MINORITY TALK: ETHNOGRAPHY OF A MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Many factors contribute to the minority achievement gap, and intercultural communication is one of them. Although research repeatedly examines miscommunication due to differences among cultures in classroom communication, this study focuses specifically on communicative competency in these multiethnic settings. This thesis documents “minority talk” – language and communication’s changes in the increasingly multicultural youth setting, sharing features of minority variations of English, code switching, and ratifying such language use. I discuss participation, language sharing, nonverbal communication, and identity in the multicultural classroom’s community of practice. I place special importance on the changes in communication between a single cultural group and the intercultural youth community, and conclude that future research must focus on multiethnic youth classroom settings and teacher education must be expanded to include understanding of communicative differences between cultures. I finally recommend that school policies reflect such further education of teachers.

(Intercultural Communication, Ethnography of Education, Discourse Analysis, Classroom Communication, Culture and Communication, Education Policy)
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to:

My parents, who support and love me in everything that I do;

My grandmother, Sidney, who fostered my love of learning;

My advisor, Professor Dedaic, who inspires me to do even better;

and the wonderful students who participated in my study.

Thank you,

Hope
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Chapter One: Introduction: Achievement Gap and Culture
The minority achievement gap is one of the most pressing issues in American education today, and continues to be at the center of education research, policy, and debate. Whether or not standards-based reform will positively affect the gap, such policy has brought it to the forefront of education debate. Kuber writes that “it is becoming increasingly apparent that the nation cannot raise achievement to internationally competitive levels without addressing the achievement gap” (Kuber, 2001, p. 10), a focus of the Obama administration’s education goals. The gap has been in the center of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization debate of 2010, and was a critical part of No Child Left Behind. NCLB, passed by bipartisan majorities in 2001, focused on closing the minority achievement gap through requiring standardized testing. In early 2010, President Barack Obama called for a major change in education law that would judge schools on whether or not they were closing the achievement gap, requiring state intervention in even a high performing school that is not addressing the achievement gap. Not only is this gap in education between Whites and minorities an issue today, but as ethnic minority populations grows to become the numerical majority by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, intensifying the need for solutions.

The 2008 National Assessment of Educational Progress report depicts the current gap in the United States. Although this “Nation’s Report Card” shows some improvement for all students in reading assessments, many argue that it is the level of fluency required to pass that has changed instead (Ravitz, 2010). The NAEP assessments were administered to 26,000 students, and show that white students, however, “had higher scores than Black students, on average, on all assessments” (Vanneman, Hamilton,
Anderson, and Rahman, 2009). The study shows that at the state level, there was an achievement gap at the fourth grade level in mathematics in 46 states, and in 44 states for reading (Vanneman, et al). The test also demonstrates that Black and Hispanic\textsuperscript{1} children are behind in reading and math proficiency, equal to two or three years in school (Rampey, Dion, and Donahue, 2009). No Child Left Behind has required assessments in math and reading, and while many assessment scores have improved since 2007, only four states have narrowed the gap (Vanneman, et al, 2009, p. iv). No matter the subject or measurement, the gap persists.

Reports have compared White students to their minority counterparts in different manners. First, comparisons have been made by age. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that on the reading trends in 1999, “the average score of Black students at age seventeen was roughly the same of that of White students at age thirteen” (Kober, 2001, p. 9). Scores are also compared related to grade-level. The NAEP stated that the “average score for Hispanic nine-year-olds was the equivalent of more than three grade levels behind that of White nine-year olds” (Kober, 2001, p. 9). Whichever way the data is analyzed, there is a severe difference in the academic achievement of minorities in American public schools. Not only are students underachieving in the classroom, but are also dropping out of high school at alarming rates. The high school dropout rate for the second generation of Latino youth and Blacks is 9%, which is higher than the rate for Whites (6%) and Asians (4%) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

\textsuperscript{1} The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably in this report, as per the Pew Hispanic Research Center.
Hispanics have been looked to in recent years because of the growing number in the United States. According to the Pew Hispanic Center’s 2009 Report, the high school dropout rate among Latino youths is nearly three times as high as it is among White youths and nearly double the rate among Blacks. Moreover, the American Enterprise Institute’s 2010 report states “51 percent of Hispanic students who start college complete a bachelor's degree in six years, compared to 59 percent of White students” (Kelly, Schneider, and Carey, 2010, p. 4). Even many federally designated "Hispanic-Serving" institutions are graduating less than half of their Hispanic students” (Kelly, Schneider, and Carey, 2010, p. 5). It is clear that this group’s achievement must be addressed.

President Obama has stated his goal of having the United States lead the world in academic achievement, and it is clear that addressing the minority achievement gap is a first step. If not, it will widen, as it is predicted that minorities will become the numerical majority in the U.S. by 2042 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). More specifically, the population of America’s children will be 62% minority in 2050, up from 44% in 2008. According a 2008 report by the Pew Hispanic Center, the number of Hispanic students almost has doubled from 1990-2006, which is 60% of the growth in public school enrollment. There are almost 10 million Hispanic students in public K-12 programs, and make up one in five public school students in the United States. They reiterate the Census Bureau’s prediction of growth of minorities, particularly Hispanics, and claim that by 2050, “there will be more school-age Hispanic children than school-age non-Hispanic White children’ (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008, i).

Every racial/ethnic group has made achievement gains in the past thirty years, and education policy has focused on closing the achievement gap through higher
accountability of schools. No Child Left Behind, for example, required that students pass state standards, or be labeled a “failing school” – what Education Secretary Arne Duncan has called “perverse incentives”. Critics argue that many states began simply lowering standards to meet adequate yearly progress, with teachers focusing on the tests rather than quality educating of the students. Even changes in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act are setting assessment standards rather than addressing what is actually happening within the classrooms.

Current education policy has not been proven to be effective in improving it though, and thus we must look at what is happening within the classrooms. Many schools are starting to focus on cultural differences in the classroom, and creating a top-down approach to cultural competency. Although policy, committees, and goals may be created to increase such competencies in the schools, research does not show the effect of such a focus on actual classroom communication. Furthermore, it is unclear as to whether an understanding or goal of fostering cultural competency can actually improve minority students’ participation, understanding, or even achievement.

While citing many factors contributing to this particular gap, the researchers at AEI claim that a major challenge for Hispanic college students is cultural, in that “familial and social ties to home are particularly strong” (19). The idea of culture being an important factor has been cited by other studies as well. The Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2004 National Survey of Latinos in Education finds similar factors affecting educational achievement for Latinos. In fact, the survey results cite cultural factors again, that many Latinos “worry Hispanic students lag because teachers are not able to bridge cultural gaps in the classroom” (Pew Hispanic Center,
2004, p. 3). While there are numerous contributors to this gap, researchers and policymakers agree that cultural differences play a role, which will be discussed in this thesis.

Cultural differences in communication affect academic achievement for minorities. This paper applies theories of cultural and communicative competence to an ethnographic study of classrooms in a multicultural high school in order to document cultural differences in communication. While most education ethnographies related to cultural differences in the classroom have focused on a single ethnic group’s communicative style, there is a need for research on how students communicate in the increasingly multicultural classrooms across the United States. As Paris (2009) writes, there is an increase in “multiethnic youth space” – what he defines as “a social and cultural space centered on youth communication within and between ethnicities – a space of contact where youth challenge and reinforce notions of difference and division through language choice and attitudes” (2009, p. 3). There is a lack of research on social language in this “space”, especially in a classroom environment, and this thesis documents communication in such a space.

**Organization of the Thesis**

This study is two-fold. It compares an extremely diverse, multicultural classroom in a high school to a majority Latino classroom, taught by teachers with extremely different participation methods. I explore participation and discourse style, varieties of English, and nonverbal communication in a multicultural, multiethnic community. I analyze how students negotiate the floor, participate, alter communication style between settings, and share linguistic resources across cultures while constructing individual cultural identities.
Second, I seek to determine if mandating “Cultural Competence” and “Courageous Conversations” affects classroom communication or achievement.

In the next chapter I provide theoretical underpinnings and review of the literature in this field. I offer the definitions of culture and cultural competency used in this thesis, and how they relate to communication, both verbal and non-verbal, and communicative competency. I discuss the major studies in classroom communication, and highlight key distinctions in communication between cultures.

Chapter Three describes setting, data, and methodology. I focus on the minority achievement gap in a public school system praised for its addressing of the gap and commitment to diversity. It has been the locale for national education speeches by the President and Education Secretary, as it has made headway toward academic equality. Although ranked nationally and lauded for its success, a gap between White and minority testing scores and graduation rates persists. I describe the County, County School system, the High School, and the classrooms in which I performed ethnographic observations. I then explain the data that I collected throughout the fall of 2009, and the methodology used collect and analyze it.

My analysis is divided into three sections: participation, language sharing, and language and identity. In Chapter Four, I compare how students participate and how often, competition for the floor, turn taking, and interruption in ninth and twelfth grade classrooms. I focus on the difference between a truly multiethnic space (twelfth grade) and the majority Latino space (ninth grade), as well as the difference between a teacher who uses teacher-nomination of students (twelfth grade) versus the instructional conversation method (ninth grade). All of the students are members of this multicultural
community, yet individual situations yield diverse experiences in participation. Finally, I discuss the students’ participation in relation to their academic success.

Chapter Five explains how students in a culturally diverse community share linguistic resources between groups. Non-African American students employ features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), while all students code switch between varieties of English and different languages altogether. The issue of ratification is crucial to the idea of language sharing; not all cultures or communities will ratify it in the classroom community.

The final analysis, Chapter Six, focuses on the relationship between language and identity. Although the multiethnic youth space creates overlap and sharing between communicative styles, it also causes students, in this important stage of cultural identity development, to use language and communication to construct an individual cultural identity. I consider particularly the Latino students at Multicultural High School, and the manner in which they construct identity through communication in the shared multiethnic space of the classroom.

I close the thesis with main conclusions on how youth in a multicultural community participate in classroom communication, how they share their linguistic resources, and how they use language to construct their individual cultural identities. I highlight the creation of a community of practice in which the teachers do not participate. Students share features of minority dialects between cultures, yet Hispanic students will not ratify the use of Spanish by other ethnicities. African American students in classroom settings do not use African American Vernacular English, while students of other cultural backgrounds do use its features in any setting. Finally, linguistic resources, topics, and
vocabulary construct “Minority Talk,” a term that I coin. I draw conclusions on whether a top-down approach to cultural competence truly affects daily classroom interactions. Finally, I make recommendations for practical application of such research, as well as policy implications and future research.
Chapter Two – Literature Review

I have discussed, in the introductory chapter, the achievement gap in public schools and the goals of this thesis. Although there are many factors contributing to inequality in education, a persistent issue is that of cultural differences, particularly their manifestation in communication styles in the classroom. I now discuss theoretical underpinnings and studies in which such theories are applied in education research. My study applies theories of cultural and communicative competence to an ethnographic investigation of classrooms in a multicultural high school. It seeks to determine students’ communicative and cultural competency in a multicultural classroom.

I use ethnography of communication, paired with discourse and conversation analysis. Previous research has shown that students with a communication style of a culture different than that of the teacher can lead to miscommunication and lack of academic achievement. My goal is to document communication in a multicultural high school classroom that has emphasized cultural competency and achievement of minorities. This research compares a truly diverse, multicultural classroom with one that is majority Latino and questions if students alter communication styles between different groups and situations in the school environment. The relationship between language, identity, and community in the classroom, and comparisons of the multicultural versus the majority-Latino classrooms can show us how the increasingly diverse classroom communication is constantly changing to form a minority youth community of practice. While the school system has focused on cultural awareness and competence, it is crucial to document what is really happening within these multicultural classrooms in order to improve policies and practice to provide the best learning situations for students.
My study draws on applied and theoretical works that discuss the cultural and communicative competence, classroom communication, and multicultural communication. In what follows, I investigate and summarize what has been done in the field of multicultural education classroom research and how the theories from interactional sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, and a multilingual environment apply to the research I am proposing in this thesis. I start with the multicultural classroom, focusing on studies of cultural and communication issues that arise in such a diverse classroom. Next, I discuss classroom interaction studies, including language, non-verbal communication, and competencies.

**Classroom Communication**

Students arrive in a classroom with a culturally constructed manner of communication that often differs from that of a “standard” classroom communication pattern, and thus often causes misunderstanding of minority students’ communication. Philips (1986) discusses the traditional Anglo structure of classroom interaction, which is helpful in understanding differences between cultural norms and expectations of classroom and learning and teacher's roles. Philips (1972) defines classroom “participant structures” – the teachers’ “ways of arranging verbal interaction with students” (Philips 1972, p. 377). In this section, I expand on Philips’ idea of the traditional classroom structure as it applies to this study.

In the typical classroom, there is a distinction between teacher and student and the types of talk and communication that is acceptable between groups and within groups. The one teacher usually sustains one end of the floor – as either addressee or addressor –
and is either the last or next person to speak. Talk is regulated; students do not face each other and cannot read each other’s nonverbal cues. The teacher controls shifts by cutting off a student or attending to another. There are only three ways where there is "equal opportunity" (Philips 1986, p.77) for the students to talk: in a choral response, in a "round" (one student after another), or in the "first come, first served" format where students raise their hand to gain the floor (Philips 1986, p.78). There are also three major communication arrangements: full class interactions, teacher and small group, and teacher and individual student. Interaction in teacher-less small groups “differs markedly from the official interaction controlled by the teacher” (Philips 1986, p.91). In full class communication, teachers instruct appropriate body alignment and posture as well as the proper way to allocate student turns at talk. Of course, the “proper” way is also constructed, varying between cultures.

