new relations, new representations, and new knowledges can be formed, sometimes against, sometimes tangential to, sometimes coincident with, the interests of those holding power" (p. 22). This outlook considers the complex interplay between individuals and schools, emphasizing twin roles that structural forces and individual agency play in the formation of educated people.

In charting a path for an ethnographic project that can cut to the heart of the way that adolescents experience their "ESL-ness," postfoundational approaches to ethnography also build on the work discussed in the previous chapter. Matti Bunzl

(2004), for example, envisions an "ethnographic genealogy" in which "the present would never appear as a transparent entity, but as the very site of a critical investigation into the ongoing processes of historical reproduction" (p. 441). Valentine (2007) favors a similar perspective, advocating a "genealogical approach, one which examines the meanings, values, and investments of naming and labeling" (p. 30). Adopting such a perspective in the study of language education would overcome the tendency to uncritically view ESL as a marker of difference and move toward an investigation of how it produces difference. It would also draw attention to the historical context of "ESL-ness," and help account for the ways that the present and past are intertwined and how even in the contemporary moment, language learners are historical actors. The value in this kind of work is that it allows for a focus not only on how students classified as ESL experience this category in the present moment, but how they are caught up in historical processes of meaning making that offer both possibilities for transformation and the reproduction of discourses on linguistic identity.

In order to explore these issues, I focused ethnographically on how students and teachers in a particular classroom constructed ESL identity. How did they describe their experiences in the ESL classroom? What role did the students envision English playing in their lives? How did the teachers envision their roles in shaping the students' academic and social identities? In what ways did their identities intersect with those that educational institutions had previously constructed for them? These are the kinds of questions that lead toward a meaningful description of "ESL-ness" as it relates to a particular group of students in a specific time and place. Furthermore, a focus on cultural

production potentially explodes the coherence of ESL as a cultural category, as it "disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent within itself" (Foucault, 1994, p. 356). I framed my analysis not to delineate differences that are already presumed to exist, but to map how differences may have come to exist through the interplay between competing discourses on ethno-linguistic identity.

The School Site

Butler is located in a large metropolitan area in the upper Midwest. As part of an urban school district, the student population at Butler is demographically diverse. Approximately half of the 455 students enrolled at Butler are African-American, a further one third of the school population is Hispanic, and 33% are defined as English language learners (ELL).[3] One unique feature of Butler is that the figures above represent a sea change in the school population as compared to the previous year (see Table 1 for details). This is related to a somewhat contentious process of combining schools as part of a district reorganization plan. The current Butler population therefore consists of students who had previously attended Butler, and students who had attended two other area middle schools. One of these schools was a Spanish Immersion school, which accounts for a dramatically increased number of Hispanic students at Butler this year. According to a number of informants that I consulted, there was significant political backlash related to the combining of these school populations, particularly the relocation

[3] I chose to employ the common acronym ESL in my study, as it is far more commonly used in the literature. However, the school district that Butler is a part of uses the categorization ELL, an institutional designation often used in place of ESL. In the remainder of the text, I will use the term ELL only when referring to data that specifically relate to the district designation.

of students in grades six through eight who had previously attended the Spanish Immersion school, which was located in a more affluent section of the city.

Table 1.

Butler's Changing Demographics

Key Demographic Groups at Butler[4]	2009-2010	2010-2011	District 2010-2011
African-American	53	41	39
Asian-American	14	9	9
Hispanic	8	33	17
Caucasian	22	15	30
ELL	18	30	23

I chose Butler for several reasons. First, it is demographically distinct from the district as a whole in several significant ways. According to district data, African-American students make up 39 percent of the district population, Hispanic Americans 17 percent, Asians nine percent and Caucasians 30 percent. Additionally, according to district figures, the percentage of students that are classified as ELL is 23 percent. As Table 1 above illustrates, the demographics at Butler differ significantly from that of the district as a whole in two distinct areas: students identified as Hispanic and ELL. For my purposes, this is significant because it underscores the complexities in student experience

[4] Measured in percentages, as defined by the school AYP summary. It is not clear whether ELL students fit into more than one of these categories, as defined by the district.

that are masked by the institutional label ELL. For example, despite the fact that the population of students at Butler shifted significantly, the program itself changed little, and students who had previously been enrolled in other distinct ELL programs were now placed together in a single cohort. Finally, I knew that my initial teacher contact, Eleni, was interested in participation, and felt that my research might shed light on some of her questions and concerns about the construction of the ELL student identity at Butler. Ultimately, the school proved to be an ideal site for my research.

Teacher Participants

There were two teacher participants in the study. Eleni (or Ms. E), was a 2nd year ELL teacher at Butler Middle School. Her father is a Lebanese immigrant, and she often expressed pride in this heritage. In fact, during the course of this study she was pursuing a temporary teaching position for the fall in her father's hometown. She had recently completed her initial licensure program at a local university, where she was a member of a practicum class that I team-taught. Although I did not supervise her during her student teaching experience, we built a relationship of trust over the course of her time in the program. Indeed, it was partially due to this previous relationship that Eleni agreed to participate in my study. During the course of my time at Butler, Eleni taught sections of beginning and intermediate ELL for sixth, seventh and eighth graders. She was also an advisor for the Nordic ski club at Butler. This role reflected her intense interest in physical fitness and sports as well as her desire to foster students' interest in these areas.

In addition to her teaching duties, she also acted as lead teacher for the department, a responsibility that entailed attending district-wide ELL department

meetings and disseminating information to her department at Butler (a department which consisted solely of Eleni and the other teacher participant in this study). She felt some tension about this role, and she was quite outspoken, often resisting district initiatives that she felt might marginalize her students. For example, when I arrived one morning, she had just come from a district-wide meeting and was brimming with frustration about the new program framework, which included the designation *EL* (English Learner), designed to replace the previous designation *ELL* (English language learner). Eleni thought that this would inevitably cause confusion among mainstream teachers, who already had an imperfect understanding of her students' linguistic backgrounds.

Anna (or Ms. A) was in her 1st year at Butler. She grew up in the area and attended a high school in the same district as Butler. She graduated from the same cohort as Eleni, so I also had a previous professional relationship with Anna. Although Anna was initially more reluctant to participate in the study, she quickly became comfortable with my presence in the classroom, and she very frankly discussed with me her frustrations and challenges. I remember one occasion when Anna was scheduled to have her teaching observed by a team from Cambridge University as part of a school improvement initiative. Frustrated about their lack of constructive feedback, she remarked, "They visit and tell us what we're doing wrong."

During the course of my study, Anna was completing her Master's degree in education. Although she seemed proud of this accomplishment, she also expressed some ambivalence about continuing to teach in a public, K-12 school environment. Anna seemed to be very aware of an essential ESL paradox: students need the service but may

feel singled out or stigmatized by being placed in ESL classes. She expressed interest in the field of adult ESL education, a setting where she felt that students might experience this tension to a lesser degree.

One unique feature of this classroom was that Eleni and Anna shared it. They team taught three periods out of seven, and they shared space and resources. Given this situation, both teachers exhibited a sense of frankness, perhaps owing to their lack of privacy within the classroom space. Additionally, as the classes I observed were both team taught, I was afforded the opportunity of observing how the students interacted with both teachers in the same space. One disadvantage of this situation is that I perceived, in both individual and group interviews, a reluctance on the part of the teachers to overtly disagree with or critique each other.

There were five primary student participants in the study.[5] Three of the students (Carlos, Ed, and Noble) were Latinos. These three were members of the first period class that Anna and Eleni team-taught. The others (Sam and Charlie) were Hmong-American, and were members of the third hour class that Anna and Eleni team-taught. Noble, Sam and Charlie were 8th graders; Ed and Carlos were 7th graders. Of my participants, only Carlos and Charlie had previously attended Butler.

The Boys in Room 422

Samuel was born in Wisconsin, and was a self-professed "Cheesehead" and "Hmong." Despite having lived in the U.S. for his entire life, Sam grew up speaking

[5] Seven students initially agreed to participate in the study. However, two of the students—Awad and Muna—had physical disabilities that caused them to miss class for extended periods. Moreover, they were both quiet students, and did not often volunteer in class or participate actively in discussions. I interviewed each of these students once and observed them in the classroom for the entire semester. While collecting and analyzing my data, it became apparent that I did not have a sizeable amount of information about their perspectives on life in room 422. Therefore, I chose not to include Awad and Muna in my final analysis.

primarily Hmong, which was one reason he was enrolled in the ESL program at Butler. Sam is part of a large family, and one of his primary responsibilities at home was to look after ("babysit" in his words) his own siblings as well as his nephew, who was an infant. Indeed, he often appeared sleepy in class, and remarked on many occasions that he had been up late babysitting. He considered Hmong to be his first language, because it was in this language in which "my mom and dad taught me to say, 'Hello,' when I was one."

During conversations and interviews, Sam would invariably respond to my queries with some of his own, and took evident pleasure from my interest in his perspectives. Of all my participants, Sam was the most likely to question me as closely as I questioned him. In one of our first interviews, he quickly turned the conversation toward the topic of bullying, asking me if I would transfer to a different school if I were being bullied and the teachers offered no assistance. He then mentioned that he had been harassed by other students in the past and had sometimes fought back. This kind of candid admission was typical for Sam, as was his desire to use me as a sounding board for his own concerns. He quickly became a primary informant.

Noble was also an 8th grader. He initially seemed quite gregarious—before I even completed the informed assent process with Noble, he began relating his various school experiences. He mentioned that he had attended a number of different schools in the area since elementary school. This is perhaps related to the fact that he had moved residence frequently during his time in the city. His sister worked to support the family, and also attended Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes in English four nights a week. He participated in the after-school athletics program, playing soccer four afternoons each

week. Because of his open demeanor and enthusiasm for sharing his opinions, Noble became another of my primary informants. One of my defining memories of Noble is the day I accompanied him to his locker before one of our lunchtime interviews. As he opened it, he beamed with pride and invited me to inspect the contents—numerous bags of chips, candy, and other goodies filled every shelf. As he offered me a gigantic, multi-colored lollipop, I could barely suppress my laughter at his locker haberdashery.

My initial impression of Carlos was that he seemed quiet and reserved, but he also demonstrated a mischievous sense of humor, playing tricks on other students as well as the teachers. He was not free with information—in fact, getting Carlos to discuss his perspectives was like pulling teeth. He frequently missed appointments for interviews and discussions, and convincing Carlos to attend the weekly afterschool homework help sessions I facilitated became a game of cat-and-mouse. I would ask Carlos if he wanted to stay, and he would invariably agree. But as soon as school ended, I would see him bolting for the bus. It became apparent that although he was comfortable with my classroom observations and interactions, Carlos was not willing to be interviewed at length. Nevertheless, he proved quite insightful on the few occasions that he shared his opinions during our conversations.

Ed moved to the United States from Ecuador three years ago. Like Carlos, he seemed shy, but got along well with other students and was a bit of a joker in his quiet way. In fact, he and Carlos often worked together to cause mischief. One of their favorite ploys was pretending to engage in a prohibited activity. For example, one day immediately after Eleni had reminded the students to complete their work individually, I

heard Carlos say to Ed in an exaggerated whisper, "OK, I'll copy you." Ed pretended to pass his paper to Carlos, as both looked to see if they had provoked a reaction. Realizing that they had not caught Eleni's attention, they repeated this exchange until she chided them for their behavior, which was exactly the reaction they desired.

Ed was often involved in such incidents, yet he always managed to complete his work and remain in good academic standing. Indeed, he seemed to walk a fine line between academic success and popularity with the other students in room 422. Ed managed to be a favorite of both his teachers and his peers—although Anna and Eleni often praised him publicly, he never seemed to experience any stigma from his classmates. He seemed thoughtful, and always attempted to discuss issues with me in a serious way. In fact, during group interviews, Ed often redirected the other students (particularly Noble) toward the current topic of discussion.

Charlie joined the study later than the others. An eighth grader, he was Hmong-American and a friend of Sam. As the study progressed, he expressed interest in participation, and I obtained his consent. That year, he participated on the Nordic ski team, which Eleni helped to coach. Charlie was quite serious and matter-of-fact, taking my questions very seriously and considering them carefully. His thoughtful responses often set the tone for group interviews (I distinctly remember that when I transcribed interviews, a pause commonly preceded one of Charlie's responses as he considered the question). On the other hand, he seemed the least mature in many ways, perhaps because of his credulous demeanor. The other boys sometimes teased him about some of his qualities that they considered childish, such as his professed belief in ghosts or his

contention that boys should not date until after high school. Charlie tended to take this teasing in stride, as when Noble teased him about not having a girlfriend. Charlie simply shrugged and replied, "I know, but I don't care. But I care about my education."

Table 2:

Student Participants

Student Name	Age	Years at Butler	Years in the U.S.	Home Language
Samuel	13	<1	13	Hmong
Charlie	13	2	13	Hmong
Ed	12	<1	3	Spanish
Carlos	12	2	6	Spanish
Noble	14	<1	7	Spanish

Time Frame, Data Collection and Data Sources

After receiving IRB approval from the University and the school district in late fall 2010, I conducted the study during the course of a single school semester, from mid-January to mid-June 2011. The data collected during the project primarily took the following forms: 1) participant observation/field notes; and 2) unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations occurred two to three times per week, and during these observations I often had extended conversations with both the teachers and students. Additionally, I periodically scheduled semi-structured interviews with the teachers and students in room 422 in order to encourage the participants and the

researcher to reflect upon significant events, beliefs and assumptions. I took audio recordings of these semi-structured interviews to aid memory. These interviews focused on pivotal emerging themes—instances of conflict, confusion, or debate provided important opportunities to further discuss issues related to my research questions. Below, I will describe my research process in more detail.

Table 3

The Data Collection Process

Frequency of Classroom Observation	**Hours of Classroom Observation**	**Number of Unstructured Interviews**	**Number of Structured Interviews**	**Hours of Structured Interviews**
Two days per week at each site, over the course of a single academic year.	Three hours (three class sessions) per day, plus one hour after school every Thursday, for a total of seven hours per week. Over a school semester, this equaled 126 hours.	Daily, during the course of classroom observation.	A total of six (three with students, three with teachers). Structured interviews took place in a group setting.	Approximately 30 minutes per interview, for a total of three hours (90 minutes for students, 90 minutes for teachers).

Observations and Field Notes.

An integral part of ethnographic research is the process of conducting observation and compiling field notes. This facilitates what Geertz (1973) characterizes as a "thick description" of the culture in question. During the course of the study, I visited and observed the classroom twice per week. Each observation session took place during the morning classes and lasted approximately three hours. Additionally, I volunteered to stay after school once per week for an hour to tutor students and help with homework. As my participants typically stayed for this session, it became another opportunity for

observation and discussion. I straddled the line between participant and observer—although at times I assumed an invisible presence in the back of the classroom taking notes, I more frequently mingled with the students—assisting them with class work, asking questions, and discussing topics of mutual interest. The benefits of extended classroom observation and participation were twofold. First, it allowed me to experience daily routines and events alongside the students and teachers, giving me closer insight into their perspectives. Secondly, it enabled me to establish a foundation of trust on which to build more detailed conversations and interviews.

I compiled field notes in notebooks as I observed each class session. This proved no simple matter, as there is no blueprint for recording details of field observations. After experimenting with various techniques for taking notes, I devised a system that included three components. During classroom observations, I kept a two-column journal, in which I recorded observations and comments. This separation between observation and comments created an artificial divide between the two—undoubtedly, my observations also constituted interpretations. Nevertheless, I found that this method better enabled me to remain cognizant of my role as both an observer and interpreter of events. My comments often took the form of questions for reflection or immediate reactions to classroom events. Below is an example of a typical field notes entry:

1.27.11 1st Hour	
Observations	Comments
Noble in back row today, next to a girl	Who moved him? A.? Himself?
Carlos, Ed also in different spots walls are covered with posters, etc.…	New semester? New seats…
"Readiness", "Responsibility", "Respect" – "looks like, sounds like, feels like"	looks like teacher writing, maybe teachers compiled students' "ideas."
Carlos needs a new notebook when he is offered (A. offers it). Anna explains reading activity: visualization Paper: When I read… It reminds me of…on overhead/doc. cam	maybe this is a new activity for them? [they make use of technology in almost every lesson—smart board, document cam. 2.9.11]
class seems very quiet during explanation of reading activity	well-behaved? shy? what are the hidden dynamics at work here? Is this behavior the norm?
Anna asks, "Kapiche?" for understanding	I've seen her do this multiple times
sign on door @ front of class: "Respect everyone. Speak the common language: English!" [see notebook for drawing]	I wonder how students feel about this? What signs do they notice in general? [Yesterday, A. mentioned that the students were not happy about that directive, and used the word 'racism' to describe this rule].

Figure 1. A Typical Field Notes Entry

Finally, after I concluded my observations each day, I compiled a journal of reflections and interpretations of the day's events. I usually scribbled these notes during my bus ride home from Butler or left the audio recorder on as I engaged in self-talk on the drive home. Here is an example of a typical reflection log:

3/3/11
Reflections from conversations w/Anna…We discussed some students being painfully shy, and how they have limited formal schooling. Or at least probably, she doesn't know for sure because they came from Mexico and the records are not good. She is taking a class on LFS from the local U. because of those students, who challenge her and make her want to understand their needs better. We also talked about C. and whether he might have special needs. She calls him an "odd duck." I agree with her. We talk about how he seems to be smart enough, but she often has to be tough on him to get him to do his work. More of the stick than the carrot is my interpretation. She also mentions his records on OCR, and how his test scores are low, but not that low. He has actually deproved[6] since last year on one score though. This makes me think about learning more about this OCR, and the way that records follow the kids and how there is always information on the computers that teachers can access in order to find out about who the students are. This also reminds me of a recurring theme in our talks: Electronic data.

Figure 2. A Typical Reflection Log

Individual Interviews.

During the course of the study I engaged in numerous conversations with Anna, Eleni, and the boys in room 422. These took place before the start of the school day, during free moments in class, during passing periods, and during lunchtime. As Patton (1980) notes, one primary advantage of the conversational interview is that it "increases the salience and relevance of questions" for both researcher and participant (p. 206). I

[6] I copied this example verbatim. In my notes, I used the word "deproved" as a play on the word "improve," to indicate negative progress.

never audio recorded these conversations—instead, I listened carefully, took notes, and wrote down reflections immediately following. As a result, information gleaned from these conversations is impressionistic in nature. The following excerpt is indicative of a typical conversational interview, in this case with Samuel:

Samuel Interview:
Born in WI, says he is a "cheesehead." Claims not to have a favorite class, that they are all the same. Hardest class is Humanities, science. Is doing better in humanities now. He connects whether a class is good or not to whether he has finished his work. Asks me a questions about bullying/being bullied. Whether I would move to a different school if I was being bullied & no teachers were there to help me. He says that he has been bullied before, and he has fought back. I ask him about hs, whether he is still deciding & he says yes, between Adams & North high. Has friends @ both schools, so it is choosing between friends. Asks me what I would wish for from a genie. He wishes for things all for family. "Family comes first, because they raised you." Parents are not coming to conferences b/c they are going out of town this weekend to visit grandma. Says he finishes work early "sometimes." He finishes early if he likes the work, slower if he doesn't like it.

Figure 3. A Typical Conversational Interview

Group Interviews.

In addition to informal conversational interviews, I conducted group interviews as part of my data collection process. These interviews often took place during lunchtime, and were loosely structured. In planning these discussions, I adopted Patton's (1980) "interview guide approach" for these interviews—while I mapped out general topics and themes in advance, I chose the order and specific wording of questions during the interviews. I facilitated these interviews according to the planned discussion group (PDG) format. According to O'Reilly (2005), a PDG format provides several advantages within the context of ethnography: it allows for spontaneity, it brings together

participants *in situ*, and it is useful for exploring issues of relevance to the participants. Finally, a PDG accounts for the sociocultural nature of knowledge production, because "it is faithful to how ideas are formed and shared in interaction" (p. 136). I conducted six of these PDG interviews during the study—three with the teachers, and three with the students. As stated above, although I entered each interview with a specific list of topics and themes, each conversation was wide-ranging, and I maintained the flexibility to interject my own questions while generally allowing the discussion to proceed in the direction of most interest to the participants. I audio recorded each interview, and I transcribed these data myself.

Data Analysis

While collecting data, I carefully documented the classroom and school environment, noting as much sensory detail as possible in order to create a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). The word description is somewhat misleading, however, because a researcher in the field does not simply document cultures as if they were objective facts. Culture is not "out there" to be discovered and recorded. In fact, a great deal of interpretation is involved in every aspect of fieldwork, from making sense of interpersonal relations (Rabinow, 1977) to deciding which everyday occurrences to include in field notes (Van Maanen, 1988; Wolf, 1992). In his explanation of ethnographic research, Rabinow (1977) notes:

> Anthropological analysis must incorporate two facts: first, that we ourselves are historically situated through the questions we ask and the manner in which we seek to understand and experience the world; and second, that what we receive

> from our informants are interpretations, equally mediated by history and culture. Consequently, the data we collect is doubly mediated, first by our own presence and then by the second-order self-reflection we demand from our informants. (p. 119)

Therefore, I strove at all times to remain cognizant of the fact that culture is not transparent. It is mediated by our own experiences and worldviews, which will inevitably influence ethnographic writings. At its core, ethnographic fieldwork involves "sorting out structures of signification" (Geertz, 1973, p. 9) that may be no more transparent to the cultural insider than they are to the researcher.

In order to better sort out these structures, I worked to ensure that themes I viewed as significant were evident in multiple data sources. This process began when I was transcribing field notes—I identified recurring themes in the notes, which led me to more closely attend to these themes during future observations. During the course of the semester, I also raised these themes during PDG interviews. As my interpretations shifted, so too did the focus of interviews. I also noted instances when Anna, Eleni or the boys shifted the conversations toward topics of their own interests, and I always remained open to the possibility that these interests should supersede my own agenda. In fact, many of our conversations led me toward significant themes that I had not previously considered. For example, during one of my lunchtime conversations with the boys, I brought up the subject of the many posters in Room 422 that delineated various concepts related to the IBMYP program. I had been very interested in these posters, but during our conversation I soon realized that the boys rarely noticed them. Instead, they turned our

discussion toward the topic of appropriate classroom behavior, drawing a parallel between following classroom procedures and being a proper IB student. As Sam noted, "IB is like, like, sometimes you have to respect other people, so we don't bully them, something like that." In this instance, as in many others, my interactions with participants led me to examine a particular theme more closely than I had previously done.

After transcribing interviews, I conducted a thorough reading of each one, employing an open coding process to generate initial themes. I examined interviews with both students and teachers to locate instances in which themes overlapped. Likewise, I also coded data from field notes according to themes that I identified during the course of the study. I also used axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to compare codes and ensure that themes were present in multiple data sources. This process was by no means tidy, and in most cases I marked data with multiple codes and then organized them according to the theme that seemed most prominent (see Table 4 for an example of data coding details). The advantage of dissecting my field notes according to codes was that it allowed me to juxtapose data from numerous observations in order to identify patterns that were not previously apparent. For example, I had such an abundance of notes related to Sam that I simply created the code "Sam Participation" (SP) and initially organized any notes mentioning him according to this theme. This allowed me to examine patterns in his interactions with his teachers and classmates, upon which I based a number of interpretations.

Table 4

Initial Coding/Themes

Themes	Sources
Gifted & Talented	
• IB/MYP	• T#, S#, O
• Learner traits	• T#, O
Language Use	
• Common language	• T#, S#, O
• Code-switching	• T#, S#, O
Class Participation	
• Teacher participation	• T#, S#, O
• Student participation	• T#, S#, O
• Destiny sticks	• S#, O
• Noble participation	• S#, O
• Sam participation	• T#, S#, O
• Planner stamps	• T#, S#, O
Discipline/Control	
• Teacher praise	• S#, O
• Planner stamps	• S#, O
• 3R (readiness, responsibility, respect)	• O, T#
	• O

Key:
T#: Teacher Interview
S#: Student Interview
O: Observation

Throughout my research process, I wanted to remain cognizant of the extent to which analyzing data is a process of interpretation rather than discovery. Although researchers often use terms like "code" and "theme" matter-of-factly, they are loaded with connotations. I might claim that I coded themes as they emerged from my data, but it would be more accurate to say that I wrote them into existence through my process of analysis. I find that the following description of the coding process captures the sense of tension that I often felt while devising themes and coding:

> We *construct* our codes because we are actively naming data—even when we believe our codes form a perfect fit with actions and events in the studied world. We may think our codes capture the empirical reality. Yet it is *our* view: we choose the words that constitute our codes. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47)

Themes were not extant in the data; instead, I created codes and themes that I judged to correspond with my interpretations of the reality in room 422. Moreover, the manner in which I collected data, combined with the types of data I chose to collect, invariably influenced my analysis and the conclusions I drew. For example, had I chosen to video record classroom observations, rather than take field notes, I would have been better able to attend to facial expressions or gestures. However, by the same token, privileging these visual cues could occur at the expense of attending carefully to aural data. Each method has particular advantages and limitations, but themes are not present in either case until the researcher begins to make sense of the data.

Writing as Interpretation in Ethnographic Research.

As crucial as the fieldwork experience is, *writing* itself is where the real business of creating ethnography takes place. As Geertz (1973) asserts, ethnographies are "fictions, in the sense that they are 'something made', 'something fashioned'" (p. 15). Likewise, Clifford (1986) argues that "ethnographic texts cannot avoid expressive tropes, figures, and allegories that select and impose meaning as they translate it" (p. 7). These comments from Geertz and Clifford are provocative, drawing attention to the constructed nature of culture, and how it is through writing that these ethnographic fictions are created, as the immediacy of experience is transformed into the permanence of textual

documentation. However, much has also been written about the importance of recognizing the line between fashioning ethnographic data into meaningful prose and simply crafting stories without regard for veracity or faithfulness to participants' reading of the word/world (e.g., Atkinson, 1992; Reyna, 2010). With this in mind, I turn to an explication of how I approached the challenge of writing ethnography.

In order to present my findings in narrative form, I decided to represent field notes using as few spatial markings as possible. For example, I made a conscious effort to avoid indentation and single-spacing when presenting data. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) refer to this as an *integrative strategy*, in which ethnographic data and interpretation "are merged into a single, flowing text written in a single voice. The writer does not mark differences between fieldnotes recorded in the past and present interpretations through textual devices but, rather, indicates this shift through…transitional phrases" (p. 210). The authors mention that this strategy emphasizes themes over chronology and encourages concision in the final written product—characteristics that I found extremely useful for my project.

I have also preserved inconsistencies in grammar as part of the individual participants' styles of speaking. This is an arbitrary decision, but a significant one. As Atkinson (1992) reminds me:

> In practice the reporting of informants' talk is as dependent on textual convention as any other element of the text. Any and every method for rendering spoken language is found to be conventional. There is no such thing as a "natural" mechanism for the representation of speech. Orthography, punctuation, type

> setting—these are all textual methods through which speech is reconstructed and rendered accessible to the knowledgeable reader. In fact, ethnographers have used a very wide range of styles to represent their data. Each has its effects on the reader. Each may be used—consciously or unconsciously—to convey different interpretative connotations. (p. 23).

Atkinson's examples illustrate the complexity involved in representing speech with the written word. Each stylistic choice influences the interpretations of both the writer and the reader. I chose not to "clean up" participants' speech in order to render it more accessible as well as more reflective of how they actually spoke in conversations with me. This decision was in keeping with my ultimate goal for the final research product: keeping my analysis grounded in the data I collected, while making stylistic and aesthetic choices that I felt would enable readers to experience the written account not only as sound scholarship, but as a compelling *story*.