Jordan (1985) describes cultural compatibility related to education as the need for classroom processes to be compatible with the cultures of the students. She argues, “educational practices must mesh with the children’s culture…so that academically desired behaviors are produced and undesired behaviors are avoided” (110). The existence of a “standard” classroom communication in the United States creates a need for a competence in understanding cultures and their forms of communication.

**The Multicultural Classroom**

This thesis focuses on classrooms with students and teachers of a diverse set of home cultures, and thus home communication styles. The United States, including its public school classroom, is becoming increasingly diverse, with predictions that minority ethnic groups will outnumber the White population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).
Because schools are charged with educating increasingly multicultural classrooms, in this section I review major studies in communication of multicultural classrooms.

A number of studies focus on the language use in a multiethnic space. Rampton’s (1995) language use in a multiethnic youth community in Britain shows how language and ethnicity function in a multiethnic space. Rampton describes how individuals adopt “plural ethnicities” that blur the lines between singular ethnicities, sharing language, social rules, and cultural norms.

Paris (2009) explores the linguistic and cultural ways that students of all ethnic backgrounds in multiethnic urban American high schools use features of AAVE. Paris describes this “interethnic youth communication” as a linguistic and cultural sharing that needs more research, necessitated by demographic shifts. Paris coins the term “multiethnic youth space” as a “social and cultural space centered on youth communication within and between ethnicities – a space of contact where youth challenge and reinforce notions of difference and division through language choices and attitudes” (430). Paris expands on Rampton’s plural ethnicities, arguing that it is actually a “language sharing” that must be ratified by the traditional speakers as authentic.

Paris’ study of this multiethnic high school describes the use of AAVE features by students of other ethnicities and how these various groups react to and feel about such sharing. The African American students at the school agree that “Every Black person is bilingual” (432) in terms of a knowledge of AAVE and a more Standard English. The study focuses on grammar and lexicon typical to AAVE and how the Latino students adopt them. These features are used by multiple ethnicities, and must be ratified by the traditional speakers: “African American youth were keenly aware that their language was
used by Latinos/as and Pacific Islanders…[it was] generally seen as unproblematic and caused far more social cohesion than social fissures in youth space” (440). Paris claims that this sharing of language is important on many levels. First, AAVE is acting as a unifier among ethnicities – creating cohesion and school identity within this one high school. He goes on to explain: “these young people were passing their language into youth space and, through sharing it, ensuring its interethnic survival and importance in the community” (443). In this thesis, I document sharing of language and identity constructors in a multiethnic and multilingual setting.

**Bicultural Classroom Communication**

This thesis compares a multicultural classroom with a majority-Latino, almost bicultural classroom. In this section, I discuss major works in bicultural classroom communication studies.

Many African-Americans not only use with a different grammar or lexicon from mainstream English, but also a different style of communication, and students can be misunderstood or interrupted because of these differences. One such feature is “topic-associating” style, made up of “implicitly associated personal anecdotes” (Michaels, 1981, p. 429), in contrast to standard White “topic centered” style that progresses linearly. Michaels and Collins (1981) found that Black children's narratives during sharing time were often interrupted by teachers who saw their discourse as without purpose.

Li (2000) and Watson (1975) provide examples of Asian American and Hawaiian students’ miscommunications in the classroom to create a clear picture of possible cultural differences that may arise in my study. Their studies find communication
differences in organization, structure, hierarchical systems, and narrative between Anglo and other cultures. For example, when Chinese students are put in situations with American teachers who encourage oral discourse, students often feel that the teachers are "unsystematic, disorganized, shallow, or unstructured" (Li, 2000, p. 15). Hawaiian culture has a distinct communicative routine, the ‘talk story’ that is described as a “rambling personal experience narrative mixed with folk materials” (Watson, 1975, p. 54) and involves joint performance and cooperative production by two or more participants at a time. Although this thesis does not primarily discuss Asian or Hawaiian students, this discussion of such differences is important in understanding possibilities of miscommunication in a multicultural setting.

Latino students in standard American classrooms also face difficulties because of differences in culture. Delgado-Gaitan (1994) discusses the importance of critical thinking in the United States, characterized by verbal analysis, questioning, and argumentation, and its direct clash with the importance of respect in Mexican culture. McCollum (1989) finds that there is a striking difference in the structural framework of discourse and that Puerto Rican students might be at "cross-purposes" with a teacher in a standard American classroom or even be seen as socially inappropriate, and their behavior as "indicators of social or emotional maladjustment" (153). Melzi explains that Latino cultures emphasize the group over the individual, and that this is reflected in discourse construction (156) where Central American mothers are concerned with teaching their children to establish and maintain a dialogue, a conversation. In contrast, European American mothers are more interested in their children organizing a structured
narrative (156). In such bicultural comparisons, the possibility of miscommunication between teachers and students is evident.

**Warm Springs Indians**

My study is inspired by Philips’ (1989) highly regarded work on the Warm Springs Indians, but in a multicultural environment instead of her comparison of Anglo and Warm Springs Indian communication. This section describes Philips’ application of cultural competency theoretical framework in an educational ethnography.

Philips (1983) argues in her study on the Warm Springs Indians that children are "enculturated in their preschool years into modes of organizing the transmission of verbal messages that are culturally different from those of Anglo middle-class children" and that it is this difference that makes it "more difficult for them to then comprehend verbal messages conveyed through the American school's Anglo middle-class modes of organizing classroom interaction" (4). She examined verbal and nonverbal communicative differences between Warm Springs Indians and Anglo children, including the manner of securing attention, the connection between talk and physical activity, who participates, and how. Philips also notes nonverbal differences in movement, gaze, volume, listening behavior, or amount of attention paid to peers. Warm Springs students did not compete for the floor, violated Anglo rules for turn taking, and participated less when the whole class is engaged in interaction with the teacher (p. 119). This ethnographic study provides specific differences in culturally distinct communication styles in the classroom. I now provide theoretical framework of language and culture for practical education research.
There are many definitions of culture (Hall, Levine and Adelman, Byram, Nemetz-Robinson, Freiburg et al, Geertz, Gee, Agar, among others). I consider Agar’s to be the most appropriate for my study because of his view of culture as open, fluid, and changing. Agar defines culture as based on perceptions of differences between groups – and thus involves more than one culture to make such distinctions. Therefore, Agar claims that culture is plural because it only “becomes visible when an outsider encounters it” (Agar, 2006). I choose this as my working definition in this thesis, as throughout my analysis cultures create differences worth analyzing, and such differences are fluid, open, and changing as the different groups meet in the multicultural space of the classroom.

“Culture is communication and communication is culture,” claimed Edward Hall in his book *The Silent Language*, a system of “learned and shared behavior” (Hall, 1973, 47). Hall moved from the traditional anthropological definition of culture and put it in a linguistic framework, treating culture itself as a form of communication. Agar agrees that the two are so entwined that he coins the term “languaculture”. However it is defined, every person has culture –differences in ways of communicating, ways of framing situations, and ways of thinking about things. Levine and Adelman (1993) compare it to an iceberg, where one only can see the tip, explaining that things such as language, food, or appearance are visible, but there is a great deal hidden beneath the surface – communication style, beliefs, values, attitudes, or perceptions. Schneider explains that culture is a system of symbols and meanings (1997). Agar (1994) agrees, defining culture as a system of frames – an intellectual set of ways of looking at the world. In fact, “cultural knowledge and experience shape behaviors and influence expectations for and
interpretations of other people’s behaviors. It is clear that culture is made up of not one, but many things, and that culture is concerned with the message: sets, isolates, and patterns.

For this research, Hall’s description of cultural differences in learning is also key: “people reared in different cultures learn to learn differently” (47). Hall explains that, for example, American culture stresses “doing as a principle of learning” and that the Japanese will “guide the hand of the pupil, while our teachers usually aren’t permitted to touch the other person” (47). Children are not born with a culture, but must learn it. Culture is “everything you have ever learned about how to communicate and how to think about things” (Tannen, 1984, p. 2). Transitioning between educational systems is difficult, and I assert that it is a difficulty even between our own American classrooms. I now discuss how children learn such culture.

According to Saville-Troike and Kleifgen (1986), children learn social cues and nonverbal signals to become a competent member of a culture, including what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately. Schieffelin and Ochs (1996) explain that language socialization seeks to find how persons are “socialized to become competent members of social groups and the role of language in this process” and thus studies two major parts of socialization – through the use of language and to use language (252). Bernstein (1970), takes it a step further, explaining that socialization is “the process whereby a child acquires a specific cultural identity, and his responses to such an identity”. This identity is affected by sociocultural and historical context,” which is all of a person’s experiences within culture, community, schools, family, media, and jobs (24). These institutions work together to “[sensitize] the child to the various orderings of society as these are made
substantive in the various roles/he is expected to play” (25). Socialization teaches the child how to initiate, structure, and maintain social interaction and how to gain acceptance, status, and identity within the group.

As Le Roux (2001) writes, “attitudes are not innate, but are learned. Knowledge and feelings about others affect one’s behavior towards them. During the process of socialization, inter-group attitudes form as the child gradually acquires the beliefs about different groups, together with feelings and behavior patterns towards them usually adopted from the examples set by other members of one’s in-group” (Le Roux, 2001, p. 286). Children are taught their culture, socialized into from the moment that they are born. It is clear that children learn their “languaculture” from an early age. When the culturally constructed styles of verbal and non-verbal communication differ from that of their classroom, difficulties arise.

**Intercultural Communication**

I have shown that communication is intrinsically tied to culture, requiring discussion of intercultural communication. Beneke (2000) describes intercultural communication as “the use of significantly different linguistic codes and contact between people holding significantly different sets of values and models of the world” (pp. 108-109). Such intercultural and cross-cultural communication is crucial to education. Much research has examined cross-cultural communication between adults speaking varieties of the same language (Erickson and Shultz, 1982). Kleifgen and Saville-Troike (1986) discuss cross-cultural communication in elementary classrooms and the difficulties that arose because of cultural differences in scripts. Such script differences included setting, roles and
responsibilities, activity organization, curriculum sequence and content, and rules or expectations for behavior.

**Cultural Competence and Communicative Competence**

In order to avoid miscommunication because of differences in culture, one must possess competencies in these areas. Saville-Troike (1989) explains, “communicative competence within the ethnography of communication usually refers to the communicative knowledge and skill shared by a speech community” (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 21). There is more to effective communication than grammatically correct utterances.

Hymes (1972) described a need for learning more than grammar too, and was the first to insisting that second language learners must acquire not just basic grammar of the sentence but all the communicative skills of a native speaker – communicative competence. He explains,

> We have then to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others... (Hymes 1972: 277-8).

Communicative competence can also be defined as Goodenough (1976) did as the ability of a member of a culture to use the language in a socially appropriate manner. Canale and Swain (1980) identified the elements of communicative competence as consisting of linguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. Van Elk (1986) added two more components to the above
list: socio-cultural competence, the ability to function in several cultures, and social competence, meaning familiarity with differences in social customs, confidence, empathy and motivation to communicate with others.

Saville-Troike (1989) defines communicative competence as both knowledge and expectation of “who may or may not speak in certain settings, when to speak and when to remain silent, to whom one may speak, how one may talk to persons of different statuses and roles, what nonverbal behaviors are appropriate in various contexts, what the routines for turn-taking are in conversation, how to ask for and give information, how to request, how to offer or decline assistance or cooperation, how to give commands, how to enforce discipline, and the like – in short, everything involving the use of language and other communicative modalities in particular social settings” (18). Saville-Troike also describes three major aspects of communicative competence as including linguistic knowledge, which includes verbal and nonverbal elements, interactional skills, and cultural knowledge, which includes social structure, values, and attitudes. The author also discusses the special case of multilingual speakers’ communicative competence. This includes “knowledge of rules for the appropriate choice of language and for switching between languages, given a particular social context and communicative intent, as well as for the intra-lingual shifting among styles and registers which is common to the competence of all speakers” (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 21) – dubbed ‘intercultural communicative competence’.

Liu (2001) labels “adaptive cultural competence” as a goal for second language learners and includes “social identity negotiation skills and culture-sensitivity knowledge”. Byram (1997) also defined intercultural communicative competence as
knowledge is "of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (p. 51). Byram and Fleming (1998) claim that one who has intercultural competence "has knowledge of one, or, preferably, more cultures and social identities and has the capacity to discover and relate to new people from other contexts for which they have not been prepared directly" (p. 9). Fantini (2000) describes five constructs that should be developed for successful intercultural communication: awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge and language proficiency. Furthermore, he also cites the following commonly used attributes to describe the intercultural speaker: respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, motivation, a sense of humor, tolerance for ambiguity, and a willingness to suspend judgment (p. 28). It is evident that such competencies are necessary by all participating parties for full communication.

Language and Language Attitudes in the Classroom

Although many believe that there is a more “correct” version of English, sociolinguists have determined that the many variations of English are linguistically equal. Historically, many have believed in the idea of verbal or language deprivation – that speakers of minority dialects were deprived as children and therefore inferior in their manner of speech. However, research clearly supports the position that variation in language is a “natural reflection of cultural and community differences” (Labov, 1972). This deficit theory myth is dangerous, distracting educators from focusing on the differences between variations of English and how to best address them to ensure academic achievement for all students.
The common approach assumes that “Standard English” is the only proper form of language and tries to do away with the child’s home language and teachers will assume the “correctivist” approach. Because classrooms are not culturally or linguistically monolithic, this approach tends to exclude those students who are not fluent in “Standard English.” A dialect is variety of a language that is associated with a particular regional or social group” and does not mean “a lesser, informal, or ungrammatical way of speaking” (Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, 2006, p. 30). Still, language attitudes remain strong in the United States, and even in classrooms. Haddix (2008) found that these attitudes remain true in American schools today. Although I did not note outwardly judgmental attitudes toward language use, but there was often correction to Standard English in conversation. More specifically, Wheeler and Swords (2001) discuss the common response to language variation in English as diagnosing the child’s home speech as ‘poor English’ or ‘bad grammar,’ “finding that the child does not know how to show plurality, possession, and tense,’ or the child ‘has problems’ with these” (p. 2). DeStefano and Rentel (1975) stress that the most important thing for teachers to understand is that “variation in language is natural [and] reflects a powerful rule of linguistic survival: language either changes to reflect the new experiences of a vital culture or it does; for to remain useful, a language must be capable of expressing the abstractions and discoveries of a people” (p. 336).

Michaels and Collins (1984) describe teachers’ reactions to children that use other conversational and participation constructions in discourse and narrative styles. The children are often mistreated or misevaluated, and thus the discourse style differences lead to a gap in classroom interaction and learning. Although teachers do not
purposefully treat students differently, there are unintentional mismatches in the style of conversation (Michaels, 1981) that lead to unfair treatment or assessment. Lastly, it is shown that acquiring a new discourse style is not easy for children and many do not gain access to helpful instruction as to acquiring different styles (Michaels, 1981). This large difference between home or community language style and that of the classroom creates challenges for teacher and student. If a student has the same discourse style as the teacher, the student easily meets the expectations. If there is a mismatch in styles, the student is often misinterpreted or just interrupted. Negative attitudes can affect a student’s school performance and success.

McDermott and Gospodinoff (1981) found if the teacher and the children are linguistically alienated from each other, their dialects “take center stage and the teacher and the children will battle each other about the proper way to speak up” (212-218). Lippi-Green (1997) describes standard language ideology as a “bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions” (47). Johnson (2000) agrees, and expands: that modern discussion about diversity often only scratches the surface and ignores the “rich cultural underpinnings of all discourse” (xi). An understanding of language attitudes in the classroom is critical for this study, as I describe how teachers’ use of Standard American English may affect students’ altering of language between settings, as well as how attitudes in a multicultural setting may be changing, due to the sharing of linguistic features between ethnicities.

**Conclusion**

This chapter defines culture and communication, as well as their respective competencies. I discussed the major theories of intercultural communication, and the use
of Agar’s concept of culture as the groundwork for this study. Finally, I explained how communication styles have caused miscommunications and misunderstandings from participants of different cultures and how this affects classroom participation and even academic achievement. In the following chapter I explain the setting, data, and methodology used in this study.
Chapter Three: Ethnography

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the ethnographic context, or setting, for my analysis of culture and communication in the classroom. This ethnographic study was performed at what we will call “Multicultural High School”, which is in Arlington County, Virginia, the closest suburb to Washington, DC. In this chapter, I describe the access to data collection and situate the two classrooms in which I performed my ethnographic observation within a larger context. Finally, I discuss the data and the methods of analysis – discourse and conversation analysis. I conclude with a note on ethnographer bias.

Setting

I collected data in an ethnographic study performed in two high school classrooms in Northern Virginia. I start with the wider context of this school, and follow with more specifics, such as the daily routines and activities, teachers, class size, class makeup, and general structure of the classroom.

Northern Virginia

Northern Virginia is a group of cities and counties south and west of Washington, DC. Of Virginia, it is the region of the highest income as well as the most diverse – in both ethnic groups and nationalities. Northern Virginia also includes six of the twenty highest-income counties in the United States, including the number-one ranked Fairfax County, number nine-ranked Arlington County.

The public schools in Northern Virginia are, according to U.S. News and World Report, some of the best ones in America (Terrell, 2009). In fact, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology has held the number one slot in these national
rankings for three years in a row (2006-2009). Four of the schools in nearby Fairfax County, Virginia are ranked in the top schools as well, and this region of Virginia consistently places in national and state academic rankings (Wolsey, 2008).

Arlington County is the ninth richest county in the United States, according to Forbes Magazine (Wolsey, 2008). The population of the County is 210,000, as of July 2009, with a population density of 8,140 persons per square mile, and a 10.8% increase since 2000. There are many listed community resources, including 200 parks and playgrounds, eight libraries, and 86 miles of biking and jogging trails.

As evident in the county’s vision, the county prides itself on diversity and inclusion. The Arlington County website states this vision as:

“Arlington will be a diverse and inclusive world-class urban community with secure, attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods where people unite to form a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important.”

The website also claims that “Arlington County has the highest percentage of people with bachelor's or graduate/professional degrees in the Washington DC area (after the fellow Northern Virginia city of Falls Church), almost one-fifth of Arlington County's population is Hispanic or Latino - the highest percentage in the Washington metropolitan area, and over one-third of Arlington County residents speak a language other than English at home” (APS website).

The median household income is $91,896, whereas the per capita income is $64,504. 33% of residents hold Bachelor Degrees and 34% hold graduate degrees. “CNN Money” ranked Arlington as the most educated city in 2006 with 35.7% of residents having held graduate degrees. Finally, the County website focuses on education,
proclaiming that “about 90.1% of all graduating high school seniors in Arlington County go on to attend college”.

There are 35 public schools in Arlington County. According to the Arlington Public Schools website, Arlington Public Schools (APS)’ students come from 127 countries and speak 105 different languages. APS is the 15th largest school division of Virginia’s 132, and the 2008 Newsweek/Washington Post Challenge listed all of the APS high schools in the top 2% in the United States, for the fourth year in the row, and Washingtonian magazine named it a “national model for teaching diverse students”. There are three major public schools in the county, two of which are in North Arlington, and the one that I focus on in this study, that is in South Arlington.

Diversity in the Arlington Public Schools

According to the County website, APS teaches a diverse group of students from 128 nations that speak 95 languages. Figure 3.1 displays the breakdown of Arlington Public School students by ethnicity.

![Arlington Public School Students](chart)

Inclusion, diversity, and cultural awareness are a main focus, as shown in policy and Councils focused on this matter. The County defines cultural competence as
a set of attitudes, skills, behaviors, and policies that enable organizations, such as
the Arlington Public Schools, and staff to work effectively in cross-cultural
situations. It reflects the ability to acquire and use knowledge, beliefs, attitudes,
practices and communication patterns of others to improve services, strengthen
programs, increase community participation, and close the gaps in a given area
relative to the status among diverse populations. Simply stated, cultural
competence is the level of knowledge-based skills required to work effectively
with persons from particular groups.

The “Council for Cultural Competence” focuses on education about and an
understanding of diversity. “Diversity is about creating an equitable, hospitable,
appreciative, safe and inclusive school district environment-one that embraces the full
spectrum of all community members’ contributions,” states the council’s page on the
County School’s Website. The goals of the council for cultural competency include
creating a climate with dignity and respect, exploring perspectives and contributions of
all cultures, and implementing policies and procedures that address diversity.

A program called “Courageous Conversations” where administrators, teachers, and
students participate in conversations about race. Former Superintendent Smith explained
“if we're really going to make a difference with the achievement gap, we really need to
confront directly issues of race” (Bahrampour, 2007). This focus on Cultural Competency
is crucial to my ethnographic study, as I highlight its application in the classroom.

Community

It is also important to take into account the community’s involvement in minority
academic achievement. In October 2009, I attended and observed discourse and
interaction at the County’s “Latino Education Summit,” held at one of the high schools as a part of Hispanic Heritage Month. The County Public Schools held this summit in order to create dialogue and interest in improving academic achievement, especially graduation rate of Latinos in the county. Hundreds of parents and students, as well as almost all members of the school board, principals of the high schools, and the superintendent attended this upbeat, yet emotional event. In a video presentation made by Latino students, there was a real focus on changing the culture and view of education in the Latino community. More than one student described the focus on working and earning a living as outweighing the importance of going to school - especially for recent immigrants and children of immigrants. The guest speakers, panel of parents and students, as well as video presentation, were done in both English and Spanish. Although higher than the national average, there was also an emphasis on improving the graduation rate of Latino students. There was a real feeling of community and cohesion in the auditorium that evening. Although many recognized the language barrier in the academic success of Latino students, the overall message was that the culture of Latinos in this area needed to be changed to emphasize the importance of a high school education and beyond.

**Multicultural High School**

This study was performed at one of the three major high schools in the county. Located in South Arlington, it is the most racially diverse of the schools. Figure 3.2 provides the ethnic composition of Multicultural High School, which demonstrates that it is the most diverse of the County’s schools, with 46% Hispanic students.
Figure 3.2. Student population diversity in the Multicultural High School

Although all within the same county, figures 3.3 and 3.4 show that the other two major high schools in the County are predominantly White.

Figure 3.3 Student population diversity in Arlington High School 2.

Figure 3.4 Student population diversity in Arlington High School 3

The total percentage of minorities at the schools also varies, with Multicultural at
84.9%. High Schools Two and Three have only 58.6% and 33.0%, respectively. Figure 3.5 compares the percent of minority students at the three high schools.

![Percent Minority Students](image)

Figure 3.5 Percentage of Minority students in Arlington’s three High Schools

Not only does the student population vary greatly between schools, but the graduation rates do too. Graduation rates at Multicultural HS also show a large gap between ethnicities, and Multicultural’s rates do not compare with the rest of APS graduation rates. In relation to the state of Virginia, Multicultural’s rates are below average for minorities, especially Hispanics.

Table 3.6, presenting the total Arlington Public School graduation rates, clearly shows that Black and Latino students are not close to the 96.4% graduation rate of White students in the School System.
However, when broken down by high school, a greater difference is apparent. At The Multicultural High School, the numbers are lower for minority students, with still only 81% of Hispanic students graduating. Following is a chart of the Multicultural High School Graduation Rates (APS, 2009):

Although not discussed in earlier comparisons, as it is not a neighborhood program, High School Four provides even lower graduation rates for minority students (APS, 2009).
Figure 3.8 High School Four Graduation Rates

In comparison, High School Two has much higher results (APS, 2009) with 95% of Hispanic students graduating, and 89% of Black students:

Figure 3.9 High School Two Graduation Rates

Although the schools are providing the same materials and curriculums and preparing for the same tests, there is something different at High School Two that is creating a 95% Hispanic graduation rate, as opposed to an 81% rate at Multicultural HS. Finally, I compare the scores to High School Three (APS, 2009):
High School Three again has much higher graduation rates for minorities than Multicultural, even though Multicultural HS is majority minority, and should be able to provide for these students.

Despite its instructional quality and favorable location, Multicultural High School, shows great discrepancies in the academic achievement of students when compared with the two other large high schools located in North Arlington. The physical school buildings themselves are far from equal. From the outside, High Schools One and Two are modern, shiny, and clean. The North Arlington schools have recently been renovated, while Multicultural is outdated, shabby, and dark, with many run-down basement classrooms used everyday. Graduation rates between schools is strikingly unequal – the higher percentage minorities in a school, the lower the graduation rate for those students.

**Observation Settings**

Other than the regularly attended classrooms that I observed for this ethnography, I also immersed myself in the routines and culture of this school, including the main office, morning hallway, and Minority Achievement Group. Each week’s visit to the High School involved observation of these different settings within the school to get a more
complete feel of the atmosphere, culture, students, and teachers. Each of these settings improved my understanding of language attitudes, relationships between teachers and students, and the youth culture in this diverse school.

Morning routine

One specific location within the high school that I observed was in the morning hallway between the bus drop offs and the tone that signaled the beginning of class, the pledge of allegiance, and morning announcements. I would arrive during this time, and in my trip from the parking lot to the main office for my “visitors” sticker, felt that I almost could blend in with the students and teachers. Students congregated in the hallways in semi-circles around their lockers, sharing jokes. The groups of students often were so dense that it was very difficult to walk through the hallways. Noteworthy was the high volume of interactions compared with the not-awake silence of the students once they arrived in the classrooms. There was a strong sense of community, into which I was welcomed. When passing a student in one of my observation classes, I was almost always greeted, either verbally or with a smile or wave.

Every morning of observation began with my signing in the logbook in the school’s main office. I was always warmly greeted, offered the sign-in book and “visitor” sticker, and advice on how best to avoid a parking ticket in the area. The office was a constant hum of both English and Spanish – exhibiting the openness and acceptance of both languages equally in the school. Students constantly came through to meet with the Minority Achievement Coordinator, whose office was in this main office, creating a warm sense of welcoming in many languages.
I attended classes that were the first period in the morning. The morning always begins with students filing into the classroom, and then at 8:20 a tone is sounded over the intercom and a female voice says, “Please join in a moment of silence”. The amount of “silence” varies on the teacher, the day, and the students’ energy level. After 30 seconds, the same voice continues with “Please join for the pledge”. Although everyone in both classrooms I observed do stand, only a few face the flag, only a few mouth the words along with the female voice on the loudspeaker.