A Note on The Researcher: Identity and Positioning

It is with some ambivalence that I approach the discussion of my own position as a researcher—after all, a primary focus of this study is the way that categories obfuscate as much as they reveal. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the categories we create carry with them real implications for social relations. For example, "White American male," a category to which I belong, takes on a particular significance in the context of educational research. Within the institutional structures of schooling, White males are powerful players, comprising a significant portion of the teachers, administrators, principals, and school board members. Likewise, I belong to the category "former ESL

teacher," and in many cases during my teaching career, mine has been the only White face in the room. This is perhaps part and parcel of English language education in the United States, but it is also symbolic. After all, English has been a language of colonialism, and the image of a White male teacher working in a classroom filled with students of color certainly has colonialist overtones. So while my sense of identity encompasses much more than can be explained by the above categories, my membership in them has both symbolic and practical significance. As Rampton (1992) reminds me, "researchers cannot help being socially located persons. We inevitably bring our biographies and our subjectivities to every stage of the research process and this influences the questions we ask and the ways in which we try to find answers" (p. 5). It is therefore my responsibility to "come clean" (Byrd Clark, 2009) about my positions and epistemologies as they relate to this research project.

I have lived in a metropolitan area near Butler Middle School for nearly twenty years. I entered this project from the dual perspectives of a teacher and a researcher, having taught ESL for eight years in another local district before returning to graduate school. During that time, I continually witnessed the tensions my students felt about their status as ESL students. Although the story of Xiong that I shared in the introduction chapter was certainly the most salient example of this tension, it was by no means an isolated occurrence. In fact, one of my primary reasons for returning to graduate school was my desire to further explore this tension related to the identification and labeling of linguistically diverse students as ESL. In this respect, interactions with my own students over the years have certainly shaped my research interests.

Likewise, as an ESL teacher, I shared the sense of alienation and marginality that my students shared with me. In my experience, ESL is often viewed as a remedial program, and as a teacher I sometimes worked in less-than-ideal conditions—pullout classes in hallways, moving on a cart from room to room, fighting for legitimacy with other departments. Because of these experiences, I embarked on my study with empathy toward ESL teachers, who in my view are caught in a double-bind—dominant vis-à-vis their students, and often marginalized vis-à-vis their mainstream counterparts. Thus, part of my mindset when entering room 422 was not simply to document the ways that ESL students were constructed, but how teachers were constructed as well. I identified with Anna and Eleni because of my own background as an ESL teacher; moreover, I often saw my own experiences reflected back at me while observing their teaching.

Therefore, I had a sense of dual insider/outsider status as I embarked on my research project. I wanted the students to trust me, and not view me as another teacher; I also wanted Eleni and Anna to confide in me, and not feel that I was undermining their classroom authority by developing too much solidarity with the students. Furthermore, on my initial visit Sam helped me to understand that my participants would be integral to defining my status in room 422. Upon meeting me for the first time, he exclaimed in front of the entire class, "I thought you'd be younger!" As I later discovered, Eleni and Anna had introduced me as a student researcher—accurate enough, notwithstanding the fact that Sam and I had different conceptions about what this identity entailed.

This was the first time, but not the last, that I experienced what some ethnographers have described as the dialectical nature of the researcher/participant

relationship (Ergun & Erdemir, 2010; Narayan, 1993; Tsuda, 1998). It has become common to acknowledge that to dichotomize insider/outsider status "does not fully explain the complexity and ambivalence of the researcher's transformative experiences in the field" (Ergun & Erdemir, 2010, p. 17). Instead it is more fruitful to conceptualize the researcher's role as a complex co-construction between she and her participants. I certainly experienced this at Butler, as I often felt a sense of tension as I navigated between the roles that I imagined for myself and those that my participants expected me to play.

"Let's confuse everybody just a little bit more. I don't think they're confused enough, so let's make it more difficult for content teachers to know who we're talking about."
-Eleni, referring to the new district designation "EL" for English Learners

Chapter Four: If You're ESL, Can You Be Anything Else?

The cultural production of the category ESL at Butler Middle School is the focus of my analysis in this chapter. Both the students and the teachers in room 422 employed specific strategies to negotiate their identities in this classroom. Based upon my analysis of these strategies, I have divided my findings into three broad themes. First, the issue of sanctioned language use became a key factor in the cultural production of ESL in this classroom. Specifically, the use of English as a common language versus the use of home language to negotiate social and academic interactions was a key feature of the culture in room 422. Secondly, through various daily routines and management strategies, the teachers sought to maintain order in their classroom and mold the students into "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977). These practices invariably connected to both language use and the IBMYP framework, which leads to a third theme: Anna and Eleni's attempts to create a figured classroom world in which students exhibited a set of IBMYP learner traits, or "gifted" behaviors, as one facet of an ESL identity. To close the chapter, I present the stories of Sam and Noble as illustrative of how the institutional classification ESL, as it was produced locally, served to deemphasize the unique abilities and experiences of two strikingly different individuals.

"Speak the Common Language": Sanctioned Language Use

One morning near the beginning of my time in room 422, as the students were engaged in independent work, Noble asked Eleni, "What day is today?"

"Not the 23rd," replied Eleni, looking at the white board and realizing that the date written there was leftover from the previous day. Noble, perhaps sensing that Eleni did not understand that he was actually referring to the day of the week, clarified, "No, Jueves [Thursday]."

Eleni retorted, "Noble, I'm not even going to say it, and you know what I'm going to say."

"Yup."

"As an English class, we speak the common language."

Noble had been using Spanish to brainstorm about the correct day of the week to record on his class worksheet. Eleni, however, viewed this as a breach of a rule that students often encountered in room 422: "Respect everyone. Speak the common language: English!" This phrase was posted on the classroom wall near the area where Anna and Eleni typically presented announcements at the beginning of each class period. They encouraged students to use English as much as possible, especially what they referred to as "academic English." Anna and Eleni often used this phrase or a variation of it in their interactions with students, particularly during class discussions or small group work. By this they meant the language of school. An exchange such as the above was quite common in room 422, particularly between Eleni and the Spanish-speaking students. In another instance, Ed was attempting to work something out in Spanish during a small-

group discussion. Eleni briefly argued with him about practicing and using academic English, reminding him that, "We had this discussion [about using academic English] at the beginning of the year." As was typical of Ed, he glumly assented to Eleni's request without much protest.

Indeed, Eleni was quite consistent in her demand that students use English in the classroom. On another occasion, a student asked her in English to borrow a folder. When Eleni asked why he needed one, the student replied, "no tengo [a folder]." Eleni replied, "How do you say, 'no tengo' in English? Then maybe I'll give you one." Even though Eleni understood the student's message, she insisted upon English as the medium for communication. Anna also invoked the "speak the common language" rule to remind students to speak English. Most often, Anna used this phrase in response to students who seemed to be off-task or chatting in Spanish. Paradoxically, Anna is a fluent speaker of Spanish, and often understood how and why the students were using the language. In fact, she occasionally used Spanish herself in interactions with students, particularly in order to explain a difficult or complicated idea. For example, in one class, the teachers were introducing and discussing some new vocabulary related to *The Rock and the River*, a novel the students were reading. During the discussion, Anna asked if anyone could explain the meaning of the word "justify" in Spanish. The students weren't sure about the meaning, so the discussion switched back to English. This was the first time I had seen either of the teachers in room 422 use a language besides English to elicit participation and discussion from the students. It seemed to be an inconsistency in

Anna's enforcement of the "common language" policy, and I wondered whether the students felt the same.

In a separate exchange, Noble in fact took the opportunity to playfully remind Anna of her inconsistent enforcement of the policy. Near the end of the semester, he was working with a partner on a class project, and I was helping them to brainstorm text. I told him that I thought the word "ellos" was basically synonymous with "you guys." He agreed, and when Anna walked by she concurred: "Yeah, 'ellos' is like 'guys.'" Noble pointed at Anna and replied, "No Spanish in this class. Five pushups." Anna jokingly replied that she probably couldn't even do a single pushup. His point made, Noble let the matter drop. Although this moment of levity underscores Anna's flexibility with implementing the policy, it also illustrates the perplexing nature of the policy. Noble once explained to me his confusion about Anna's behavior toward Spanish in room 422. He commented, "She think that we're saying bad words, but I don't know, I don't get it—Ms. A speaks Spanish so she understands." Similarly, Ed remembered one instance in particular when he had been admonished for using Spanish during group work, when in fact he had been using it to discuss the task at hand.

During one conversation, Noble seemed particularly bitter when I asked his opinion about the language rule. On a number of occasions, I had observed Eleni or Anna reminding him to use English, and I was curious how he felt about that. I asked him, "Did you ever get into trouble with Ms. A or Ms. E for talking Spanish?"

"Um-hm."

"A lot?"

"A lot. Like, with Ms. E, she's mean," Noble replied. Imitating a stern, formal tone of voice, he went on, "She's like, 'Noble, you have to speak English in this class.'"

"Did it happen more than one time?"

"Um-hm. The second time, she's like, 'Noble,' and she looked at me, she looked at me with evil. Like she wanted to eat me." As he said this, he contorted his face in an exaggerated imitation of an angry Ms. E. It was not surprising that Noble reacted in this way, given his propensity for using Spanish in class and his pride in doing so.

Sam and Charlie, on the other hand, were somewhat more charitable in their view of Anna and Eleni's motives. This is perhaps owing to the fact that they felt themselves to be members of a language minority group within the school. As the above exchanges imply, discussion of the "common language" rule in room 422 primarily centered around Spanish use. This seems logical, given the predominance of Spanish speakers in the ESL classes and the school in general. In the classes I visited, Spanish speakers made up the majority (first hour—14 of 16 students, second hour—10 of 12 students, third hour—10 of 16 students). This was not lost on Sam, who linked the high number of Spanish speakers with his own discomfort in using Hmong, despite the fact that he considered it to be his first language because "my mom and dad taught me to say hello [in Hmong] when I was one." He went on to explain that in his experience, students would make fun of Hmong speakers and disapprove of his use of Hmong at school. He expressed discomfort about speaking Hmong at Butler because "other students might be racist." Charlie concurred, stating "they [other students] use bad words against us if we speak our own language."

One particular incident provides context for Charlie's above comments. Although I witnessed very few instances of overt conflict between the Spanish and Hmong speakers, there were moments that revealed undercurrents of tension. In fact, during my first few weeks at Butler, in a class discussion about civil wars in Africa, Charlie volunteered the information that his parents had been involved in the civil war in Laos. One student scoffed at this story, prompting a swift rebuke from Eleni, who reminded the student to be respectful of people's experiences with war. Upon leaving class that day, Charlie remarked that he hated it when people disrespected his culture. Similarly, Sam had previously mentioned to me that he had been bullied at another school. This revelation along with his comments above about avoiding use of Hmong because of perceived racism led me to believe that he had had similar experiences, although he never shared any examples with me.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Charlie implicitly defended the language use policy. I asked the group, "Do you guys think that they should let you speak whatever language you want…I mean if you could prefer, what would you say?"

"No, nah, nah," Charlie replied.

"Why?"

"No, Ms. A make me, make us to speak English."

"Why?"

"Because people are talk about others…they probably talk about others or making fun of others."

Sam also felt discomfort with other students' use of Spanish in class, and was not afraid to confront his peers on the issue. One day, he was working in a group comprised primarily of Spanish speakers. As the other members of his group conversed in Spanish, Sam loudly exclaimed, "English, English!" Noticing Sam's reaction, Anna and Eleni reminded the group that English should be the main language for the task. Clearly, Charlie and Sam felt some sensitivity about language use in room 422. When I asked him to share his thoughts about students' use of Spanish versus Hmong at Butler, Sam made a connection about safety in numbers: "There are a lot of Spanish speakers, but not too many Hmong." My own observations in room 422 support Sam's claim. With the exception of Sam and Charlie, the Spanish speakers were the only students that I observed using another language besides English in room 422. Charlie admitted to having a similar attitude toward speaking Hmong. Although he clearly valued opportunities to do so, and began nearly every class by conversing with Sam in Hmong, he (like Sam) was more reticent about whether he would speak more Hmong if given the chance: "What's the point of speaking Hmong if it's only like, like two people there." Like Sam, Charlie seemed to feel that a critical mass of Hmong speakers would be necessary to increase his comfort to speak freely in this language.

Sam also shared with me his opinion that other students showed little interest in learning about Hmong language and culture. Furthermore, he claimed, those who showed any interest in his language only did so because "they want to know bad words." In Noble's case, this is a fairly accurate assessment—during more than one of my lunchtime conversations with the boys, he spent time practicing vulgar phrases in Hmong

and asking Sam for pronunciation tips. However, I also witnessed students asking Sam questions about Hmong with genuine interest on numerous occasions. For example, a nonparticipant once asked Sam how to say "yes" in Hmong. Sam appeared pleased with the question, and explained that there was not a word that directly translated.

As the above examples illustrate, the issue of language use in room 422 was often paradoxical. Despite Sam's claim that other students did not demonstrate interest in his language and culture, his peers did sometimes show interest. Moreover, despite their claims to the contrary, Charlie and Sam seemed quite comfortable speaking Hmong at school. I witnessed Sam talking with Charlie in Hmong at the beginning of class nearly every day—and when I asked Sam which language he preferred to use outside school, he immediately and enthusiastically answered, "Hmong." Sam also mentioned that he had attended a Hmong language-oriented charter school the previous year, but transferred to Butler because that school was "too easy." And one day during class, it came to light that Sam took Hmong language classes in his community on weekends.

When I discussed the language use policy with the teachers, they had some important ideas to share. Anna was quite ambivalent about the policy, noting that she was more concerned with students being off-task than which language they were using. She felt that most of the time, students were using Spanish to chat and gossip. Eleni agreed, and also stressed her responsibility to make sure that other students did not feel excluded during class discussions and activities. She shared with me that one student had written her a letter expressing frustration at her peers' use of Spanish. According to the letter, which Eleni read to me, this student felt excluded during class discussions when

her peers employed code-switching, and she implored the teachers to ensure that students spoke only English in class.