**Minority achievement group**

The County and each school places a special emphasis on closing the achievement gap, through the existence of the “Office of Minority Achievement” and a “Minority Achievement Coordinator” in each school. I was able to meet with this School’s Coordinator and even meet with two groups of senior girls in their weekly meeting. It is important to realize the extra effort and support that the school gives to these students. Junior and Senior students in single-sex groups meet for weekly meetings with guest speakers, school-funded college visits, academic support, and mentoring. The Coordinator for this high school is incredibly dedicated to each of these students – which pays off in the 100% graduation rate and college acceptance rate. In my interaction with the senior girls group, I was impressed with the maturity, awareness, and drive of these students. Although a very strong program with definite results, the selection of students may narrow out those most in need of such support. Students must go through an application process, and have and maintain a certain G.P.A.
Classroom Research: Two Teachers, Two Classrooms

The majority of my observation was done within the confines of two teachers’ classrooms. Both classes of students observed were in social studies classrooms, and I rotated between the two: a ninth grade World Studies class and a 12th grade U.S. government class.

First is the ninth grade World Studies class at Multicultural High School, a small class, with only ten students: six boys and four girls. The four girls are all Spanish and English-speakers, Hispanic. Four of the boys are also Hispanic. There is one Asian-American boy and one White boy. The students always sit in the same seats – with the girls on one side and the boys on the other. The teacher is a White female, in her early thirties. We will call her Ms. C. She has been teaching for about five years and has a Master’s degree in education. She does not speak Spanish. My first observation day, in October 2009, is her first day back from her honeymoon. She is a rather non-traditional woman, highlighting the fact that she had a non-traditional, non-religious ceremony for her wedding the previous week.

Also, as a social studies classroom, there is a big focus on culture. In fact, one poster on the wall asks “Is contact with other cultures beneficial or harmful to a civilization?” There is also this quote on wall: “the interaction of cultures often results in the predominance of one over another”. Cultural inclusion is a focus of this class, as communicated via wall art.

Next is the twelfth grade U.S. Government Class. The teacher, who we will refer to as Ms. H, is in her late thirties, and has returned this year as a part time teacher after some time off on maternity leave. She says that while she does not like to leave her baby
for long periods of time, she enjoys being in the classroom, even though part-time teaching does not count toward retirement years. The set up of this classroom changes, and Ms. H often asks students to sit in certain seats, and preselects groups for group and pair work during the class. This class is also quite diverse in its student make-up. The students do not always sit in the same pattern, and it rotates from assigned seating to choosing seats. The classroom is set up so that there are two sides that face each other, and in free seating, there is one corner where the White and African American males sit together. The opposite side of the room has the Latino girls and Asian girl, who through her few words seems to not speak English as her first language. However, when groups are formed, Ms. H ensures that all are included and often assigns groups so that there is a mix of cultures. There are eighteen students total, including eight girls and ten boys. There are four Black students, five White students, three Asian American students, and six Hispanic students.

**Ethnographic Methods**

Dell Hymes (1996) calls for more ethnographic research to be done in education, yet cautions researchers to have a clear understanding of ethnography. He posits that all cultures and all schools are different, and thus it is important to study a large variety of schools to gain a better understanding of what is successful and what is not. The purpose of my study is to contribute to this overarching goal.

Stubbs (1976) agrees that there is a need for more ethnographic work to be done in education. The author writes that “our ignorance of what actually happens inside classrooms is spectacular. We are often prepared to make broad generalizations
purporting to relate children’s language to their potential educatability, yet we lack basic descriptive information about how pupils and teachers communicate. In a sense, of course, we all know what classrooms are like: we have spent long enough in them as pupils and teachers. But such intuitive, remembered knowledge is no substitute for a conceptually adequate analysis of classroom life based on recordings and descriptions of the classroom routine, which takes up thousands of hours of a pupil’s life. People often hold firmly entrenched views on the language and education debate, often arguing more from prejudice than from carefully considered observations and evidence” (70).

There is a need for education policy based on qualitative, educational ethnography. In fact, many argue that researchers should work with local schools to help them reach their achievement and other goals, and to advocate for the schools in policy arenas (Robinson, 1998). Brazilian educator Isabella Cabral Feliz de Sousa agrees, stating that ethnography should be used “as a device for understanding culture with the objective to exert social control and influence policy”. I hope to use my ethnography for such a cause.

I utilized the method of participant observation in four areas: the morning hallway, the main office, a minority achievement group meeting, and two classrooms, each taught by a different teacher. In each case, I followed Susan Philips, who wrote that she "purposefully did not actively seek involvement with the children – not alter the quality of the interaction." Finally, I observed a community event to understand community beliefs about education for Latinos. In each setting, I did not participate in the events, so as not to disrupt or create artificial discourse or events in my data.

Although I specifically did not participate, and did my best to limit interaction with the students, spending that much time with a group of children will create
familiarity. One particular situation, I described in my field notes as such:

This morning, I first went to C’s class. I wasn’t sure it was a 1 or 2 day for what class was going on. Her class wasn’t in the room, but I bump into “Ivan”, a 9th grade Hispanic student. I am greeted with a hug – friendly, nice to think that I am becoming part of their little community – but also a little strange to have a 15 year old boy crush me with a hug. He then offers to walk me to where I’m going – even though he has class. He says it’s fine, class hasn’t started. Hope it’s not an issue!! I earn another hug when I get to my room. I kind of feel like I am in high school. (December 3, 2009)

For three hours each week, for three months in the Fall of 2009, I did audio recordings of the classroom, and then transcribed them for further analysis. The names of the students and teachers have been changed.

Access

A critical part of the ethnography process is gaining access to the site of the study. First, I am a resident of this county, and thus had a personal interest in the school system. My first interaction with the school district academically, was through one of my professors that is on the County School Board. I realized the success of the county in minority achievement and began to research the school district. It was also the chosen site of some of President Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan’s important national speeches, which peaked my interest in this school system.

I first contacted specific teachers via email. Through browsing the website, I chose various social studies teachers, as well as the Minority Achievement Coordinator, and sent them preliminary emails asking to sit in and observe some classes. I received a quick response from Ms. C, saying she would be happy to meet with me and set up an
observation schedule. She had recently completed a Master’s degree in education and was happy to be a help to me. A final email from another teacher pointed me in the direction of the Office of Policy and Research, which reviews proposals for any research projects to be performed in the School system.

Through one of my graduate classes’ guest panel of students of this County, I was introduced in person to the Minority Achievement coordinator, who recognized my earlier email to him and, after discussion of my desire to perform research to help close the achievement gap, warmly invited me into the school.

Upon completion of Georgetown University’s Institutional Review Board requirements, I then turned to submitting my official proposal to the County’s Office of Policy and Research. My connection to the school board ensured a hand-delivery of my proposal, and a strong recommendation that my research would be valid and useful to future School Board policy-making. Six weeks later, I was sent a short letter stating that my research proposal was denied. Upon further inquiry, I found that the Office did not see the validity in such qualitative research. I pressed the matter, meeting with the member of the School board, as well as the head of the Office of Policy and Research. Their stance was firm, however, and it seemed that this type of data was not what the School system was looking for, as opposed to number-driven, quantitative data. I was told that I could not, therefore, perform interview or survey with students or teachers regarding language attitudes, understanding of communication in the classroom, or the culture of a multicultural, suburban high school. I was, however, permitted to use any purely observational data that I had collected.
Data

As the ethnographer in this study, I spent three hours each week at The High School for the fall and early spring semester of 2009 – 2010. This was approximately 15 weeks, or 45 hours of observation. The data were analyzed within two theoretical-methodological approaches – discourse analysis and conversation analysis.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is an interpretation of the social meaning of discourse. Analysis of discourse deals with the idea of “language-in-use”. J.P. Gee (1999) explains that as a theory and method it is used for “studying how language gets recruited ‘on site’ to enact specific social activities and social identities” and claims that “language in use” is everywhere and is always “political” (p. 1). Language is not without social meaning – and Gee applies discourse analysis to connect language with the mind, social interactions, society, and institutions. Specifically, in applying such a theory, one might ask “how is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?” or “how does language connect or disconnect things?” (pp. 11-13). Gee focuses on the use of language to enact identity, which is discussed in this study.

The discourse analysts look at the function and purpose of linguistic data and how both the producer and the receiver process it (Brown and Yule, 1983). The method is used to describe “regularities in the linguistic realizations used by people to communicate those meanings and intentions” (p. 26). Important aspects of speech analyzed in this method include sounds, gestures, context, and style.

Working with Gee’s (1999) definition of discourse and its cultural significance, I
used transcriptions of discourse and conversation in the classroom and applied his theory and method of discourse analysis to analyze data for this study.

**Conversational Analysis**

Combined with Discourse Analysis, I employed the method of Conversational Analysis. Conversation Analysis is a study of power dynamics or social relationships in conversation. It is based on the premise that there is order in everyday behavior, regulations and rules for common conversational occurrences, and that in this culturally defined linguistic behavior, is a set of rules. There is regulation, order, and pattern to communication behavior, seen in who takes the floor and when, who allocates the floor, or who interrupts. These rules are also reflected in power relationships.

Moerman (1988) explains that C.A. “focuses on talk” (2) and is useful to ethnographers who can use C.A. on transcripts to “anchor us in that world” by “living in the line-by-line production of ongoing actual native talk (5). Basically, such a detailed analysis of conversation is, as Moerman claims, a “verification procedure for ethnography” (5).

The goal of Conversation Analysis is to “elucidate and describe the structure of a coherent, naturally bounded phenomenon or domain of phenomena in interaction, how it is organized, and the practices by which it is produced (Schegloff, 1987, 2). Schegloff explains that such analysis “should be empirical not conceptual, bringing to bear findings derived from the study of other actual actions and episodes of interaction” (3). My conversation analysis focuses on turn taking, interruption, laughter, floor-taking, and overlapping talk.
Ethnographer Bias

As a former primary school teacher, I came in with certain expectations and understanding of how a classroom works. My own racial and cultural diversity prompts me to relate to the minority population of the school and feel a personal connection to their achievement. That my facial features reflect my Vietnamese ancestry may affect student and teacher behavior, if it is based on the way that they view my intentions. I also have family that is of Hispanic descent, have traveled to Spain and Central America, and speak Spanish. Moreover, I have taught English as a Second Language to many Spanish-speakers, and thus feel a connection to the Hispanic population, which is likely to affect my understanding of Latino Identity in the United States. Through my time at The High School, I became involved in a mentoring program for minority girls, and thus feel an attachment to this school. Finally, having the career goal of affecting the minority achievement gap, I arrived in these ethnographic observations taking a definite position with empathy toward minorities in the classroom.

Now that I have described the ethnographic context, data, and methodology for this study, I provide analysis of the data recorded and draw conclusions about the classroom communication in this Multicultural High School. I divide the analysis into four chapters: Participation, Language Sharing, Nonverbal Communication, and Language and Identity.
Chapter Four: Participation in the Multilingual Classroom

This chapter provides analysis of observational data collected in two teachers’ respective classrooms. I apply conversational analysis to transcriptions of classroom communication. I discuss the two classrooms individually, as each had a different style of teaching, discourse, participation, and overall communication style. Also influential is the difference in the makeup of the students’ ethnic and racial backgrounds.

I explain participation styles of students’ verbal communication in two different classrooms. This includes getting the floor, competing for the floor, keeping the floor, and the teacher’s role in sharing the floor. I compare the same students in different settings, including full class, in-group communication, and intercultural communication within the classrooms. I analyze how communication and language change between two different classrooms. The comparison of data and analysis cover the following issues in participation that have been shown to vary between cultures: turn taking, appropriation, and interruption. The patterns of participation create an unspoken set of rules to which students in this minority youth community of practice follow.

The teacher plays a crucial role in setting the tone for participation, choosing the method of nomination, and, usually, in sharing or giving the floor. In this study, I find that the twelfth grade teacher almost exclusively nominates students in an almost “round” method (Philips, 1989, p. 77) where each student is asked to participate before allowing for repetition in participating. This is also referred to as the ‘cold call’. In the ninth grade classroom, the teacher opens the floor, creating a conversational or interactional participation structure, where students compete for the floor, share the floor, and often participate in overlapping talk.
The cultural and ethnic makeup of the students itself also affects the change in participation. In the multicultural twelfth grade classroom, minorities are less likely to participate in the official classroom interactions than the White students – when the entire class is engaged with the teacher. In contrast, minority students are likely to participate in small group settings, whether monocultural, bicultural, or multicultural. In comparison, the ninth grade classroom, which is majority Latino, and the Instructional Conversation method is employed, the students participate freely and consistently. Differences in taking the floor and frequency of participation appears to be an individual preference, rather than a cultural one, as some students are more likely to compete for the floor or compete for floor than others.

In this chapter, I analyze the standard participation structure of Western classrooms compared to the multicultural twelfth grade classroom and the majority Latino ninth grade one. I also discuss how participation creates a community of practice. Although the classroom situations are very different, these students are all part of a multicultural, multiethnic community of their high school, and have created new ways of using language to both create a multicultural community, while also constructing their individual cultural identities in this youth space.

**Initiation-Reply-Evaluation**

The participation structure found in most Western classrooms is described as “Initiation, Reply, Evaluation” (IRE) (Cazden, 1988). This turn-taking normative method begins with the teacher’s initiation, a question, or prompt, followed by a student’s reply, finishing with the teacher’s evaluation or response. IRE is argued to be a “get-the-facts-straight, confrontational style of discourse” (Minami, 247). Cazden posits that those
students who are most comfortable with this discourse pattern in the classroom, are usually ones who found similar patterns in home discourse. However, not all home communication styles follow this pattern, putting some students at a disadvantage.

In this study, there are striking differences between the ninth grade and twelfth grade classrooms. While both teachers follow the traditional IRE discourse pattern, Twelfth grade teacher Ms. H consistently calls on a specific student by name at the end of each “initiation” turn. Ninth-grade teacher Ms. C instead follows a more conversational style, the “instructional conversation”. There are also differences in the student composition. The twelfth grade classroom is truly multicultural, with a balance of ethnic backgrounds that mirrors that of the entire high school: four African American students, three Asian-American, twelve Hispanic, and three White students. This mixture of cultures affects the type of participation. I describe how students participate, how often they participate, how they gain the floor or even compete for the floor. I also analyze who and how students interrupt or take turns. This is in comparison to the technically multicultural ninth grade classroom that has eight Latino students, one Asian student, and one White student. Here, the Hispanic students are truly the majority and intercultural communication is more between the teacher and students.

**Twelfth Grade**

Through the teacher’s maintenance of the floor and rigid IRE participation method, there is a barrier between teacher and students. This classroom has a mix of students of different races, ethnicities, and cultures. Ms. H nearly exclusively nominates a specific person by name to answer a question. Ideally, this includes all students’ participation at some point, while keeping them mentally involved. The teacher is the authority in the
classroom and is the one with ownership of the floor – she is both the “addressor and an addressee, the teacher is essentially without competition” (Philips, 1989, p. 76). As students from all backgrounds arrive in school with different understandings of what is expected, Ms. H sets clear expectations for participation. She explains the expectations, not assuming that all students understand that they are to volunteer.

Ms: H: Glad to hear that a lot of your groups…
were pushing each other to answer that don’t usually participate.

When students are not all participating, Ms. H makes it a point to encourage the class, reiterating standards and expectations.

MS. H: Ideally in the next debate, I would be the ONLY\(^2\) observer,
As EVERYone would be participating, right?

Although labeling expectations for participation is useful to all students, and specifically those who have different home communication styles, it is also different to change one’s cultural norms by a simple explanation. While many of the teenage students shrug off such a statement of expectation of participation, many minority students, particularly female ones, visibly tense up after such declarations by Ms. H. This may be due to the sudden pressure to compete for or to take the floor that is not part of their cultural normative behavior.

Ms. H also verbalizes classroom expectations. Again, this is useful for students from different backgrounds that arrive with different understandings of school discourse, teacher talk, and expectations. She also uses specific students’ names that are not paying attention. Here is a narrative by Ms. H during one morning’s exercise.

\(^2\) Words, such as “ONLY”, are capitalized to show emphasis throughout this thesis.
MS. H: Any questions about what I wrote on the board?

Ok um, again guys I don’t want to have to remind you.

It makes for a nasty dynamic.

If I write it on the board, I just said it 15 minutes ago,
you write it down in your notes. That is what I expect you to do.

Darian. Christen. Front and center. Don’t tell me you can’t see the board.

Gerardo. Don’t make me call you out in the middle of class.

Just get it done.

Here, she specifically calls on different students: “Darian. Christen,” or “Gerardo.” She doesn’t expect a response from them, but is keeping them focused on what she is saying. Gerardo was whispering to a classmate, and Ms. H requests his full attention and participation, letting him know what is communicated as respectful in her perception.

At the end of classes that included an open discussion, Ms. H asks students to raise their hand if they participated today. She seems to understand that not all students are comfortable with the full class participation, and gives them a chance to voice their opinions and understanding of information in small groups. Before any large discussion, or even before going over homework questions as a large group, she provides the opportunity to review answers with a small group or partner. This idea of small groups is one of the earlier mentioned participation structures of the Western classroom – teacher and small group. This allows students who are not as comfortable voicing their thoughts or competing for the floor with the teacher present, an opportunity to share their knowledge or opinion on a topic.

Ms. H also holds the floor for the majority of the classroom time. The students have much less opportunity to take the floor or participate. While she does provide clear
instructions, there is little room for back and forth between teacher and students. Students participate rarely: only when nominated directly by Ms. H, or the exceptions where the floor is opened for anyone to volunteer. Although research shows that specific details is helpful for students (“get out your binder” or “get out a piece of paper”) (Green, 2009), here it this discourages students from asking questions and participating. The classroom is quiet, no constant buzz of discussion and very little laughter, almost silent but for the solitary speaker in the organized turn-taking style of the class.

**MS. H:** But seriously guys the talking… you want to keep it to a minimum.

A minimum, ok?

There are several of you that I can see you’ve done the work already.

Take the time to think about things though don’t relax.

Although orderly, I often feel intimidated about whether or not I know the material, although I aced this course nearly eight years ago! There is a lack of laughter, a sign of community and comfort. In fact, the only laughter I have recorded is divisive, constructing Ms. H as part of the “other”. In a pre-class discussion between Ms. H and an African American male student, the laughter is over Ms. H’s misidentification of a quote on the student’s t-shirt. Other than that, there is no laughter in this classroom’s recordings. This teaching method may be useful for disseminating information, but does not build a community in which students participate in high-level learning.

This participation structure also provides little opportunity for students to do more than answer direct questions and receive immediate evaluation. While the goal of teacher-nomination in a “round” pattern is to include all students, many never participate. This is especially difficult for a student accustomed to not volunteering or competing for the floor when an authority figure, such as the teacher, is present. Ms. H’s lack of
flexibility, consistent use of IRE, control of the floor, and rigid structure separate her from her students, even creating a barrier. This provides room for the students to create their own community of practice apart from the authority figure.

**Competing for the Floor**

In Ms. H’s multicultural classroom, White students are more likely to compete for the floor. This is consistent with Philips (1983) who found in Anglo classrooms a constant “competing for teacher’s attention which does not exist in the Indian classrooms” (109). In this classroom, the Hispanic students are least likely to self-select or compete to gain the floor. In the following example, Ms. H’s question stirs up some emotions, as she is discussing the scoring of a debate in the previous class. Note that Chris is one of the few White males in the class, whereas Gloria is a Hispanic female, and Darren a Black male.

**MS. H:** Was the scoring fair?

(All respond at once)

**Chris:** I, I, I don’t see I don’t understand how it made it a close debate at all, like how can you consider that a victory

if you don’t understand a lot of the arguments

**Gloria:** I see how it was fair because you didn’t give a lot of statistics or facts.

**Ms. H.** Let me just… your side had 9.5 points and your side had 8 points.

Darren, do you remember, was it an overwhelming victory?

**Darren:** Yea it was like 9-8-3

**MS. H:** oh I don’t think it was unfair

**Chris:** No, no I wasn’t saying that it’s just that

**MS. H:** Well it is subjective

**Chris:** Also, personal opinion comes into play

**MS. H:** I agree. You’re listening for a certain something.
When the entire class answers at once in a mumbling, chaotic fashion, it is always the White male voice that wins the floor to finish his statement. After he competes and earns the teacher’s attention and the floor, Ms. H specifically directs the next question at an African American male, “Darren”. After Darren answers, the next question re-opens the floor, and again Chris is able to win it.

In Ms. H’s class, there are few times when students have the opportunity to actually “take the floor” on their own, as they are usually named directly after the teacher poses a question. The following example demonstrates one rare exception where a Hispanic female student, Mercedes, must take the floor on her own.

**MS. H:** But seriously guys the talking you want to keep it to a minimum. A minimum. Ok. There are several of you that I can see you’ve don’t he work already. Take the time to think about things though don’t relax.

**Mercedes:** *(raises hand, eyes facing desk)* Miss.

*(20 seconds) Ms. H. paces around the aisles.*

**Mercedes:** *(raises hand, eyes facing desk)* Miss.

**Hs. H:** Oh. Um, one second

This Hispanic female student is trying to get the attention of the teacher during a quiet review time. However, the lack of eye contact or calling the teacher by name does not quickly gain the floor for Ms. H, who is busy walking around the room. With the second “miss”, Ms. H realizes this whisper is aimed toward her, acknowledges but then continues finishing a quick discussion with another student. This female Hispanic student waits with eyes down. This example demonstrates how this rigid structure does not construct a community of learning in which both teacher and students participate.

**Ninth Grade**
In the ninth grade classroom, the free participation by students allows them to create their own community of practice that excludes the teacher, Ms. C. In contrast to the twelfth grade class, the ninth grade one is predominantly Latino, with one White student, one Asian student, and ten Latino students. The majority of this class is male (eight students) and Latino (ten students). As Melzi (2000) explains, Latino cultures emphasize the group over the individual, and that this is reflected in discourse construction (156). This is taught through Central American mother’s use of open ended questions (What did you do on your birthday?), while the European American mother’s use statements and closed-ended questions (Did you eat the cake?). Lastly, Central American narrative is topic switching, with mothers initiating related topics that elaborate on the narrative’s theme, whereas European American mothers initiate conversation on a single experience in a sequential order. This pattern is seen in Ms. C’s classroom; Ms. C’s teaching style elicits spontaneous participation and the students prefer conversation to closed-ended questions.

As opposed to the twelfth grade classroom, Ms. C does not direct questions at specific students nor does she require hand-raising, leaving the floor open for anyone to respond. Yet her questions are still focused on one answer versus creating discussion. In few instances Ms. C will become visibly frustrated with the usual open floor for anyone to answer and suddenly require hand-raising and more organized turn-taking. Only on such rare occasions do the Latino girls participate, as they prefer gaining the floor through the nonverbal communicator of hand raising.

Ms. C’s style mirrors McCollum’s (1989) observation of the Puerto Rican classroom structure of “instructional conversation” with sharing of personal stories, exploring topics not directly related to the subject matter. McCollum (1989) described the
differences between American and Puerto Rican teachers. The American teacher used individual nomination of students, whereas the Puerto Rican would often open the floor to all students. Comments frequently became class conversations, sharing of personal information, and exploration of topics unrelated to the central lesson that Ortiz would eventually lead back to the lesson's topic. Her acknowledgment and inclusion of nonlesson material "allowed students who may not have had the correct academic information the opportunity to participate in the instructional phase of lessons and receive validation from the teacher" (150). Ninth grade teacher Ms. C also accepts participation without nomination - the structure is not firm, anyone can chime in, call out. However, her tone is often unreliable in structuring participation because sometimes she suddenly will only call on those who raise their hand. Although it may be in line with the "instructional conversation," it could be teacher’s disorganization, as it allows many students to remain passive and discussion unrelated to the topic.

The following example demonstrates the most common discourse pattern in this classroom: IRE without naming participants. The floor is open for whoever would like to participate. In this case, the three students, Lewis (Asian male), Ivan (Hispanic male), and Cokie (Hispanic female) consistently participate, jumping in to answer all questions posed to the class. Although Ms. C keep the floor open to conversational instruction, and allows many unrelated tangents, her focus on a specific, “right” answer, bars her from entering the students’ community of practice.

**MS. C:**   Do you know what clemency is?

**LEWIS:**   A fruit

**MS. C:**   *Clementine* is a fruit!
(Laughter)

**MS. C:** Clemency would be the opposite of what word…

In this title…

**EDWIN:** cruelty

**Ms C:** cruelty! So if you’re not cruel …

**COKIE:** CLEMENT

This example demonstrates the extent to which the floor is open to participation.

“So if you’re not cruel…” Ms. C begins. “CLEMENT!” yells Cokie. Ms. C allows such conversation-like flexibility that students actually finish her sentences. Although the students eventually find the “right” answer, no room for higher level discussion or thinking is allowed because of the focus on IRE.

**The Floor**

Although Ms. C does not give the floor, unlike Ms. H who does it with specific calling-on of students, she consistently opens the floor to anyone and evaluates. We still see the initiation-response-evaluation pattern, even if the discussion is not directly related to the subject matter. The lack of structure provides room for students to carry the conversation, while excluding many students from participating.

[Initiation] **MS. C:** We are defining clemency, mercy.

[Response] **COKIE:** Have you ever played the game mercy?

[Evaluation] **MS. C:** Uhhhh probably not

[Response] **COKIE:** Like the hand game

**LEWIS:** I hate that

[Initiation] **MS. C:** Right now ok so the second part of the title is loved or feared.

Is it better to be loved or feared?

[Response] **IVAN:** Both

**LEWIS:** Feared! I want to be a big bully!
EDWIN: No you’re not ha-ha

(Laughter)

[Initiation] MS. C: Do you want everybody to like you or fear you?

[Response] IVAN: People fear me because I’m really mean!


MS. C: Ok I’m going to read first and then we might have to stop a lot.

I might let some of you read. Maybe not.

Because so much time is used in side bar conversations only barely related to the topic at hand, Ms. C isolates herself from the students’ community of practice in order to cover the necessary material. She quickly ends their discussion that could enforce an understanding of Machiavelli, and states that she will read aloud from the textbook. Again, such a conversational discourse pattern excludes many students from participating, especially those who speak English as a Second Language. Kevin, who sits in the back with another Hispanic male, Diego, spends most of each class whispering in Spanish, poking Diego, and throwing pencils in the back of the classroom. The following scene is my only observation of Kevin speaking in class, and he does it so hesitantly, almost as if he gains the floor by accident, that I am unable to tell what he says. From Ms. C’s response, it seems that she cannot tell either.