On the other hand, both Eleni and Anna commented that some of the Spanish speakers had accused them of racism when they invoked the classroom policy. This illustrates the complexity of the issue for both the students and teachers in room 422. In some ways, the teachers were caught in a bind, partially of their own making. By insisting upon the use of English as a lingua franca, they risked accusations of racism by those from the dominant (Spanish) group. By the same token, those from other language groups (e.g., Hmong, Somali, Amharic) might—and sometimes did—feel threatened by the frequent use of Spanish in the classroom.

Just as the students in room 422 received mixed messages about language use from Anna and Eleni, it seems that the immersion program at Butler further complicated the issue. Students like Ed, who were enrolled in this program, continually received mixed messages about language use. Ed once mentioned his frustration that he went from immersion classes in which he was chastised for using English to ESL classes where he was chastised for using Spanish. He and other immersion students were caught in a bind, and although Ed understood the reasons for this bind, he did not necessarily agree with the complete separation of English and Spanish into different spheres.

These kinds of dilemmas demonstrate that tensions and debates over language use were part and parcel of the daily classroom practices of the students and teachers in room 422, and that the issue of linguistic hierarchies and the continuum of bilingualism was constitutive of what it meant to be ESL in room 422. Part of this identity included

placing an emphasis on English, despite the many resources that students possessed in Spanish and the other languages that they spoke. Indeed, my conversations with the teachers and the boys in room 422 showed many instances of this development. Furthermore, as illustrated by Noble's strong opinions about Eleni's push to curtail his use of Spanish, and as illustrated by Sam and Charlie's choice to speak Hmong despite their contention that other students did not respect their language, the students employed code-switching as part of their identity work. This practice has been documented extensively, and scholars have noted that students engage in this practice for a variety of reasons, including the negotiation of identity (Canagarajah, 1995; Fuller, 2009). Liang (2006) theorized that language learners practice code-switching in order to resolve the dilemmas they face between maintaining peer relationships and acquiring the academic English necessary for success in mainstream classes. Examining the situational use of L1 and L2 by Chinese students in an ESL classroom, Liang concluded that the students drew upon their linguistic resources in a process of "intense negotiation and renegotiation between competing multiple investments in different languages and different individual identities and group memberships" (p. 160). The boys in room 422 clearly demonstrated different levels of investment in both peer groups and their academic work. Code-switching was one strategy they could rely on to balance these distinct and often competing discourses. For example, the above data show that Noble used Spanish in the classroom despite the knowledge that Eleni would reprimand him for it. Furthermore, this instance, as well as his conversation with Anna, contradict Charlie's claim that his

Spanish-speaking peers use the language primarily to "talk about others or making fun of others."

Moreover, Anna and Eleni's separation of English into two distinct registers—English and academic English—is connected to the creation of a specific English learner identity. In room 422, speaking Academic English became part of the figured world of being a student who was both "gifted" and "ESL." As Talmy's (2009) students were being socialized by their peers into specific ESL identities, so were the boys in room 422 being socialized by their teachers into a specific type of ESL student—one who used Academic English at all times. As Holland, et al. (1998) mention, one of the paradoxical elements of figured worlds is that in order to fashion identities that cut across the grain, individuals must often use cultural tools associated with hegemonic attributions of identity. In this case, English can be viewed as such a tool. In order to maintain positive relationships with their teachers, the boys in room 422 often used English in their classroom interactions, regardless of their personal feelings about doing so. This—at least partially—mitigated their use of code-switching during other times in the classroom. Anna and Eleni were positioning students as speakers of what they referred to as "academic English." They did this through their everyday talk, the posters on the wall, the planner stamps, and perhaps most crucially, their enforcement of the rules for language use.

Anna and Eleni's emphasis on English may have the opposite of their intended effect. Michael, Andrade and Bartlett (2007) noted that in their ethnographic study of a bilingual high school, it was by granting Spanish high status that teachers were able to

recruit students into the figured world of "success." As the authors note, "In the United States, at predominantly English-speaking schools, Spanish-dominant students are often seen as lacking English, and then are tracked out of mainstream classes into classes reserved for the linguistically different" (p. 174). The students in room 422 were tracked in just such a way. Moreover, since many of the Spanish students at Butler were concurrently enrolled in Spanish immersion classes, Anna and Eleni may have felt even more pressure to focus on English. But had the teachers adopted a more accepting attitude toward L1 use in the classroom, they may have lessened the tension that was constantly present in room 422 regarding language use.

Ironically, Anna and Eleni had both attended a teacher preparation program that emphasized a focus on students' linguistic resources, and they were both multilingual themselves. Moreover, they also strongly believed that students' cultures needed to be respected, and they constantly advocated for their students. This begs the question, "How did an environment which privileged English come to exist in room 422?" Returning to the concept of figured worlds, Anna and Eleni, just like their students, were being recruited into a figured world of their own. As ESL teachers at Butler Middle School, they became part of a historical set of schooling practices, a set of practices that has proven remarkably resistant to change over time and space. Their own core values notwithstanding, they were becoming ESL teachers, and thereby becoming what this has traditionally entailed. Like the teachers that Michael, et. al (2007) described, Anna and Eleni were subject to "the constraints placed upon them by externally defined measures of success, such as standardized tests. In order to survive, the school must continue to

meet the benchmarks established by these policies—policies that devalue students' bilingual and cultural resources" (p. 185). Since *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974, English language learners have been guaranteed access to language programs, including ESL and bilingual instruction. In theory, this guarantees these students equal access to educational opportunity; in practice, however, policies are implemented in various ways across states and localities, with the result being that students receive varying levels of quality in instruction.

Even the term bilingualism is somewhat misleading—as many scholars have documented, the philosophy behind bilingual education in the United States is often a subtractive form of bilingual education, intended not to cultivate the student's L1 while simultaneously building English proficiency, but to gradually build English skill in order to replace the student's heritage language with English (Cummins, 1989; McCollum & Walker, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999; Grinberg & Saavedra, 2000). Whatever the motives behind such practices, the result is a discourse in which students' home languages are devalued and they are placed into courses that carry with them the stigma of remediation. Like their students, Anna and Eleni were subject to these larger sociohistorical discourses about what it means to be bilingual in America.

There is also a discourse of conservatism endemic to the teaching profession. Lortie (2002) refers to an apprenticeship of observation for novice teachers. Regardless of what pre-service teachers learn in their preparation programs, and no matter what their own values and ethics might dictate, they have undergone a protracted period of apprenticeship during their own time as students. This apprenticeship period shapes their

own teaching practices as much, if not more than what they have learned in their comparatively short time as pre-service teachers. Ultimately, their time as students in language classrooms, coupled with their recruitment into the figured world of ESL teachers, may counterbalance their personal stances that students' home languages and cultures should be valued in the classroom.

Daily Routines and the Creation of "Docile Bodies"

As part of the classroom environment, the teachers used a variety of strategies to keep students on task and maintain order. Ranging from classroom participation routines to behavior management strategies, these practices were integral to the cultural production of the category ESL in room 422. Researchers examining ESL classrooms have noted that everyday routines are integral to how learners come to understand their roles as ESL students (e.g., Canagarajah, 1993; Talmy, 2009; Toohey, 1998). In this section, I explore several of Anna and Eleni's daily practices, and provide analysis of these practices through the theoretical framework of disciplinary technology. Although the teachers often expressed that these procedures were designed to foster sound academic habits, the procedures also tied into broader regimes of surveillance and the creation and maintenance of students as "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977).

One typical daily routine in room 422 was the teachers' use of a daily agenda on the white board near the front of the room. This agenda included an objective for the day, a list of activities, and the daily homework assignment. A typical daily agenda, in this case in the context of a novel the students were reading, looked like this:

Agenda: April 7, 2011
Learning Objective:
-Silent Reading (chapter 2)
-Complete character chart
Homework:

Figure 4. The Daily Agenda in Room 422

Throughout my time at Butler, the teachers were very consistent in their use of this daily agenda, and as part of their participation credit, Anna end Eleni required students to copy down each day's agenda in their notebooks. Most students, including Sam, Charlie, Noble and Ed took down the information as soon they settled into their seats. Often, Anna and Eleni used a quick verbal overview of the agenda items as they opened the class period.

The use of exit tickets was another common feature of the daily structure in room 422. The exit ticket is a common, even archetypical example of an informal classroom assessment. Typically, the exit ticket involves teachers asking students to write brief comments on some aspect of the daily lesson or material, and submit these comments before leaving the classroom. It functions as an accountability measure as well as a way to quickly determine how well students processed important aspects of the day's lesson. In room 422 the exit ticket involved Anna and Eleni projecting a question or set of questions onto the Promethean Board (a kind of electronic chalkboard); the students would then copy the question in their planners and answer it. The teachers would periodically check these notebooks, and the exit ticket question sometimes led to a wrap-up discussion at the end of the class period.

An additional part of the structure of student participation involved the use of destiny sticks. Another common teaching device, destiny sticks are used to ensure that all students participate in a class discussion. Instead of allowing students to call out responses, or to raise their hands, each student's name was written on a popsicle stick. The sticks were stored in a disposable cup at the front table. If many different students were offering responses during a discussion, the teachers would allow things to proceed informally. However, if one student was dominating the discussion (e.g., Sam, who often attempted to answer any and every question the teachers asked), or if students were reluctant to participate, the teachers would choose a stick at random and call on the student whose name was written on it.

Although the above examples may seem commonplace, even innocuous, they were part of a larger set of practices that the teachers employed in order to maintain control over the students and inculcate the idea of self-control as an important aspect of the figured world of ESL. This concept of self-control was embedded in both the artifacts and the teacher talk in room 422. One specific example of how the artifacts and talk overlapped was the "Give me 5" poster that the teachers had hung high on the front wall of the classroom. This poster included an illustration of the palm and fingers of a human hand. Each finger was numbered, and the numbers corresponded to different behaviors that students could demonstrate to prove that they were focused and engaged (see Figure 5 for an example of such a poster). In one instance, Eleni made specific reference to the poster, reminding the students, "Give me five. That means you need to check yourself, and see if you are doing the things you need to be doing. That means you have self-

control." On another occasion, Eleni invoked a metaphor about the division of labor to remind the students about self-control: "Guys, remember. Teacher job, student job. Teachers manage the class, you manage yourself."

Figure 5. The "Give Me Five" Poster[7]

The above examples illustrate that self-control was integral to the figured world of this classroom in several ways. In one sense, the teachers applied it to students in the context of behavior self-regulation. As Eleni did above, the teachers often reminded the students that they must be in control of themselves, and this invariably involved control of their bodies as well as their voices. In another sense, the teachers invoked the idea of self-control to stress the importance of working independently without always asking for assistance from the teachers. When the teachers and I discussed the importance of self-control, they expressed genuine concern that their students would not be self-disciplined

[7] Although this image is not identical to the poster in room 422, it is a reasonable facsimile. Anna and Eleni's poster looked homemade, but contained a similar image and identical wording.

enough to succeed in high school if Anna and Eleni did not better prepare them to work independently on class assignments. Such was the paradoxical nature of the environment in room 422—although many of Anna and Eleni's practices served to constrain the students, their motives often seemed to be based on a foundation of caring.

Another important routine was the practice of giving out stamps to students. This routine involved the daily planners/agendas the school had provided to each student at the beginning of the academic year. When students completed a task successfully or with particular flair, one of the teachers might reward them by placing a stamp on the calendar page for that particular day. The teachers also awarded stamps to students who completed the exit tickets. This built up to a "50 stamp party" toward the end of spring semester. The stamps were ostensibly part of a strategy designed to focus students on the IBMYP learner traits (which I will explore more fully in the following section). For example, on one occasion, Anna and Eleni were ecstatic that the students had displayed qualities that corresponded with the IBMYP trait about thinking:

> Anna: "Thinkers, you guys are definitely thinkers…for not giving up, you all deserve stamps."
>
> Eleni: "Welcome to the stamp party!"

However, the stamp system also figured prominently as a way for teachers to reinforce desired behavior standards. Often, one of the teachers, Anna in this case, would use the stamps as a way to single out certain students for praise after class discussions: "I'm going to come around and give stamps to people who showed that they were listening and participating." By the same token, Anna also used the stamp system at the beginning of a

class period to encourage students to display the behaviors she expected: "I will give stamps today at the end of class to those that show they care by being quiet." By implication, students who did not adequately display these qualities were left out of the equation.

The stamp system, then, became a method the teachers used to regulate students by tying the IBMYP learner traits to a normalized set of classroom behaviors. Foucault (1977) explains that one element of disciplinary technology is physical regulation of individuals within institutional spaces—the process of creating what he refers to as "docile bodies." Part of this process involves reinforcing comportment, particularly through signals that are immediately recognizable to students: "place the bodies in a little world of signals to each of which is attached a single, obligatory response" (p. 166). Anna and Eleni's reinforcement of preferred student behaviors through use of the planner stamps constituted such a signal, as it reminded them whether or not they had demonstrated the desired response. It was not always clear whether the students understood the spirit of the trait underlying the behavior, but they certainly understood the system of rewards that accompanied displaying the behavior. This connects to another aspect of disciplinary technology—regarding self-monitoring, "it is a question not of understanding the injunction but of perceiving the signal and reacting to it immediately, according to a more or less artificial, prearranged code" (Foucault, 1977, p. 166). The planner system did not necessarily ensure that the students reflected deeply on what it meant to be caring, but it encouraged them to outwardly demonstrate behaviors the teachers associated with caring.