MS. C: Typically. Let’s relate it to school.

Kevin: (inaudible)

MS. C: What, Kevin?

Kevin: (Inaudible)

MS. C: Kind of.

Although it seems at times that Ms. C is simply setting up a conversational classroom discourse style, sometimes the calling out bothers her and she will suddenly require the
hand-raising for gaining the floor. This changing of tones so quickly also excludes her from communicating effectively with her students, as they are not sure what is accepted and what is not.

**MS. C:** If we come across a word you don’t know
RAISE. YOUR. HAND.
There’s gonna be a lot of those. Don’t feel bad.
Or there’s something a sentence that is read that
You don’t understand
Raise your hand.

In this example, Ms. C changes her teaching method, most likely due to the difficulty in completing a lesson while multiple side conversations are taking place in more than one language. Here, she must reiterate her desire for students to raise their hands because this is out of the norm.

**Competing for the floor**

As demonstrated, Ms. C almost never calls on a specific student. She leaves the floor open for anyone to take. There are three students who respond almost every time: Hispanic male, Ivan, Hispanic female, Cokie, and Asian male, Lewis. While comfortable for these three that consistently participate and take the floor with ease, it also is easy for the rest of the students to be passive, not participate, and even carry on side conversations with their neighbors.

The following is the only time in any of my observations of this class that Barbara, a slight Hispanic girl that always catches my eye with a smile, volunteers and participates. I remember the surprise of hearing her voice for the first time. Barbara quietly raises her hand to gain the floor. She does not raise it high, and it is quite possible
that she has tried to participate before, but the slight hand raise has gone unnoticed. This is also the first and only time in my observation that Ms. C has specifically asked for someone to volunteer that “hasn’t gone yet”. This seems to not normally be an issue in this classroom, as the same three students participate the entire class period each week.

**IVAN:** Can I read?

*(Ivan reads three paragraphs.)*

**MS. C:** want to keep reading?

**IVAN:** Do I have to?

**MS. C:** No, I can read.

**IVAN:** Ok, ok I’ll keep reading.

*(Ivan reads another three-four paragraphs.)*

**MS. C:** Someone else to read - who hasn’t gone yet.

*(Barbara raises her hand.)*

Barbara.

*(Barbara reads for two-three paragraphs).*

**MS. C:** So government and religion. Who will read?

**IVAN:** Diego will read.

*(Dylan has his hand up.)*

**MS. C:** Dylan! Thank you. Diego you can read next time.

**IVAN:** *(to Diego)* Read it in Spanish, man.

After Barbara reads a few paragraphs, Ms. C opens the floor for someone else to take with a quick summary and by asking, “Who will read?” This is interesting compared to the “want to keep reading?” directed at Ivan only a few minutes before. Barbara’s reading was much more fluent than Ivan’s, and her smooth reading allowed her peers to follow along with the subject matter more easily. Ivan’s reading is punctuated with long
pauses and pronunciation correction. Perhaps Ivan’s role as consistent floor-taker and participant rewards him with more reading/floor time.

The second half of this transcription shows Ivan’s attempt to share the floor with Diego, another Hispanic male student. Diego usually sits in the back of the room with another male Hispanic student and talks in Spanish quietly for the entire two-hour class. Here, Ivan tried to have Diego participate by taking the floor for him with “Diego will read”. In this case, the hand-raise by Dylan supersedes the verbal taking of the floor. It is interesting to note that this is the only scenario where hand-raising is used at all, much less given floor preference.

Ratification of Participation

Teachers ratify or respond to answers in different ways that distance themselves from participation in the community of practice. Ms. C’s ratification is often a tacit acknowledgement integrated with a new initiation. In the example below, while she allows Ivan to continue with his only somewhat-related talk about the explorer “La Salle” and how the word would translate from Spanish, Ms. C simply continues with her own questions, neither asking Ivan to stop his tangent or acknowledging that he has made a personal connection with the day’s topic. She gives him a little ratification – by answering “No” to his question, and then continues with her own agenda while he entertains the class (and causes himself to laugh!) with his bit of information.

**IVAN:** La Sal. La Sal. You know what that means in Spanish?

**MS. C:** Noooo… so

**IVAN:** The salt!

*Laughter*
MS. C: The salt. Well. He wasn’t Spanish though so… you all know a lot about Columbus

IVAN: Ohhhh man, the salt. Oh my god! Ha-ha!

(Laughter)

MS. C: Oh. Well. So you know quite a bit about Christopher Columbus. We didn’t have school on Monday because of him.

LEWIS: I had a tournament because of him!

MS. C: When did he sail?

LEWIS: 1492

MS. C: Which country?

IVAN: Us! The Spaniards

COKIE: Spain!

MS. C: Yes, Spain paid for his trip. Do you remember the queen?

COKIE: Elizabeth?

MS. C: Queen Isabella. And king…

COKIE: James!

MS. C: See, Elizabeth and James aren’t really Spanish names. So Ferdinando and Isabel are. Ok and what were their ships?

(Muffled talking)

MS. C: Yes. The Santa Maria (really American sounding)

(Edwin, Ivan, Diego start laughing, muffled Spanish comments)

MS. C: The NINA, the PINTA! And the Santa Mariaaa!

(Laughter)

Not only does she stop ratifying Ivan’s comments, but Lewis’ comment related to Columbus Day also goes unnoticed. The idea of an interactional conversation discourse pattern is partially used, as the floor can be taken by anyone, and students can compete
for it at their own decision, and they are not often reprimanded for talking out of turn. However, while their participation is up to them, it does not mean that it is ratified as part of the actual classroom teacher-student discourse. The lack of ratification seems to distance the students from the teacher in this full-class discussion. Instead of allowing students to find connections from the subject matter to their own experiences, Ms. C is focused on mastery of specific facts. While she continues with her simple questions, the students continue their own conversation and laughter related to “la sal,” eventually switching into Spanglish. Ms. C realizes that she is not part of the conversation and attempts to join by pronouncing words with a “Spanish” pronunciation, causing even more laughter. This laughter and increase of Spanish conversation creates a clear line between the teacher and the students’ community of practice.

**Small Group Intercultural Communication**

Small group intercultural communication contrasts with the large-group, teacher-directed setup. It occurs throughout the class period – before the teachers bring the full class to attention, as side conversations during full-class discussions, and in small groups or pair work. Philips (1989) explains that the Warm Springs Indians are much more apt to participate in small group conversation than in the teacher-led discussions, and I suggest that Hispanic and Asian students participate similarly.

In the twelfth grade classroom, there are many intercultural communication opportunities because of the variety of races, ethnicities, and cultures. Ms. H. assigns seats, creating mixed-culture groups. Although minority students in this classroom participate when called on, they volunteer less, and do not typically compete for the floor.
However, when put into small groups without direct teacher interaction, Asian and Latino students will willingly take the floor and participate equally.

In this example, the only African American girl in the class is paired with an Asian female student, who is hesitant to speak in full class situations, probably related to both cultural norms as well as English being her second language. Here, the students are asked to discuss a Norman Rockwell painting, which depicts a scene familiar to Americans, but perhaps even more to Chelsea, who is African American. The painting shows a young African-American girl being escorted into a newly integrated school. Chelsea immediately jumps on leading this discussion, taking the role of the expert. Although her facts are not exactly accurate, she willingly holds the floor in this small group conversation. There are no interruptions or competing for the floor, even with long pause between comments.

**Chelsea** (African American girl):

I can’t tell like I know one is a Black girl so
It’s around the, the, the time when um they abolished slavery and all the…
it’s this case where this little girls he, um, she lived in um one area and she um, she wanted to go to a White school …and they didn’t allow Whites to come in\(^3\) so she tried to go to court to say why do I have to go so far to go to school and um get equality?
They are adults and she is just a child.
No matter what age you are, your rights still apply to you.
And the picture says it all.

\(^3\) Although historically inaccurate, an exact transcription of the student’s words.
In this small group communication, students are much more likely to participate, no matter their cultural background or linguistic resources. Students are also more likely to encourage each other and support each other in these more intimate situations. In the following conversation students are asked to review their homework in pairs. Nick, a White male, asks Mercedes, a Hispanic girl, what she got for an answer after he has provided a few.

**Mercedes:** No, no I don’t speak English.

**Nick:** Yeah, sure you do. You’re speaking it right now!!

As the analysis so far has shown that minorities compete less for the floor, these small groups provide great opportunities for them to participate and absorb the material of the day. Although minority students may be hesitant to take the floor in a large group, teacher-led discussion, the small group setting creates communities where all participate.

**In-group Communication**

Student in-group communication takes place either before the class starts, as side bar conversations or whispers during class, or in small group or pair work assignments. Student participation increases in small groups, particularly by minority students, and communication is used in the construction of a cultural community.

In this type of communication situation, the Spanish-speaking students automatically, and almost exclusively, engage in Spanish-only conversation. In the ninth grade classroom, this occurs in side-bar conversations constantly throughout each class period observed. In the twelfth grade classroom, students will attempt this, but are usually reprimanded immediately by Ms. H.

In-group communication is also carved out by the Latino students in the ninth grade classroom. Here, there is one Hispanic male student who really looks out for the
rest of the Latinos in his class, taking on a leadership role. One morning, Ms. C has given an individual assignment. Ivan encourages his peers to finish the assignment of answering questions in notebook, as well as asking for areas that need assistance. He ignores the few other students, but forcefully encourages his Latino peers:

**IVAN:**
- Daniel, you haven’t even started yet!
- Diego, which one you stuck on?
- Use your brain, son!

While another student is trying to explain to Ms. C what other work he has to make up from being absent, the floor is opened to any and all sidebar conversations in Spanish or English. In this case, Ivan and Diego talk only in Spanish together. Then, Ivan actually stands at the front of the classroom to lead question review – calls class to attention in Spanish, asks questions in Spanish – really ensures that his peers are doing what they are supposed to be doing.

**Conclusion**

Overall, there are noteworthy participation differences between cultures, classrooms, and size of the group. First, there are differences in the management of the classroom participation by the teacher. For the multicultural twelfth grade classroom, Ms. H did a cold-calling, round, where each student’s participation is nominated by the teacher herself. There is little room for volunteering or calling out, and thus little competition for the floor. This seems useful for inclusion of all students, however still seems to focus on a small group of students, rather than including all. Minority students are more likely to say, “I don’t know” or simply shrug in response to teacher nomination. In the majority Latino ninth grade classroom, Ms. C employed the “instructional conversation” method,
that had little structure and allowed students to participate when they wanted to. This is more like what research finds is common in Hispanic homes and schools, however it allows for more than half of the class to never participate.

Next, I find that there are differences between cultures in who takes the floor and will compete for the floor. In the twelfth grade classroom, the White males are most likely to gain the floor when there has been competition for it, and participate via volunteering the most. Minority students are more likely to allow others to volunteer first than fight for the floor. In the ninth grade classroom, the floor is equally shared between a Latino male, Latino female, and Asian-American male.

I also found that the most striking differences were changes in participation relative to the size of the group – from full, formal class discussion to small group – affects who participates and how often. While many students simply never participated in the full class discussions, in both classrooms, I found that students of all cultural groups were more willing to speak in a small group or pair work situation. Students that I had never heard speak before were able to voice their opinions or at least carry on informal conversation in small groups. Because I had never heard them speak in the full classroom, the most surprising to me was a group of Hispanic males in the twelfth grade class that never participated in the formal class discussions, but really knew the material when discussed in small groups, no matter the cultural make-up of the group.

Finally, the type of language and communication employed in the in-group conversation is supportive and community-constructing. Especially in the majority Latino ninth grade classroom, there is a real building of community, support, and encouragement. There is almost a sense of “tough love” – where a male Latino student
checks on students’ academic progress and even puts them down for not doing the work they are expected to do. The minority youth students have created their own community of practice within this school setting that has their own rules of participation – whether it be in turn-taking, gaining the floor, or differences between size and cultural makeup of the group. The idea of cultural inclusion and creation of a community through language will be discussed in Chapter Seven on Language and Identity.

**Looking ahead**

In the next chapter, I continue the focus on verbal communication, but move forward from the participation structures in relation to culture. In discussing language sharing across and between cultures, I begin by focusing on language variation, both in code switching between languages, as well as between varieties of English, and how it constructs a community of practice. This also requires analysis of the ratification of language use by original users of borrower’s usage.
Chapter Five: Language Sharing in the Multilingual Classroom

In the previous chapter, I explained differences between the multicultural classroom and the majority Latino classroom in participation style. The amount of participation, competition for the floor, turn-taking, and interruption are all culturally-relative and students who share participation patterns construct their own community of practice. Not only does the participation style reflect one’s culture, but language variation also stems from a home language.

In this chapter I describe how students share linguistic features across cultures and ethnicities. As school communities are becoming increasingly multicultural, children are learning to use language to create classroom communities of practice. I discuss the sharing of features across cultures that traditionally are used by another ethnicity, how students code switch between varieties of English or between Spanish and English in different settings, and the importance of ratification or non-ratification of such linguistic choices in this “multiethnic youth space” (Paris, 2009). I employ Paris’ (2008) term “multiethnic youth space” throughout this analysis, as it perfectly describes the setting of this school and community.