The language surrounding the stamps was as layered with implications about rewards and punishments as it was with references to the IBMYP learner profile. Anna and Eleni often mentioned the stamps in the context of praising students for displaying particular behaviors as well as highlighting instances when the class was not living up to their expectations. For example, in one class period, Anna was displeased that the students, in her mind, were not making an honest effort to focus their attention during a period of silent reading. She reminded the class, "Our trait of the week is principled, which is kind of like being honest and doing the right thing…if I don't see that happening during the whole class period, I won't be giving you a stamp." On another occasion, she took the opportunity to encourage the students, noting that "we've had over 90 days of stamps, so I think it's something we could achieve, can achieve if we put our minds to it." These comments illustrate two implications of the stamp system: first, the teachers conflated the IBMYP traits with their own behavioral expectations. Secondly, the stamps served as an arbitrary system of rewards and punishments that served to further enmesh the students in a regime of control.

Indeed, it often seemed that the students were more interested in the possibility of the "stamp party" than they were with internalizing the values Anna and Eleni associated with the stamps. For example, Carlos, whom I rarely observed displaying any active interest in class work, was very interested in his progress on the stamps. One day, Anna was announcing the names of students who had enough stamps to participate in the party. Carlos, who had been inattentive to that point, raised his hand and asked, "How much do I have?" Anna took him aside to explain that he was well short of the necessary total.

Likewise, I observed Noble and Sam checking with Eleni about their stamp totals at different times during the semester.

In light of the connection between the stamps and an external reward, it is perhaps unsurprising that the students missed the underlying implications related to cultivating particular habits of mind. Furthermore, during one of our conversations, Anna herself expressed skepticism about the efficacy of the stamp system. She mentioned that she was not entirely satisfied with it, particularly because it was only tenuously connected to the IB profile. In planning her curriculum for the following year, she was considering whether to scrap the stamps altogether or simply modify the system. Ultimately, she felt that simply modifying her use of the planners would be ineffective, and she "wouldn't re-vamp the planners because I don't know how well it's connected to the IB profile." This comment demonstrated to me that on some level, Anna was aware that the planner stamp system was not effective in leading the students to better understand the IBMYP learner traits.

Nevertheless, the stamp system was part of a greater effort in the classroom to socialize students into a particular conception of a specific, local ESL identity. Like the teachers in Talmy's (2009) study, Anna and Eleni worked hard to reinforce particular behaviors and habits of mind in their students. However, Anna and Eleni were more caring and thoughtful than the teachers Talmy characterizes in his study. Both teachers in room 422 were fairly rigid in their use of the planner stamps as a way to reinforce behaviors, and they used the planners as a tool of control, reminding students about the party. However, they often framed their motives as part of a caring disposition, and a

way to prepare students for more rigor in their future academic endeavors. This contrasts with the teachers in Talmy's study, who frequently berated their students and reminded them of their marginalized status. Ultimately, Anna and Eleni took care, through their classroom management practices, to mold their students into a particular local idea of what it meant to be a gifted student, which primarily involved visible behaviors that ostensibly demonstrated the IBMYP learner traits.

It seems clear that many of the tactics Anna and Eleni employed were only designed to regulate behavior, or to hold students to normative conceptions of what it meant to be a good student—be quiet, sit down or listen. However, it was also clear that the teachers wanted inculcate in the students certain habits of mind that they believed would be integral to their ethical development. Once again, the IBMYP themes were embedded into the discussion of proper behavior. In this case, one of the students in first hour finally realized, after nearly nine months in the same classroom, that the students who sat behind her were brothers:

> Nonparticipant asked, "Y and Z are brothers?
>
> Noble replied sarcastically with a long, drawn out, "Noooooo."
>
> Anna reminded Noble, "Sarcasm doesn't really show caring."

On another occasion, Anna unintentionally wrapped up class with ten minutes remaining in the period. After a few minutes Eleni, who was working at her desk in the back of the classroom, remarked that the period wasn't actually over yet. Anna admonished the students, telling them that to be principled would be to remind her that class was not over. In this case, Anna explicitly connected her behavioral expectations with the academic

framework of the learner profile, revealing that had a specific idea about how her students should demonstrate the IBMYP traits, in this case by being honest and reminding her that it wasn't time for class to be over.

As the above section demonstrates, there was a contradiction embedded in a number of Anna and Eleni's classroom practices. On the one hand, their management strategies often served to regulate many aspects of the students' behaviors, constructing them as "docile bodies." On the other hand, many of the classroom policies were tied to the IBMYP framework as a means to encourage students to adopt attributes of giftedness in their actions. Next, I will discuss this aspect of classroom life, and explore the ways that the teachers strove to create a figured world of giftedness in room 422.

Creating Gifted Students: IBMYP in Room 422

Anna and Eleni were committed to incorporating the IBMYP themes into their classroom in a variety of ways, as evidenced by group discussions, activities, numerous posters on the wall and the daily agenda board. Their talk was layered with IBMYP language, and as demonstrated above, they built it into the exit tickets and the planner stamps. In fact, my first experience with compiling field notes in room 422 involved taking notes on the various wall posters that related to the IBMYP framework. The following table summarizes the "IB Learner Profile Traits" as they appeared on the poster:

IBMYP Learners Are:	
Inquirers	They develop their natural curiosity. They acquire the skills necessary to conduct inquiry and research and show independence in learning. They actively enjoy learning and this love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.
Knowledgeable	They explore concepts, ideas and issues that have local and global significance. In so doing, they acquire in-depth knowledge and develop understanding across a broad and balanced range of disciplines.
Thinkers	They exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to recognize and approach complex problems, and make reasoned, ethical decisions.
Communicators	They understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication. They work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others.
Principled	They act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness, justice and respect for the dignity of the individual, groups, and communities. They take responsibility for their own actions and the consequences that accompany them.
Open-minded	They understand and appreciate their own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities. They are accustomed to seeking and evaluating a range of points of view, and are willing to grow from the experience.
Caring	They show empathy, compassion and respect towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a personal commitment to service, and act to make a positive difference in the lives of others and to the environment.
Risk-takers	They approach unfamiliar situations and uncertainty with courage and forethought, and have the independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas and strategies. They are brave and articulate in defending their beliefs.
Balanced	They understand the importance of intellectual, physical and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being for themselves and others.
Reflective	They give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and experience. They are able to assess and understand their strengths and limitations in order to support their learning and personal development.

Source: www.ibo.org/programmes/documents/learner_profile_en.pdf

Figure 6. IBMYP Profile of Learning

These learner traits are emphasized in the IBMYP framework, and are embedded into the discussion about being an IBMYP school. In addition to this poster, there was another one that did not include the written descriptions, but instead included visual representations of each trait (e.g., a microscope for "inquirers"). Also, there was a poster describing the "IBMYP areas of interaction (AoI) for English as a Second or Other Language: Approaches to learning, human ingenuity, health and social education, community and service, and environment." These materials were all printed on large, laminated sheets of paper and hung high on the walls (indeed, high enough that it was a challenge to read them while sitting at a student desk). While Anna and Eleni displayed these posters to remind students of the key behaviors associated with MYP, the posters are also representative of the branding that is often associated with becoming an IBMYP school (Cambridge, 2002; Sperandio, 2010; Visser, 2010). Indeed, I saw many other posters throughout the halls of Butler that reminded me of the IBMYP program the school was implementing.

Perhaps more relevant to the everyday workings of room 422 was the white board that always had a description of the "IB Learner Profile Trait of the Week" as declared by Anna and Eleni. This board was further evidence of the efforts that the teachers made to include the IB theme in the visual makeup of their classroom. For example, during one week they had written, "Reflective: We think about what we have learned and make plans to be better learners." At the beginning of each week, Anna and Eleni would update the board to include an overview of the week's learning objectives and the IB trait that they would emphasize. As a corollary to this aspect of the students' learning experience

in room 422, the IBMYP learner traits were tied to specific behaviors as much as they were tied to habits of mind. For example, one day during a class discussion, the students were continually interrupting each other. Anna directed the class to notice the white board and commented, "Our trait of the week is caring, so how can we show caring when we're talking in a group…being quiet is the biggest thing." In this case, Anna relied on a visual and auditory embodiment of the "quiet learner" as evidence that students were demonstrating caring behavior. However, as Foley (1996) and Fordham (1993) have demonstrated, silence in the classroom may have many other implications beyond caring—for example, resistance or apathy. I often observed Carlos using silence as a means to hide in plain sight and avoid being called upon. Likewise, I often observed that Noble fell silent when he was frustrated and wanted Anna and Eleni to know that he was disengaged from the lesson. So while the teachers may have viewed silence as a form of respect for the academic environment, the students' perception of what being quiet meant may have differed significantly.

In addition to the visual cues in room 422, the IBMYP learner profile was embedded in many daily procedures and rituals, such as the exit tickets discussed above, which were often related to an aspect of the learner profile. For their part, Anna and Eleni wanted a system to help them determine whether students were meeting their academic and behavioral expectations. As teachers, they were much more well-versed in the world of school and its expectations than were the boys in room 422. They were aware of the expectations of other adults in the school regarding self-discipline and academic performance. Therefore, the importance of the exit ticket was twofold. First, it

was a quick way for them to determine whether the students had processed the important aspects of a lesson. Secondly, it reminded students that one aspect of an academic identity was to demonstrate their knowledge to teachers. This kind of demonstration was integral to the figured world of giftedness that Anna and Eleni nurtured in the classroom. Holland, et al. (1998) explain that while figured worlds are imaginary spaces that individuals inhabit, these spaces are created collectively, in that a person is positioned in particular figured worlds relative to others in terms of power and prestige. In effect, this "positional identity," as the authors refer to it, is a bridge between the figurative space of a figured world and the physical spaces and actors that make up this world. Positional identity, then, involves "a person's apprehension of her position in a lived world; that is, depending on the others present, of her greater or lesser access to spaces, activities, genres, and through those authoritative genres, authoritative voices, or any voice at all" (p. 128). Individuals may adopt very distinct positional identities depending on whether others around them recognize their legitimacy in a given space.

The concept of positional identity relates to Anna and Eleni's efforts because of their institutional power relative to that of their students. As I alluded to above, Anna and Eleni were experts in navigating the world of school. Moreover, they saw it as their responsibility to help the students navigate this world as best they could. The practice of embedding IBMYP artifacts and terminology into the culture of room 422 was part of the larger process of shifting the positional identities of the students relative to their mainstream peers. The boys in room 422 were constrained in many ways by their positional identities as ESL students—they were singled out for special programs and

subjected to additional testing, for example. By encouraging them to adopt language and dispositions related to giftedness, Anna and Eleni were offering them the possibility to adopt more a more prestigious social position. This may seem contradictory, because as my data illustrate, many of Anna and Eleni's classroom practices were focused on outward appearances, rather than habits of mind. However, these outward appearances are constitutive of positional identities, in that:

> The dialect we speak, the degree of formality we adopt in our speech, the deeds we do, the places we go, the emotions we express…are treated as indicators of claims to and identification with social categories of privilege relative to those with whom we are interacting. (Holland, et al., 1998, p. 127)

Simply acting as if they understood the underlying tenets of the IBMYP profile had the potential to lead others to view Sam, Charlie, Carlos, Ed and Noble as IBMYP students.

Interestingly, as much as the IBMYP learner profile was embedded into the visual world of the classroom and the daily activities, the students seemed only vaguely cognizant of profile's language and purposes. During one of our lunchtime conversations near the end of the semester, we discussed the profile at length, and I asked the group to share with me some of their impressions of the profile, and speculate about why it might be important to Anna and Eleni.

I asked, "What do you guys notice about that [the IB profile]?"

Sam replied, "We don't actually know."

None of the others contradicted Sam, so I pressed them further, asking, "Do you know where the traits come from?"

Sam quickly responded, “The IB profile.”

Charlie agreed.

Sam continued, “Yeah, IB is like, like, sometimes you have to respect other people, so we don’t bully them, something like that.”

The conversation became more animated, with the boys talking over each other and elaborating on Sam’s point. For all of them, it seemed that the IB profile traits were primarily related to behavior and attitudes. Ed was adamant that the teachers wanted them to “learn how, like every word.”

“They will check your record,” commented Charlie.

Noble added, “So we learn more.”

Charlie went on, “Yeah, like see how your record is, to keep like, to help you to like, to help you get up if you’re in a lower grade.”

“To get better?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

This conversation was typical of our discussions related to the profile, in that none of the boys displayed a coherent understanding about Anna and Eleni’s use of the profile, or the purpose of the profile. They were aware of it, but they did not necessarily link it to the gifted program.

In fact, as the above conversation indicates, the boys associated the IBMYP profile primarily with behaviors and attitudes, rather than anything overtly academic. Later in the conversation, I again raised the topic of the learner profile, wondering how

widespread the boys thought it was at Butler. I asked, "Do you notice that most teachers talk about it, or just some teachers?"

Sam quickly responded, "I don't hear most all teachers talk about it…well, the first, I think the one who created it was Ms. _____, the eighth grade language arts teacher. She was like the first person to taught everyone about the IB profile. Right Charlie?"

"Yup. Last year everybody blew up the IB program. Everybody was super, everybody was good, no fights at all. Only a few."

"What about this year?" I asked.

Charlie replied, "This year a whole bunch, and lots of bad, bad, bad stuff."

When Charlie did not elaborate on this comment, Sam added, "Man, last year, last year we did the IB profile, you know what happened? Everybody broke into fighting in the classrooms, the hallways, the bathrooms!" Again, the boys (at least Sam and Charlie) made specific connections between the profile and behavior.

This is significant considering Anna and Eleni's intentional use of the profile and their attempts to embed it into nearly every phase of classroom life. They felt responsible for communicating the importance of the IBMYP framework to the students, and did not feel that other teachers made the same kind of effort.[8] Nevertheless, it was very important to them that the students reach the standards set by IBMYP. For Anna and

[8] There is some evidence to bear out this assumption. Although I did not visit any other classrooms at Butler, the topic came up during one of my lunchtime conversations with the boys. I asked, "Do other teachers do that IB stuff, too, or just Ms. E and Ms. A?"

Sam replied, "Just Ms. E and Ms. A."

Carlos offered, "Some, not all of them."