In this chapter I first provide a basic description of the varieties of English employed in the Multicultural High School, including African American Vernacular English or Latino English. I then discuss what types of features are shared across and between ethnicities, and who uses them. Next, I provide examples of how the Spanish language is used in classroom discourse. Finally, I explain the importance of ratification of such language sharing in creating a community in this multiethnic space.
Varieties of English

It is important to understand that variation is systematic and that it is the “product of powerful forces which affect the culture at large” (Green and Walker, 2004). Unfortunately, many teachers believe, whether consciously or not, that there is a standard variety of English that is inherently better than others. Sociolinguistic research has shown the positive outcomes of addressing minority variations of English in the classroom as one that is equal and legitimate. Although this thesis does not deal with specific variations of English, but rather the communication style, it is important to note the sharing of features between cultures, rather than simply noting the use of one’s own cultural variation of English. In this section, I briefly describe some of the most common features of English variations in order to properly discuss how students in a multicultural setting choose to use or not use such features, share features across ethnicities and cultures, or switch between the two.

African American Vernacular English

As discussed, different variations of English are equally “correct”. John Rickford outlines some of the most common features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as including the following:

1. Consonant cluster simplification
2. Habitual be
3. Multiple negations
4. Zero copula/auxiliary
5. Zero third person present tense –s
6. Zero possessive –s
7. Zero plural –s
African American students exhibited high levels of communicative competence in switching between Standard American English (SAE) and variations of AAVE depending on the setting. In this study, a female in the twelfth grade U.S. government class with Ms. H followed patterns of SAE in the formal class discussion setting. However, this student, Chelsea, deletes the copula or possessive or plural –s in small group conversations. I noted Chelsea speaking with more features of AAVE when with other students in the hallway or after class, and with one African American male student in this class, in side conversations. These conversations would take place when other students did not participate, or when students were allowed to choose small groups for discussion. About once in each class period observed, the African American male would sharpen his pencil at the sharpener next to Chelsea’s desk, sparking a short and quick conversation between the two, where they would engage in less formal conversation than that of the class discussion, employing many features of AAVE.

Only during in-group conversation do African American students employ features of AAVE. Otherwise African American students at this school that I observed were likely to use Standard American English features in the classroom. African American students were able to switch between AAVE and more Standard American English easily, depending on the context, setting, and participants in the conversation. Although used in in-group communication, it is noteworthy that these students choose to use a more Standard English when participating in the classroom discourse, especially when, as we will see in this chapter, other racial and cultural groups have adopted some of the most common features of AAVE as their own in classroom discourse.
Spanish in the Classroom: “You know what that means in Spanish?”

Hispanic students also exhibited high levels of communicative competence, using Spanish, Spanglish, and meta-linguistic discussion in the classroom. According to a 2008 report by the Pew Hispanic Center, seven in ten Hispanic students speak a language other than English at home (Fry and Gonzalez, 2008, p. iv). The Pew Hispanic Center’s study on Hispanic youth (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009), writes that “for both native-born and foreign-born young Hispanics, the boundaries between English and Spanish are permeable. Seven in ten (70%) say that when speaking with family members and friends, they often or sometimes use a hybrid known as “Spanglish” that mixes words and other communicative elements from both languages. I found this to be representative of my observations too.

Students observed in this study very often switched between English and Spanish, also known as “code-switching,” which will be covered in the next pages. Students also often take on features of AAVE in classroom communication, yet another example of overlap in such a multicultural setting. Not only do students switch into “Spanglish,” but will use Spanish pronunciation of a word or discuss the relationship to the Spanish language as part of the conversation. Here, I focus on how students use Spanish words, or Spanish pronunciation of words, during full-class conversation or instruction time instead of the “American English” pronunciation or use of the word. They are not switching between languages, per se, but instead constantly insert discussion of linguistic resources. From my observations, it seemed that students would use this resource as a way to tie the topic of discussion to their own lives, enhancing understanding or meaning when there is a direct relationship between them and the topic at hand. In this one example of this
consistently repeated situation, Ivan brings a Spanish twist to the discussion of early
Explorers.

**MS. C:** Let’s talk about explorers. 
Who is the first that you think of?

**IVAN:** 
*COLOMBUS* (in Spanish accent)

**MS. C:** Yes Columbus, or Ponce de Leon. *(Anglicized pronunciation)*

**IVAN:** Yeah! I said that!

**LEWIS:** Yeah, yeah, Columbus…

**MS. C:** or La Salle. Yes. French Name.

**IVAN:** La Sal. La Sal. You know what that means in Spanish?

**MS. C:** No… so

**IVAN:** The salt!

*(Laughter)*

**MS. C:** The salt. Well. 
He wasn’t Spanish though so…

you all know a lot about Columbus

**IVAN:** Ohhhhh mannnn⁴, the salt! Oh my god.

*(Laughter)*

In this short classroom discussion, Ivan continuously uses a Spanish pronunciation of Spanish words or names. His teacher, however, is not interested in his relating the topic to something personal, and instead uses an Anglicized pronunciation of “Columbus” or “La Salle,” for example. Ivan is not fazed, however, and continues by defining the Spanish term – “the salt” – that he and his peers find incredibly hilarious as someone’s name. Ms. C does not find his connection to his home language necessary to

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⁴ Multiple letters are used to demonstrate lengthened pronunciation.
the conversation, and simply responds with “The salt. Well.” before continuing with her explanation. Laughter ensues throughout the discussion.

In this next section, Ivan does the same thing – bringing a Spanish pronunciation to an American animated movie title *The Road to El Dorado*.

**MS. C:** They heard these stories of cities made of gold in the new world and wanted to be rich for the rest of their lives!

**Cokie:** …but there was no gold

**IVAN:** like that movie *The Road to El Dorado*!

**MS. C:** I have not seen it, but is it about a city of gold?

Ok.

So they believed it was their duty as the correct people, their duty to go and spread it around the world to their uncivilized people and the last one is glory…

Again, Ivan inserts a Spanish pronunciation of “*el dorado*” to the classroom conversation, and again Ms. C lightly acknowledges it, and moves on quickly. She does not ask about the movie, but asks if it is related to the topic (“is it about a city of gold?”) before going on with the instruction. Although not encouraged by teachers, Spanish-speaking students repeatedly use Spanish words in conversation, which is seemingly very appreciated by their Spanish-speaking peers. The students show such appreciation, and even happiness, through sharing laughter, smiles, and eye contact between the members of the in-group. The use of Spanish words seems to construct community, an in-group, and building camaraderie through the sharing of language. Not only is the language something that they have in common, but also even more specifically it is something that excludes the non-Spanish speakers from understanding and being part of the group. This
creates a community of practice, shared linguistic practices within the classroom in which the teacher does not participate.

In this final example of Spanish pronunciation, there is a discussion of Christopher Columbus.

**MS. C:** Where did he land?

**IVAN:** *En el Caribe.*

**MS. C:** Well. Yes.

**IVAN:** The Dominican Republic!!!

Here, Ms. C is not completely confident in her understanding of Ivan’s answer and instead of providing a strong positive evaluation, is almost questioning in her response: “Well. Yes.” she says, but does not seem confident of his answer until after he says “The Dominican Republic!!!” in the next line. Ivan is happy to have an opportunity to use Spanish so seamlessly in the conversation and take on an almost teaching role.

These three dialogues are merely examples of the constant use of intentional Spanish pronunciation, or Hispanization of words, inserted into class discussion, regardless of the teacher’s understanding, attention to, or ratification. The use of the students’ home language in the classroom setting constructs a community in which Ms. C does not participate, as I discuss in the following section on code switching.

**Code switching:** “Con permiso, vieja.”

Students use code switching in this setting as a feature of their community of practice. Code switching includes switching between dialects, languages, or variations. Mar-Molinero (2000) discusses code switching and bilingual identity, and claims that English is often associated with power, but speakers will choose Spanish to mark themselves as different and to increase camaraderie with other Spanish speakers.” It serves to create an
important sense of ‘them’ and ‘us’, as outsiders cannot easily share in this linguistic code…. To insiders this is a legitimate form of communication with its own unconscious rules and forms. It serves as an important identity marker for the Spanish-speaking community, and like any linguistic code, is a dynamic, evolving symbol of solidarity” (Mar-Molinero, 2000, p. 185). Not only does it mark a Spanish-speaking community, but provides communicative norms for the classroom community of practice.

Aoki (2000) explains the importance of code switching as “enacting an identity claim” (208) and that it is using this communicative event as accomplishing a “particular sociocommunicative ends” (209). Delpit agrees and expands, claiming that “acquiring an additional code comes from identifying with the people who speak it, from connecting the language form with all that is self-affirming and esteem-building, inviting and fun” (39). This code switching is common in this ninth grade classroom. Spanish is used in any small group or pair assignment when both students are Latino. Although the teacher does not allow too much side conversation during her lectures and class discussion, she always allows the two Hispanic Males in the back of the classroom to talk in Spanish constantly. They engage in continuous conversation throughout each class almost without stopping. Ms. C rarely acknowledges them, even as they draw other students into their discussions or activities. Not only is it used in personal conversations or Spanish-speaker-only group work, but within the full class discussion, as seen in this next dialogue. The class is talking about Machiavelli, and the first student mispronounces the name.

IVAN: Machiavelli (with a ch)

MS. C: Machiavelli! (with a k)

IVAN: Ah, Machiavelli (with a k), con permiso, vieja

(Full class – loud Laughter)
MS. C: What did he say…?

LEWIS: Can we speak in Spanish?

IVAN: Cokie, what did I say?

COKIE: I have NO idea

LEWIS: Let’s speak in Spanish so she doesn’t know…

LEWIS: *Hola mi compadres*

COKIE: What does *‘Hola mi compadres’* mean?

EDWIN: *Tu quieres cosas* [inaudible]

IVAN: You better all stop trying to speak Spanish.

This first half of this excerpt from the classroom discourse shows the use of code-switching to undermine the teacher’s authority. She does not speak Spanish, and this Hispanic Male student, after being corrected by her, says directly to her face, “*Con permiso, vieja*” or “Excuse me, old woman” in a sarcastic, mocking tone. The teacher clearly has no understanding, and none of the students will translate it for her. The Hispanic female even pretends to not have heard the taunt. The use of code switching strengthens the community of Spanish speakers through exclusion of the "other", the teacher, in this situation.

In this next example, the Latino students again address the idea of using Spanish as a means of undermining authority. Ms. C is having students take turns reading the textbook aloud, and asks for a volunteer. Ivan, who had just been reading, immediately volunteers Diego, another Spanish-speaking student in the class. Diego has never volunteered himself in class, but Dylan, a White male, raises his hand at the same time that Ivan verbally volunteers Diego. However, Dylan is chosen to read.

MS. C: So government and religion. Who will read?

IVAN: Diego will read.
As we can see in this excerpt, after Diego and Ivan are turned down for reading aloud, Ivan suggests that Diego “Read it in Spanish, man” in a conniving, whispered voice directed away from Ms. C. The “reading in Spanish” would have been like a punishment for Ms. C, who again, does not speak or understand Spanish whatsoever. The use of language to create in-group solidarity or even exclude those in the out-group is consistent with Paris (2008) study of multiethnic space. This is yet another example of the use of language for creating an in-group, although this time it is even more direct, using it as a tool of exclusion. Both Dylan and Ms. C are excluded from the community via language use.

Sharing of AAVE Features across Cultures

After discussion of each culture’s differences in features of English, and when or how students use their linguistic variations, we come to a discussion of sharing features across cultures. Although language is used to create solidarity and inclusion within racial or ethnic groups, I find sharing of linguistic features across and between cultures in this multiethnic classroom. In such a setting, the lines between features of varieties of English that have traditionally been labeled as “African American,” “Latino,” or any other ethnic or racial group, are quickly blurred. In this diverse setting, linguistic features are shared across race and culture.

Paris (2008) found in increasingly common multiethnic classrooms students borrow language that is often traditionally from another culture. He found that Latino or
Pacific Islander students might use features of AAVE in writing and oral communication, and that African American students might use Spanish words in communication. In this study, I found similar patterns on the East Coast, in comparison to his study of the urban West.

This is also consistent with Rampton’s (1995) study in multicultural settings, where he coined the term “language crossing”, which is where youth cross into the language of their peers. Paris (2008) makes a distinction between simple “crossing” and that of “sharing” – where members of the original user’s group ratify language use. Both language crossing and language sharing are found in this observational study.

I find that students of all ethnicities and backgrounds use features of AAVE as a shared linguistic resource. It is interesting that in the ninth grade classroom, that has not one African American student, there is a prevalence of habitual be and zero copulas. As Paris (2008) found, “AAVE practice was shared by many youth speakers across lines of ethnic difference, pushing against traditional understandings of linguistic division” (p. 102). One of the most common features that is used by students is the habitual be. Traditionally, this is a feature of African American Vernacular English. However, in this Multicultural School, many other students have taken the habitual be as their own. The habitual be, according to Paris (2008) is a “deep grammatical feature of AAVE and not used in other non-dominant English varieties” (p. 126). An example is provided in this quote from Ivan, a ninth grade Latino male student, where he talks about having a girlfriend far away in Iowa.