Eleni, this was part and parcel of preparing the students for academic life, particularly the demands of high school.

Toward the end of the semester, Anna stressed that students should consider all the traits important to their academic success. She spoke at length toward the beginning of one class period:

> Our trait of the week is all of the traits…our goal is that you would use all these traits all the time…you should be doing all these traits, all the time…I want you to show us that you can use all these traits…you can be knowledgeable…a thinker, you can be principled, you can do the right thing, because you know it's the right thing to do…you can be caring…you can be balanced, so you take care of your body, your education…you can be reflective…so all this year we've been working on these traits…I want you to think about what traits you think we will need to finish your project today and why.

Although this kind of language was embedded into both Anna's and Eleni's everyday talk, this was by far the most extensive and explicit explanation that I heard either teacher give about the importance of the traits. As Anna spoke, she referred to a list of the traits that she had projected onto the screen in the front of the classroom. Again, this kind of talk was integral to repositioning the students as both ESL *and* gifted by making them aware of how much the teachers valued the traits, and encouraging them to embrace the trappings of IBMYP as part of their academic and social identities.

An event near the last day of school illustrates the way that broader social structures at Butler were intertwined with Anna and Eleni's emphasis on giftedness as a key component of the figured world in room 422. There was an assembly to honor students with various academic accolades, and I had initially planned to stay behind with

Eleni as Anna attended the assembly. But my ears perked up when Anna mentioned that the assembly had to do with the learner profile. In fact, the school would present awards for each domain of the profile to the two students who most exemplified that trait. Of the boys in room 422, only Ed won an award. As I watched the presenters call student after student, I couldn't help noticing that most of the students who won the awards were White. After the assembly, Anna expressed her frustration that "It's always the same students who win those awards." We never explicitly raised the subject of race, but I inferred that Anna was upset because the winners were mostly White students.

A number of researchers have noted that one stigma that students labeled as ESL experience relates to race (e.g., Lee, 2005; Lopez, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). Likewise, scholars have noted that two groups that are often underrepresented in gifted programs around the country are students of color (Briggs, Reis & Sullivan, 2008; Hoyle & Kutka, 2008) and students from diverse language backgrounds (Harris, Plucker, Rapp & Martínez, 2009). Although the issue of race at Butler was not a primary focus of my analysis, it is worth exploring briefly in light of how it relates to the awards assembly. This ceremony represented a formal and public acknowledgement of students who their teachers felt had adopted aspects of the IBMYP profile. As part of this recognition, each student received a certificate indicating which IB trait he or she exemplified. Writing about smartness as a cultural construct, Hatt (2012) has noted that there is a constant struggle in schools "over who gets to define what it means to be 'smart' and which students get labeled as 'smart,' with results closely linked to race and class" (443). Although the term smartness is distinct from giftedness, the awards assembly at Butler

illustrates the struggle that Hatt describes. The assembly was designed explicitly to single out students who embodied the IBMYP traits; also, many of the students who embodied these traits were White. Implicitly, this sent a message contrary to that which Anna and Eleni wanted their students to understand. Even though the teachers worked hard to create a figured world in which their students could adopt an IBMYP identity, in the world outside their classroom one component of this identity included Whiteness. As hard as Anna and Eleni worked to recruit the boys in room 422 into the figured world of giftedness, the one thing they couldn't do was make the students White.

In their attempt to build academic and social identities that go against the grain of institutional expectations, it is essential for students to have allies at school among the teachers and staff. Through their emphasis on the IB traits, Anna and Eleni were working to mold identities for the students in room 422 that would serve them well in the school environment. As Harklau (1994) and others have noted, institutional tracking is seldom made transparent for students. By placing such emphasis on the language of the gifted and talented program, Anna and Eleni were making this process somewhat more transparent. Their efforts also presented a paradox, because as part of their institutional role, they felt compelled to maintain control of the classroom. As a result, the figured world of room 422 involved both the "gifted student" and "docile body" identities. Anna, Eleni, and the boys in room 422 were caught in a double-bind: their actions against the prevailing system were mitigated by actions that reinforced this same system.

However, it is important to note that although the classroom environment was tied to the discipline and control of students' bodies and minds, as I explored above, it also

diverged from other classroom environments that stigmatize ESL students as incapable of reaching the same standards as mainstream students. There has been a good deal of research that references the marginalized status of ESL students (e.g., Auerbach 1995; McKay & Wong 1996; Vollmer 2000). In fact, Talmy (2009) argues that one function of ESL programs is to socialize students into the already existing school hierarchies, and he calls for research that draws attention to analyzing everyday classroom discourse, "where this stigma is produced moment-by-moment in the unfolding details of talk" (p. 237). While the present study makes no claim toward detailed discourse analysis, Anna and Eleni's classroom talk is a far cry from Talmy's Mr. Bradley, who exclaims, "Don't act dumb like ESL students" (p. 243). Indeed, as Anna's discomfort with the award ceremony suggests, she is very aware of the stigma related to ESL students, and is working against this in her own classroom practices.

Sam and Noble, or How the Category "ESL" Elides Difference

Below, I offer two vignettes in order to highlight the arbitrariness of the ESL designation. Although this label is applied to students in order to identify their language skills and needs, it also serves the function of categorizing them so that they can be grouped more conveniently in educational programs. However, the stories of Noble and Sam illustrate that the two boys are two strikingly different individuals, with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and dissimilar experiences inside and outside school. A close examination of their classroom experiences reveals that the ESL designation does far more to minimize important differences between them than it does to help Anna and Eleni better meet their educational and social needs.

Sam: Stranger in a Strange Land.

Sam maintained a unique relationship with Anna and Eleni. Early during my at Butler, we discussed student placement and they both mentioned that Sam was one of the most capable students in any of their classes, and that he could, and possibly should, be moved to a more advanced ESL class. Sam never complained to me explicitly about this, but he often remarked that the work Anna and Eleni gave him was easy. Moreover, he strove to display his knowledge to the class as often as possible. Sam's participation was a dual-edged sword for Anna and Eleni. They often praised him for making positive contributions to class discussions, and they welcomed his enthusiasm, particularly when other students were more indifferent about the topic at hand. However, on other occasions, they attempted to shut him down when he was dominating the discussion. During one lesson, he repeatedly volunteered answers during a group discussion, despite the fact that Eleni and Anna were making a concerted effort to get other students involved. Finally, Eleni became exasperated, and snapped, "Sam, you're restricted from talking anymore." Sam responded with mock excitement, waving his hands and exclaiming, "Yay!" Following this incident, he continued to give answers under his breath for the rest of the discussion.

Based upon a number of such exchanges, I concluded that Sam approached public classroom moments as a kind of benchmark for judging his own competence and that of his peers. In fact, he often became impatient with classmates who seemed to either ignore or be unaware of class procedures that had been previously established. For example, one classroom procedure that I noticed within my first week at Butler was the

use of the pencil box on the front table. If a student forgot to bring a writing instrument to class, the teachers expected that s/he would borrow one from the box and return it at the end of the period. One day, a student asked Eleni to borrow a pencil. Motioning to the front table, Sam replied, "You can borrow a colored pencil." Sam also displayed frustration with students who he felt didn't display adequate knowledge of local or national events. During one class period, Anna and Eleni were discussing a series of floods that were occurring in the Southern United States. Another student asked the teachers if the area around Butler was in any danger. Sam immediately responded, in a tone that reminded me of an exasperated parent trying to explain something to a small child, "We're not in the South, we're in the North." He and the nonparticipant then proceeded to quietly argue about the veracity of his claim for the next few minutes.

In fact, Sam was just as likely to turn this kind of judgment upon himself. In one instance he became visibly distraught when he answered incorrectly in front of the class. During an activity related to current events, Anna and Eleni asked students to locate countries where important events were taking place. Sam argued with them about the location of a country, and when it became apparent that he was wrong, he exclaimed quite loudly, "Oh no, I failed!" He then spent the next few minutes of the class discussion attempting to steer the teachers' attention his way so that he could guess again.

In addition to using class discussions as a forum to display his competence, Sam was also eager to demonstrate his knowledge on class quizzes, even though he acknowledged that they were not particularly challenging for him. During one class period, he explicitly raised this issue with me:

"The quiz is so easy, I finished it in ten or five or four minutes, look," Sam said.

"The quiz was easy?" I asked.

"The quizzes are always easy."

"In every class, every quiz?"

"No, just this class."

This typified our discussions about the class work in room 422. Sam clearly felt that the material was not a challenge, yet he was enthusiastic about completing it.

Noble: "I'm Going to Invent My Own Name."

Noble always kept me guessing. At times compliant, at times defiant, and nearly always humorous, he presented many different facets of himself during my time in room 422. In light of my own research interests, one of the most important things I noticed about Noble was his constant work to creatively invent an identity. He seemed more aware than any of the other boys that he could, at least to an extent, manipulate the perceptions that others had of him.

The most striking example of this was Noble's successful attempt to convince the teachers and students in room 422 to call him by a different name. I remember being extremely confused one day when taking field notes. There was a substitute teacher for Eleni, and when he called Noble's given name during role, Noble said, "I'm not Virgil, I'm Noble." When I asked him about this later, he explained that Noble was actually his middle name, and he preferred that people use it when addressing him. At this point I had been a visitor in room 422 for nearly two months, yet this was the first time that I had witnessed Noble's attempt to change his name. In another exchange, Noble playfully

insisted that some of his friends refer to him as "Papa Noble," a riff on the Spanish name Papa Noël, or "Father Christmas."

Perhaps because of such word games, the students seemed to adapt very quickly to the name change, and Noble seldom had to remind them about it. The teachers, though, sometimes forgot, and he took care to remind them. In one case, Anna asked for Noble's participation during a discussion of figurative language,

Anna asked, "Virgil, what is one metaphor?"

Noble replied, "Virgil, who's Virgil?

Anna, smiling, corrected herself, "I mean Noble."

This exchange not only illustrates Noble's consistent effort to demand that the teachers address him by this name, but also their willingness to do so. Indeed, neither Anna nor Eleni ever challenged Noble on this. Instead, they went along with his name change, and by the end of the semester, Virgil had effectively become Noble.

On one occasion, Anna and Eleni asked the students to write letters to the author of a novel they had recently finished in class. As they were working on the conventions for closing the letter, Noble commented, "I'm going to invent my own name. My name is Pancho Villa." 4Had he not spent so much effort on convincing his peers and teachers to address him by a different name, I might have simply dismissed this as an attempt at getting a cheap laugh. Instead, it led me to further wonder about Noble's identity work. He was clearly playing with names and the effect they might have on the way others viewed him. By inventing a name, Noble was inventing his identity.

During most of April and May, Anna and Eleni were working on a novel with the students. Since they did not have enough copies for the students in each class to take home, all the reading was done during class. The format for the reading took one of three forms: shared oral reading, small group/partner reading, and independent silent reading. By this time in the semester, the boys in room 422 were fairly comfortable with my presence. Noble, in fact, often used my presence as an opportunity to gain an advantage in his reading. The first time Anna asked the students to read silently, he immediately appeared at the desk where I was sitting and asked me to read with him in the hall. I agreed, and we took our chairs into the hallway. Although our talk strayed into other topics, Noble remained largely focused on the reading, and we took turns (although he was invariably able to make my turns much longer).

As the students continued reading the novel, this became something of a routine for Noble and me. Any time Anna or Eleni asked the students to engage in silent reading, he would materialize at my desk and we would go into the hallway to read. I noticed that he had difficulty decoding, although he never seemed to lose the narrative thread despite the fact that he often read in fits and starts. I was never sure how he felt about his reading ability, and I only asked him obliquely about it. One day, when he came back to ask me to read with him, I asked if he wanted to just stay in the back of the classroom. He shook his head, motioning to the hallway. I asked him if he didn't want the others to hear him read. He gave me a quizzical look, and replied matter-of-factly, "Why do you think I wanted to go in the hall?"

This was my first window into Noble's keen awareness of both his struggles with decoding and how others might view these struggles. He often became frustrated during our reading sessions, and preferred that neither his teachers nor his peers witness this frustration. He complained to me about the book, noting that he didn't like "these kinds of books [novels]." He explained that such books were too long and didn't have any illustrations to help readers to better understand the events and the appearances of the characters. During one of our hallway reading sessions, he became particularly annoyed with the text. After he completed a challenging passage, he stopped abruptly and declared, "It's too hard. I don't wanna read no more." This comment didn't surprise me, so I gave no response and simply picked up where he had left off. But at the very end of the chapter, he interrupted me, saying, "My turn," and began to read the last page aloud.

This tension between frustration and perseverance was something I often noticed with Noble. While he struggled at times with decoding, writing, and finishing his assignments, he also made consistent efforts to complete tasks and to show Anna and Eleni that he was engaged in class. I made a number of comments in my field notebook about his efforts to participate in nearly every class discussion and to get Anna and Eleni to acknowledge his responses. He was actually very assertive in class, especially when it came time to share journal responses or answers to questions about class readings. He also volunteered quite often to read parts aloud during the shared reading of novels. This seems to contrast with his desire to read with me in the hallway in order to avoid having classmates see him struggle with the reading. On the other hand, during the shared reading one of the teachers invariably narrated, leaving the students to read the dialogue,

which was often easier for Noble to decode. Nevertheless, this was another tension for Noble—between risking acknowledgement of his academic struggles and his strong desire to participate and receive recognition for his efforts in the classroom.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images

-T.S. Eliot

Chapter Five: Reassembling the Fragments

My last day at Butler proved anticlimactic. I'm not sure what I was expecting—probably some sense of closure in the literary sense, a tidy and satisfying conclusion to my story. In any case, the reality was far less literary. I brought small gifts for Anna and Eleni—paltry offerings, I felt, considering their generosity in allowing me to inhabit their classroom space for an entire semester. Likewise, I brought tokens for Sam, Noble, Ed, Carlos and Charlie. Like most adolescents I have met—indeed, like the one I once was—they were far more interested in the chaotic events of the last day of school than in any good-byes or well wishes. They chased each other around the room, slapped each other on the backs, and discussed the potential for an eventful and exciting summer, filled with languorous days of doing nothing much.

Perhaps this was a fitting end to my time in room 422, considering that my process of reflection and analysis has generated more questions than conclusions. Sometimes as I look back on my data, I feel as though I am left with only heaps of broken images, parts that make up no semblance of a whole. What do I make of Sam and Charlie's stories? Do the collective experiences of the teachers and students in room 422 have implications beyond this single classroom? Are the patterns of interaction I observed indicative of broader phenomena? Although the information I have shared in

the previous chapters inevitably presents a fragmented and incomplete image of the classroom reality, it is now my responsibility to make some sense of this representation.

In the following sections, I offer implications as well as possible avenues for research and action based on the time I spent observing and interacting with the students and teachers in room 422. First, I examine the role that disciplinary technology played in the construction of "ESL" in this classroom, and also how power functioned not only to repress the students, but also to produce them as specific types of individuals. I also draw upon María del Carmen Salazar's framework of humanizing pedagogy (Salazar, 2013; Salazar, 2010; Salazar & Fránquiz, 2008) to outline a strategy of critical collaborative education that teachers like Anna and Eleni might adopt with their students. Next, I examine the possibilities raised by Anna and Eleni's focus on the language and artifacts of IBMYP. Their emphasis on giftedness had the potential to lead to a meaningful shift in the imagery associated with being "ESL" at Butler; however, this potential was not fully realized. Finally, I close with a circumspect discussion about the limitations of this study and how future research might dig deeper into an area where my work has just scratched the surface.

Disciplinary Technology and the Production of ESL at Butler

According to Michel Foucault, disciplinary technology permeates institutions and individuals, circulating through the body politic and regulating thoughts, actions and behaviors. In the educational context of Butler Middle School, this involved such practices as standardized testing, institutional classification, and daily classroom management rituals. Each teacher was subject to the structures around her, and in turn

their decisions helped to mold the students. For example, no matter how much Eleni loathed the standardized testing batteries that her students underwent, she was obligated to administer these tests due to her institutional position as an ESL teacher. Likewise, Anna, although bilingual herself, pressured students to use English at all times in order to position them as gifted in the eyes of those outside room 422. These practices must not be viewed in isolation; on the contrary, they were among a number of factors that, taken in sum, produced a specific type of individual at Butler Middle School: the "ESL student."

Two separate but related incidents at Butler illustrate this complex process. One day, when we were discussing the placement of students into the ESL program, Eleni explained that the district placement center provides a home language survey to parents (a common practice among many local districts). Eleni expressed her frustration at the capricious nature of the placement process:

> My friend, her kids are in the district, and they speak Spanish at home, but [parent name] is I think bilingual, and they are raising their kids bilingual. They actually speak English and Spanish, and they did before they came to school. But because she wrote that they speak Spanish at home they were identified [as ESL] and she had to call the new family center…it was really bizarre. So sometimes it works, and sometimes, I think the system is…

Eleni used this example to stress the arbitrariness in the process of categorizing students as ESL. The home language survey is where this process begins, and indeed is a key component in the identification of students as ESL. The parents' answers to questions about native language and the amount of English spoken in the home initially determine whether their children will be eligible for additional English instruction. But as was the

case with the family in Eleni's example, simply speaking a language other than English immediately marked them as Other, and this parent had to take the initiative to call the district in order to straighten out the situation. This begs the question whether immigrant parents, who may have less cultural and linguistic capital, would be in a position to take such a step.

During the same conversation, Eleni mentioned that the teachers themselves were only peripherally involved in the identification and placement process. She described a meeting where she questioned district-level officials about exiting students from the ESL program:

> Are those kids ever going to exit ESL? It's not even an ESL problem, you know, and then, we're, we're held to this test data. I think it's just, it was really weird, so, and especially when they showed this [the form] to me. And we asked X that, too, I said, one of the questions today in the lead teacher meeting was, "How did those kids ever get exited then?" That [the reply was], *"I don't have an answer for you"* [emphasis added].

Although Eleni and Anna worked with the students every day and were able to see their progress, the ultimate decision about whether these students remained in the ESL program rested with of district officials who were far removed from Butler Middle School and seemed to have incomplete knowledge about *their own procedures* for classifying linguistically diverse students.

This is particularly significant, and highlights the insidious form of power at work in the production of ESL students at Butler. As Eleni alluded to, the teachers and students in room 422 were "held to this test data"—that is, they were subject to testing

regimes that ostensibly measured students' progress in learning English. However, viewed through the frame of disciplinary technology, testing is integral to the differentiation of individuals as specific subjects to be known and categorized:

> The examination leaves behind it a whole meticulous archive constituted in terms of bodies and days. The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them. (Foucault, 1977, p. 189)

Eleni's above comments indicate that the students in room 422 were indeed captured in the ESL program at Butler. As soon as parents marked a language other than English on the survey, their children became marked and were subject to further testing and documentation to reconfirm their status as ESL students. This ultimately became a permanent status, because the officials charged with exiting students from the program had no clear answer about what criteria were used to ensure that this actually occurred. These processes exemplify the notion of power as productive. Foucault (1977) cautions against viewing power as merely constraining individuals. Instead, through disciplinary technology, "power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth." (p. 194). The home language survey, the ESL placement process and the exit criteria (or lack thereof) that Eleni describe are precisely the types of rituals that began to establish individuals as ESL students in this local context.

At the classroom level, Anna and Eleni's own classroom routines were an extension of these institutional rituals of truth. In their use of the planner stamps, their attempts to connect observable behaviors to the IBMYP framework, and their

enforcement of the "common language" rule, the teachers were attempting to mold Sam, Charlie, Carlos, Ed, Noble and the others into Foucault's "docile bodies," with the ultimate aim that the students would self-regulate in action and thought. Initially this may seem paradoxical—Anna and Eleni clearly cared for their students, yet their classroom routines often marginalized the students. However, viewed through the framework of disciplinary technology, the teachers engaged in these practices not because they didn't care for the students, but precisely because they *did* care. Caughlan (2005) notes that teachers, particularly in urban environments, have historically been entrusted to exert a form of caring control in order to "instill self-discipline and self-monitoring in individuals seen as lacking those attributes" (p. 14). This is consistent with Foucault's notion of power as a range of techniques that ultimately lead individuals to "discipline themselves, acting in ways that constitute themselves as docile bodies and normalized selves" (Gunzenhauser, 2008, p. 2227). Anna and Eleni's practices were part of a regime of caring/control that could lead the students to identify with a hegemonic conception of "good student" behavior, which in turn could lead them to greater success within the school environment.

Moreover, Anna and Eleni's continual use of the language and artifacts of IBMYP was integral to this regime of caring/control. As Eleni mentioned, the district seemed to have no coherent policy for lifting the label "ESL" from students like those in room 422—once identified, they were then documented and fixed in their position. Thus, the IBMYP initiative at Butler provided an opportunity for Anna and Eleni to offer their students an avenue toward shifting their identities while remaining within confines that

the district had placed upon them. Since it was not feasible to reposition students as gifted instead of ESL, there at least remained the possibility to graft the more prestigious label "IBMYP student" onto the more stigmatized ESL designation. As Holland, et al. (1998) might put it, Anna and Eleni were working to create a world of "gifted ESL," in which students could simultaneously inhabit the subject positions of "ESL" and "gifted." By speaking the common language (i.e., academic English) and demonstrating the behaviors that their teachers associated with the IBMYP principles, students could demonstrate both their desire to be a part of this world and their legitimacy within it.

Student/Teacher Collaboration and Figured Worlds of Possibility

I find the juxtaposition of disciplinary technology and figured worlds useful in this instance, because it reminds me of two key implications for ESL educators. First, Foucault provides a reminder that ESL teachers, because of their authoritative position in the classroom, are key players in the figured world that we refer to as the education system. Their actions and decisions are buttressed by their position within the school hierarchy, and because of this, they have more power than students to shape the figured world of the classroom. To deny this basic social reality would be not only foolish, but also potentially harmful. Although Foucault's framework of disciplinary technology is open to the charge that it paints social structures as monolithic and minimizes individual agency, it also forces us to acknowledge that teachers are enmeshed in an institutional grid that influences their actions on a daily basis. Before judging Anna and Eleni too harshly, we would do well to consider our own complicity as members of an institutional system that minimizes the skills and contributions of linguistically diverse individuals.

Secondly, the framework of figured worlds reminds me that despite this institutional grid, individuals have some measure of agency to act alone, both within and against the worlds that have been formed for them over time and space. Anna and Eleni's decision to use the language, imagery and artifacts of IBMYP exemplifies this complex balance between disciplinary technology and individual agency. By placing IBMYP posters on the wall and embedding the IB profile language into their daily talk, they were legitimizing a hegemonic system: the world of the gifted. Furthermore, by tying behavior management to their evaluation of students' ability to demonstrate the learner profile qualities, they were reinforcing a normalized conception of school performance—namely, that if students behave properly, the will achieve success. Yet, they were also using the IBMYP framework to give their students access to a figured world that wasn't necessarily created with them in mind.

The upshot here is simply stated, but perhaps difficult to implement: educators and students must work together to forge figured worlds that are less constraining and more full of possibility. In my time at Butler, I saw that Anna and Eleni genuinely cared for their students, and were frustrated at times with the system. Yet, they often overlooked their own roles in minimizing the importance of students' cultures and identities. Likewise, my data show that the boys, particularly Noble and Ed, often felt frustrated about the classroom environment in room 422, particularly as it related to their linguistic identity. Salazar (2013) points out that students and teachers often share a common disengagement from mainstream education: "Students and educators are constrained from finding meaning in the current educational system as a result of the

tension between educators' pedagogical practices and systemic constraints, such as high-stakes standardized tests and district-mandated instructional curriculum" (p. 124). Better strategies are needed to help both groups find common ground.

One possible avenue for finding this common ground is the concept of humanizing pedagogy, which builds upon the work of Paulo Freire. Salazar and Fránquiz (2008) have examined ways that teachers might help students pose and solve problems in the classroom that are more relevant to their own lives. Moreover, they have identified specific actions that ESL teachers might take in order to provide both rigor and support to linguistically diverse students in their classrooms. They described a novice ESL teacher, Ms. Corazón, who initially engaged in a number of dehumanizing classroom practices. Most significantly, she maintained rigid linguistic boundaries, allowing students to speak only English in the classroom. Despite this practice, her students respected her and believed she cared for them. However, she was unsatisfied with their progress, and expressed frustration at her inability to consistently reach them. The researchers convinced her to make several changes to her classroom, including the following: she began to promote bilingualism, and she developed what Dyson (1993) refers to as "permeable curriculum," that is, a curriculum that includes student input. After implementing these changes, Ms. Corazón saw an immediate improvement in student engagement. Salazar and Fránquiz do not offer this example as a panacea, but they argue that with these simple changes, teachers can begin to address the inequities that linguistic minority students face.

It strikes me how much Anna and Eleni's classroom situation mirrors that of Ms. Corazón. Their insistence on English as the exclusive medium of communication has a very similar result—in my conversations with the boys, Noble and Ed mentioned their resentment about this policy, and although Sam and Charlie claimed to support it, I observed them speaking Hmong to each other in the classroom almost on a daily basis. Moreover, Anna and Eleni are both multilingual, but I found no evidence that they had clarified their stance on classroom language use even to themselves. They didn't seem to see the connection between fostering bilingualism in their classroom and valuing students' culture.

This stance belies many of the conversations we had, in which it became clear to me that both teachers care deeply about their profession and about ensuring equitable learning opportunities for their students. One way this showed was through their curriculum choices. Anna and Eleni often chose topics and readings that would engage the students with issues of justice and inequality. For example, their decision to use *The Rock and the River*, a novel dealing with the American civil rights movement, was potentially a pivotal moment for students. However, they approached the book primarily with their own agenda in mind, sometimes missing opportunities to foster discussions that students felt were relevant to their own experiences with injustice. Even by taking the modest step of including student input into the goals and directions of these discussions would be a crucial move toward Dyson's (1993) central principle of permeable curriculum: bridging the divide between the students' worlds and the world of school.

The complication in the case of Anna and Eleni, and indeed in the case of many teachers, is matching actions to words. Salazar, Lowenstein and Brill (2010) emphasize the need to encourage pre-service teachers to develop what they call humanizing dispositions, by engaging in projects that explore their personal histories as well as the experiences of diverse learners. They undertake such projects in order to begin to clarify their own beliefs about equitable classroom practices. In a similar vein, Turnbull and Dailey-O'Cain (2009) discuss "a model for professional development through which teachers can develop a personalized, yet pedagogically and theoretically principled approach to target and first language use (p. 9). It is important to note that the pre-service program that Anna and Eleni completed contained important elements mentioned above. However, as Lortie (2002) has pointed out, the educational system is surprisingly resistant to change, and the pressures that Anna and Eleni felt—everything from like the district's emphasis on the IBYMP program to the increasing battery of standardized testing that they are required to administer—negatively affected their belief in the efficacy of the principles they learned as pre-service teachers.

What would help teachers like Anna and Eleni is a professional development experience that would facilitate them continuing the difficult work of self-reflection and critique during their formative years of teaching, when the pressures and challenges of classroom life may make the principles they learned in their preparation program seem unrealistic or unfeasible. Anna and Eleni were often constrained, both because their own actions often contradicted their beliefs and because they were isolated from the institutional actors who identified and labeled their students as ESL. Michel Foucault

once remarked that “people know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 187). By continually examining the results of their actions and the beliefs underlying them, teachers like Anna and Eleni would be in a position to reflect upon the ways that their own situation parallels that of their students. This could lead to what I would call a figured world of critical collaboration, in which ESL students and teachers work together in order to make sense of their social reality and begin to alter it.

Shifting Our Metaphorical Understandings of English Learners

The first thing I noticed about room 422 was its enormous size. Of the two main entrances, I nearly always used the one that is best described as the back door. Once inside this door, I would often find Anna or Eleni sitting at one of the two teacher desks that were placed near the back of the classroom. The expanse of tiled floor between these desks and the main teaching area was surprisingly vast, and I joked that it would be an ideal space for a breakdancing contest. Instead, this space was virtually unused, except as a buffer between the students and teachers on the rare occasions that both Anna and Eleni were at their desks. Given that the largest group of students in room 422 on any given day was around 25, the space seemed to me comically oversized. It could have easily been partitioned to create two full-sized classrooms. In addition to its extravagant size, room 422 had the additional benefit of a prime location within the school. Because of its proximity to the main entrance, it was easy for a visitor to find, and since it was located near the office, the cafeteria and the courtyard, the environment around room 422 buzzed with activity.

In my experience, ESL teachers rarely receive such luxurious accommodations. During my first years of teaching, I pushed a cart from room to room throughout the day until I finally clawed my way into an underused basement classroom. This story offered small consolation to the many student teachers I observed working in hallway spaces, cafeterias, and closet-sized classrooms. Auerbach (1995) noted that the status of the ESL teacher reflects that of her students; if this is the case, then being relegated to the land of the misfit toys is a shameful position indeed. I found it very encouraging that room 422 reflected a much more prestigious status for Anna, Eleni and their students.

However, it came up during one of our conversations that the school administration was considering a relocation of the ESL department. Anna expressed some trepidation about the possible move, owing to many of the factors I mentioned above. If the move occurred, it would be to a more remote section of the school and a much smaller space, possibly shared with the special education department. Given Anna and Eleni's push to mold their students into gifted learners, the association with special education was significant. The tendency to conflate "ESL-ness" with learning disability is commonplace. For example, Lightfoot (2001) notes that much of the early literature surrounding bilingual learners was framed in talk of deficit and disability. Likewise, researchers in educational anthropology (e.g., McDermott & Varenne, 1995) have noted that minority cultures are often framed in terms of disability. I found it troubling that the metaphor of ESL as a disability might be reproduced at Butler, particularly because by continually using IBMYP language and artifacts, Anna and Eleni were attempting to constructing quite a different metaphor: ESL as gifted.

However, there is evidence that this metaphorical shift was not fully realized in room 422. While the teachers certainly emphasized the IBMYP program, it is not clear that the students adopted the habits of mind associated with the learner profile. Indeed, as I explored in the previous chapter, students and teachers alike explicitly connected the IBMYP profile to a set of normative behaviors. Rather than leading the students to view themselves as IBMYP, many of Anna and Eleni's practices served to reinforce the status quo. Schulz (2005) claims, "in terms of social power relations, the liberal perspective typically invites the 'marginalised' to be compensated within the realms of the mainstream, on the terms of the privileged, and without destabilising society's hegemonic centre" (p. 120). My analysis of how IBMYP was instantiated in room 422 certainly bears this out. More than anything, the students were learning how to conform to mainstream expectations—maintaining control over their bodies, demonstrating compliance, and using only English as a medium of both communication and learning.

My experience at the awards assembly also indicates that the metaphor of ESL as gifted gained little traction within the wider school community at Butler. Despite Anna and Eleni's emphasis on the IBMYP traits, the school publicly acknowledged only one of their students, Ed, for exemplifying these qualities. Researchers have noted that IBMYP represents an opportunity for schools to increase rigor and provide greater educational access for traditionally underserved school populations, such as racial and linguistic minorities (Conner, 2008; Hoyle & Kutka, 2009). However, this is highly dependent on how the program is implemented, and as such "the IB can either work toward or against the goal of promoting intercultural dialogue, understanding, and respect" (Conner, 2008,

p. 344). Schools can construct IBMYP as open and accessible for all students or as an exclusive track designed only for students already marked as elite. Anna's comment that the same students always seemed to win these awards expressed an implicit understanding that at Butler, the hegemonic conception of the IBMYP student did not include students marked as ESL.

"As If" Spaces: Recreating Images of ESL and Giftedness

Anna and Eleni's attempts to position their students as gifted were certainly fraught with contradictions. For example, their emphasis on monolingualism and self-regulation of behavior as evidence of the IBMYP traits often worked against the purpose of their efforts to reshape the imagery of giftedness in their classroom. Yet I find a radical notion at the core of their effort—the idea that teachers through their own talk and daily practices, can begin to shift the imagery surrounding terms like "gifted," thereby shifting how these terms apply to linguistically diverse individuals. Borland (1997) emphasizes that while giftedness is often viewed as an inherent human trait that educators discover within the child, it is in fact a social construct. As such, "it gains its meaning, even its existence, from people's interactions, especially their discourse" (p. 7). Furthermore, the process of classifying students as gifted has historically omitted many types of gifts from consideration, and indeed has been based on hegemonic measures, such as IQ testing and other standardized instruments that are culturally and linguistically biased (Briggs, et al., 2008; Hatt, 2012). While Anna and Eleni's attempts to integrate the talk, the ideologies and the artifacts of IBMYP in their classroom certainly had contradictory effects, these attempts also represented a potentially significant break from

normative discourses surrounding what it means to be a gifted learner. Their efforts—reinforcement of the learner profile traits through class discussions, posters on the wall and the planner stamp system—show that both teachers understood the importance of imagery and the power of reframing it. Furthermore, they were encouraging students to act the part of being gifted. Holland, et al. (1998) note that "figured worlds rest upon people's abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized 'as if' realms" (p 49). This echoes the work of Obidah and Marsh (2006), who argue that "as if" spaces represent the potential for radical change, because they offer students the ability to practice resisting and refashioning discourses of oppression and inequality.

By encouraging their students to adopt the language and dispositions of IBMYP, Anna and Eleni took a step toward creating an "as if" space in which the arbitrary classification ESL and its accompanying imagery could be shifted toward images of giftedness. It is of great importance whether students' believe their own talents mesh with those valued in school. In her investigation of the cultural production of smartness, Hatt (2007) writes:

> The institution of schooling as a key place of socialization teaches us about what it means to be smart. From there, we look at artifacts (grades, credentials, teacher expectations, etc.) to determine whether we are smart ourselves. Then we decide if schooling or the figured world of smartness are things to invest ourselves in. (p.164)

Without conflating the terms smartness and giftedness, the above idea holds true for the student participants in my study. They certainly exhibited different levels of investment

in the teachers' conception of giftedness. For his part, Sam was confident, highly motivated and in general sought the approval of the teachers. He also sought to demonstrate this knowledge and his intelligence through class discussions, in which he exclusively used English. Noble, on the other hand, exhibited a more ambivalent stance toward his teachers' encouragement that he demonstrate the traits set forth in the IBMYP learner profile. He had a streak of independence and sometimes gave the impression of indifference, and often used Spanish in both class discussions and side conversations. Yet he also sought to participate meaningfully and gain the positive attention of the teachers during discussions about the IBMYP traits. On the other side of the continuum, Carlos demonstrated little interest in exhibiting any behaviors that might be associated with Anna and Eleni's conception of giftedness, and indeed didn't demonstrate much awareness about his classroom performance or what his grades might be. Ultimately, although the teachers introduced the possibility of a classroom space in which their students would view themselves as gifted, this environment needed further cultivation.

In order to promote the growth of "as if" spaces like the one Anna and Eleni began to create, it is indeed essential to unpack the figurative meanings behind categories like "ESL" and "gifted," as well as to explore how they are understood in local settings. These categories will not cease to exist, so we need to make sense of what we mean when we use these terms, taking for granted neither that there is some common understanding of their significance, nor that the categories are reified and impermeable. For example, according to the school district, Sam and Noble are both intermediate ESL students, yet their abilities, levels of English proficiency and academic experiences are strikingly

different. They are both framed according to one arbitrary similarity: their perceived lack of English proficiency. Accompanying this frame are well-known images—immigrant students who are probably economically disadvantaged, and whose parents are disengaged from the school community.

Like all tropes, these images provide some insight into the material conditions that many ESL students face. Yet the category and its attending images also reduce cognitive dissonance when we encounter students whose language proficiency is other than the norm, rendering difference invisible and creating the illusion of homogeneity. Placing students with such disparate experiences together under this category only highlights the arbitrariness of it. It is inevitable that in order to provide services to a diverse student population, some form of classification is necessary and even useful; indeed, it is hardly possible to make reasonable policy decisions in the absence of coherent lexical descriptions for students. But researchers and policymakers must maintain a critical awareness of the power inherent in categorizing student traits. As Thesen (1997) cautions:

> The categories have to be kept open and accurate, and their role in creating a discourse needs to be understood. The processes that should keep naming open are time consuming and require a consideration of the fullest range of social experience. (p. 490)

A system of categories must represent a means for interpreting complex phenomena, not an end unto itself, a receptacle for human experience.

Limitations/Avenues for Future Work

In a more perfect world, I would have spent more time at Butler and included more participants in my study. As many novice researchers do, I had grand plans form my research, but the reality is that I conducted a modest study. Missing are the voices of many students in room 422, most notably females. The young women in this classroom have important stories to tell, stories that would have significantly influenced my conclusions. Likewise, there are no stories from mainstream teachers, administrators and other staff with whom Noble, Ed, Charlie, Sam and Carlos interacted with on a daily basis. Just as my research would have been made fuller with a diversity of voices, a more longitudinal ethnography would provide a more "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the classroom culture. Although Sam and Noble were bound for high school in the fall after I concluded my study, the other three boys were planning to return to Butler, and I would have valued the chance to continue working with them as they navigated the world of middle school.

Although the present work is admittedly based on a narrow slice of life at Butler, the limitations of my research point to several specific avenues for future inquiry and action. First of all, more in-depth study is needed on the figured worlds of ESL classrooms. In particular, studies that cross the boundaries of the classroom door and examine broader school and community cultures can shed light on how different stakeholders make sense of what figured worlds are possible for linguistically diverse students. Secondly, it takes a tremendous amount of time, effort, and resources to create and maintain the boundaries between categories like ESL/mainstream. The question is,

"At what social cost are these boundaries perpetuated?" Disciplines like education create and maintain these categories as a kind of self-perpetuating cycle. It is crucial for researchers to examine how the categories function and what imagery they create. Moreover, researchers must remain cognizant of how their own terminology may function to reinforce hegemonic categorizations of diverse learners. When I view Sam and Noble as gifted or as ESL, what else does that prevent me from seeing? Finally, teachers and learners are important stakeholders in the process of identifying and categorizing student abilities. There is a pressing need for research and policy that can envision ways for these stakeholders to be involved in the process.

Coda

I currently work in an ESOL (yet another category!) department at a community college in the same metro area as Butler Middle School. Earlier this semester during a department meeting, as a we poring over student achievement data, a colleague asked, "Are students always LEP? Does this label just follow them wherever they go?" This discussion underscores the significance of the questions I have raised in this study. ESL Students change as they grow older, move to different cities, pass standardized tests and become more proficient English speakers and writers. Nevertheless, because of their Otherness, they remain ESL for institutional purposes. Lopez (2003) has shown how schools are "racing" and "gendering" spaces—that is, students do not simply come to school as black or white, male or female (although this is certainly part of the equation). In fact, the everyday practices in classrooms constitute what it means to be of a certain race or gender. These patterns of activity shape our thinking about a Latino or a Latina

is. Likewise, the daily practices in room 422 and in Butler as a whole shaped the boys into ESL students and reinforced perceptions of their identity. It was a vicious cycle—they were placed into Anna and Eleni's classroom because they were labeled as ESL, and their daily presence in the class served to reconfirm this status.

One paradox in the situation at Butler is that Anna and Eleni's situation vis-à-vis the district's ESL placement process mirrors that of the students. All the stakeholders in room 422 were isolated from the decisions that led to the identification and labeling of ESL students. Anna and Eleni's role in the institutional framework is to teach the ESL students, not to use their professional judgment to evaluate whether these students should be classified as ESL. Moreover, the classifications often appear arbitrary, designed to obfuscate rather than clarify. As Eleni sarcastically remarked about the newly minted English Learner (EL) designation, "Let's confuse everybody just a little bit more. I don't think they're confused enough, so let's make it more difficult for content teachers to know who we're talking about." She felt that the new label would be of little benefit, and instead would only confuse the issue of student identity. Just when teachers think they know what an ESL student is, the sands shift as the definition is changed from above.

By divorcing classroom practitioners from the process of identifying students as ESL, institutions further distance these teachers from decisions that affect their own ability to provide the services that they see as necessary. Yet Anna and Eleni interact with these students on a daily basis, evaluate their language development, and see their incremental progress. Should they not be included in the process of determining whether the students need service? In fact, their situation mirrors that of their students—just as

the boys in room 422 do not exert control over how they are categorized, Anna and Eleni are subject to arbitrary rules and regulations of the district that prevent them from being as effective as they could be. The teachers and students alike inhabit a metaphorical space that has, to a great extent, been constructed by others with whom they have little contact. Hatt (2007) and Rubin (2009) have argued that teachers are in a powerful position to shape the figured worlds of the classroom. Giftedness can be constructed in many ways, and students take notice of how teachers construct it. Likewise, being "ESL" need not mean being incomplete, lacking a crucial piece of a mythical linguistic whole. Although it is important to note that students possess a degree of agency in building their academic and social identities, it is equally important to note that this agency is limited by the constraints teachers place upon them.

Thus, the ways that teachers position students have material consequences for their academic performance. It matters greatly whether Sam, Charlie, Noble, Ed and Carlos are positioned as "bad students," "gifted students" or "ESL students," because each of these positions is imbued with cultural and historical ramifications. As Urrietta (2007) notes, "in figured worlds people encounter narratives borne out of historical significance (both oppressive and liberating) as well as a distribution of power, rank, and prestige (or the lack thereof) that they either accept, reject, or negotiate to varying degrees" (p. 111). Therefore, it is crucial that teachers and students work together in order to create figured worlds of possibility rather than limitation.

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