**IVAN:** You try to call her up and every time…

**She be sleeping!**
This habitual be tells us that every single time Ivan tries to call his girlfriend in Iowa, she is always sleeping. The understanding of the habitual be includes all of the underlying meaning in that single word. Standard American English would have said, “She is always sleeping!” It is difficult to determine whether such language choice is ratified, as there are no AAVE speakers in this particular setting, but due to the diversity of the school, there most likely are in other daily settings for Lewis.

Next is a short conversation about Lewis’ new haircut. Lewis is an Asian-American ninth grade male student. He is not happy with his new haircut, and his male peers are teasing him about it in the minutes before class starts.

**LEWIS:** It does not look different!

**IVAN:** Yeah you do!

**Dylan:** Yeah you look so…

**LEWIS:** I can’t be doing my hair flip!

**IVAN:** Hey look I’m sorry but I loved how you had it before.

Although at first Lewis tries to claim that the haircut is not so different, he admits that it has changed the ability to habitually perform his “hair flip”. Although the habitual “be” is labeled as a part of AAVE, in my observation, Latino and Asian-American students were recorded using this feature, and none of the African American students were. Here, the Standard American English would have said “I can’t always do my hair flip!” Yet Lewis borrows the AAVE feature of habitual be in this informal conversation.

**Regularized agreement**

Again, there are many instances of regularized by Latino, Spanish-speaking students in this classroom. Here, Ivan uses generalization of the verb “to have”, followed by Cokie.
MS. C: I gave every girl in here a woman and every boy got a man.

IVAN: You don't got a girl. (to Edwin)

MS. C: Everyone is a different person…

Here, regularized agreement is used instead of conjugation of the verb to Standard American English’s “You don’t have a girl”.

LEWIS: Mine's going to be pitch Black.

Can we make facial expressions?

COKIE: He got a huge head

IVAN: He got a huge nose!!!

MS. C: I’ll bring the markers around to you

Here is a final example of Latino students employing features of AAVE.

Ivan: The Dominican Republic!!!

MS. C: Have you seen his house, Ivan? You can still go visit it…

IVAN: Yeah, I been there!

Although Ivan will not allow other students to use Spanish in their talk, he is comfortable employing features of AAVE in all situations, from full class discussions led by the teacher to small group or sidebar conversations.

**Zero Copula**

Finally, there is evidence of zero copula, by the Latino students in my observations. The following discussion of a school project includes the copula deletion by Ivan, a Latino male student who asks, “so we gonna have most of our projects due for you that we do in there?”. Standard American English would say “So are we going to have most of our projects…” instead of “we gonna”, hence the copula deletion.

MS. C: Yes because we are reinforcing what you're learning in technology by practicing.
IVAN: So we gonna have most of our projects due for you that we do in there?

Again, while the African American students do not exhibit this feature of AAVE in classroom speech, it is interesting to note that the Latino students have adopted it for use in this more formal setting.

AAVE lexicon

Finally, there is evidence of what might traditionally be word choice belonging to AAVE used by Latinos in the classroom situation. It is interesting that Ms. C, who is White, is uncomfortable with the use of this term and avoids repeating it.

MS. C: Right you need to GET your street cred, credibility.
LEWIS: Like if I transfer to another school
I don’t wanna be all ghetto and stuff
(Laughter)
IVAN: Yo, you listen to me
MS. C: Who said anything about being… like… that?

Although the students seem comfortable using lexicon of AAVE, it is important to note that there are no African American students in this particular ninth grade classroom, and it is impossible to know whether or not the usage would be the same, or what the reactions, ratification, or non-ratification would be. The twelfth grade classroom does have African American students, who code switch between using features of AAVE and more Standard English depending on the setting. In this next section I analyze the non-ratification of others’ Spanish-use by Latino students.

Ratification of Language Variation: “Whaaaaat don’t try to be Hispanic, man!”

Paris (2009) explores the linguistic and cultural ways that students of all ethnic backgrounds in multiethnic urban high schools use features of AAVE. Paris describes
this “interethnic youth communication” as a linguistic and cultural sharing that needs more research, as “demographic shifts coupled with the continued residential segregation of poor communities of color have increased the numbers of Black and brown students who share the same communities and classrooms” (430). He calls for pedagogy of pluralism – teaching within and across differences – in this growing community of multiethnic schools. Paris coins the term “multiethnic youth space” as a “social and cultural space centered on youth communication within and between ethnicities – a space of contact where youth challenge and reinforce notions of difference and division through language choices and attitudes” (430). Paris continues on Rampton’s idea of plural ethnicities, but argues that it is not a “crossing” between culture and language, but actually a “language sharing” – that must be ratified by the traditional speakers as authentic.

However, this language sharing is not accepted, or ratified, by all students. Native Spanish-speaking students would use Spanish language in side conversations throughout the class, whether during pair or group work, or even in whispers and side conversations during the full class lecture or discussion time. However, when other students attempted to use Spanish language, or even participate in reprimanding or encouraging Latino students, the solidarity and community of the Latinos students was apparent. They would not ratify any participation within the Latino student community of practice.

Hispanic students in the class use Spanish but will not ratify the use of Spanish by other students. Ochs (1993) explains that one’s social identity is largely that which is accepted by the society itself, and that the interlocutors must be able and willing to ratify the speaker’s claims to a certain identity. This class has a majority Latino population,
with all the males being Hispanic, except for one Asian American and one White boy. The Asian-American male student talks with his Hispanic peers before and after class, as well as in side conversations during class. He is usually a part of their classroom jokes and they work together in any classroom disruptions. However, it is clear in the following discourse example that, while even a friend, he cannot participate in the construction of Hispanic identity, and cannot use Spanish words with this group of Latinos, who will not ratify it.

**LEWIS:** Let’s speak in Spanish so she doesn’t know…

**LEWIS:** *Hola mi compadres*

**COKIE:** What does ‘*Hola mi compadres*’ mean?

**EDWIN:** *Tu quieres cosas…* [inaudible]

**IVAN:** You better all stop trying to speak Spanish

Lewis, the Asian American male in the class, attempts to join this Spanish-speaking community in the ninth grade classroom. After Ivan mocks Ms. C through Spanish, causing laughter and building community, Lewis joins in: “Can we speak in Spanish?” Lewis is not a native Spanish speaker, but uses the pronoun “we” to include himself in this majority Latino classroom community. No one responds, and so Lewis continues: “Let’s speak in Spanish so she doesn’t know…” Again, there is no verbalized response, although there is muffled Spanish conversation in the back of the room between the four males – Kevin and Diego, who constantly speak in Spanish and almost never participate in class – and Ivan and Edwin, who both participate in class and side-bar Spanish conversation. Lewis continues to express his desire to join by adding “*Hola mi compadres*”, perhaps something that he learned In Spanish I class – as Cokie, the
Hispanic female student does not even understand what Lewis is trying to say. This use of “code-switching” by a non Spanish-speaker is not well received, and Lewis’ attempt to participate in this Spanish-speaking space, and to share in their linguistic resources, is not ratified by those to whom the language “belongs”.

In this second example, the class is being very loud and rowdy and the teacher is having some difficulty gaining the class’ attention. Finally, the same Asian American male tells a Hispanic student to stop being loud and uses some type of mock Spanish to do so. It is unclear as to whether Lewis is quoting a previous conversation or even another student, but the other students recognize it immediately as an attempt to break into the Spanish-speaking community of the classroom.

LEWIS: Ma ma ma… be quiet!!

IVAN: Whaaaaat don’t try to be Hispanic, man!

Although the Asian American male student has not said anything directly claiming any aspect of the Hispanic identity, it seems that only an Hispanic student has the right to tell another Hispanic student to be quiet and pay attention. There is a sense of community for the Latino students in the class, and they often remind each other to be quiet, pay attention, or volunteer each other to read aloud in class.

Lastly, there was a time when the one White male in the class, Dylan, attempted to use a Spanish phrase during a class discussion on Spanish explorers, where such use of Spanish might be acceptable. This was met with a disdainful response.

IVAN: “You can’t use Spanish, son.”

Although it does not interfere with regular classroom communication between students, it is very clear that the Latino students do not appreciate or even allow the Asian American or White American students to use their language, even when the Latino students
consistently use Spanish throughout every class – from full class discussions with the teacher to side-bar conversations that last throughout the duration of many classes. Ivan in particular holds an important role in this classroom. As described in the previous chapter on participation, he participates the most in this class. He is a real leader, volunteering to read aloud, helping other students, calling the class to attention, and here, controlling language use. He makes the decisions about ratification of Spanish and the rest of the class follows his decisions.

In this example, Ms. C attempts to use a Spanish accent when pronouncing Spanish names of Christopher Columbus’ ships. Her attempt falls flat, when the students laugh at her pronunciation. Granted, her vowels are very “Americanized”, although she is trying to find something in common with her Spanish-speaking students.

**MS. C:** Let’s talk about explorers. Who is the first that you think of?

**IVAN:** COLOMBUS (in Spanish accent)

**MS. C:** Yes Columbus, or Ponce de Leon

**IVAN:** Yeah I said that

**LEWIS:** Yeah, yeah Columbus,

**MS. C:** or La Salle. Yes. French Name.

**IVAN:** La Sal. La Sal. You know what that means in Spanish?

**MS. C:** Noooo so…

**IVAN:** The salt!

*(laughter)*

**MS. C:** The salt. Well. He wasn’t Spanish though so… you all know a lot about Columbus

**IVAN:** Ohhhh man, the salt. Oh my god! Ha-ha!

*(laughter)*

**MS. C:** Yes, Spain paid for his trip.
Do you remember the queen?

COkie: Elizabeth?

MS. C: Queen Isabella. And king…

COkie: James!

MS. C: See, Elizabeth and James aren’t really Spanish names.

So Ferdinando and Isabel are.

Ok and what were their ships?

(Muffled talking)

MS. C: Yes. The Santa Maria (really American sounding)

(Edwin, Ivan, Diego start laughing, muffled Spanish comments)

MS. C: The NINA, the PINTA! And the Santa Mariaaaa!!

(Laughter)

At first, Ms. C does not encourage Ivan’s Spanish pronunciation of explorers and almost completely ignores his definition of “La Sal” in the class discussion. However, as the conversation continues and she begins to lose their attention, Ms. C seemingly decides to employ Spanish-pronunciation to gain their attention again. She very dramatically lists, “Ferdinando and Isabel” as well as the names of Columbus’ ships, in an overdone “Spanish” pronunciation. Instead of creating community, this sharing of language by the teacher spurs laughter and a flurry of whispered comments in Spanish. Ms. C’s Spanish-speaking students definitely do NOT ratify her use of “Spanish” in the classroom.

While Latino and Asian American students employ features of AAVE in their daily verbal communication, such as the habitual be, from my observations, it seems that the Spanish-speaking students at Multicultural High School will not ratify other ethnic group’s use of Spanish in the classroom. The lack of ratification defines who is and who is not participating in this minority youth community of practice.
Sharing Language to Create Multicultural Community

These social groups with shared language and culture could also be described, as Gumperz (1968) does, as the speech community - “any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs.” (p. 13) In this definition, the human aggregate can be any group of people that shares some common attribute such as language, region, race, ethnicity, age, occupation, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Gumperz defines interaction as “a social process in which utterances are selected in accordance with socially recognized norms and expectations.” (p. 14) The “shared body of verbal signs” is the set of “rules for one or more linguistic codes and...for the ways of speaking” that develop as a “consequence of regular participation in overlapping networks” (p. 15). These rules of language choice fluctuate according to many variables: situation, relationship between speakers, time, place, etc.

As schools become less segregated, and increasingly diverse and multicultural, language and language sharing is beginning to reflect that trend. Although Latino students are comfortable using features of AAVE in their classroom speech, African American students prefer to use it more in in-group conversations, rather than formal ones. And while Latinos are comfortable using other cultural groups’ linguistic resources, they do not ratify the use of Spanish by other students. The unspoken rules of language sharing are being created in this multiethnic youth space.

Those who participate in and use culturally distinct communication styles are part of communities of practice. It is in communities of practice that “people participate in society, and forge a sense of their place and their possibilities in society” (Eckert, 2003, p. 57). It is at this level of community that “ways of speaking are the most closely
coordinated,” as common knowledge, beliefs and communication are developed. In fact, it is “within communities of practice that linguistic influence may spread within and among speech communities” (p. 57). In this setting, the students have begun to share ways of speaking, knowledge, beliefs, and manners of constructing a minority identity. They have not invented a new language or new identity markers, but instead have begun to “orient to the practices of larger and more diffuse speech communities” and “refining the practices of those speech communities to their own purposes” (p. 57). They have refined practices of individual members of the minority youth speech community, such as the AAVE habitual be, using it among their new community of practice. Being a part of this community of practice helps the students “develop their sense of place in the social order” and forge their identity as something that is “inseparable from… participation in communities of practice” (p. 58). Not only does the community of practice forge identity and linguistic sharing, but also has expectations about members’ roles in the community (p. 138). This is true as these students support each other in the classroom, through encouraging others to participate, checking for understanding, or even helping each other with class assignments. Language sharing creates community, and in the next chapter, I describe how nonverbal communication also creates inclusion and exclusion of the community of practice.
Chapter Six: Nonverbal communication in the Multilingual Classroom

In the previous chapters, I have focused on cultural differences in verbal communication in the multicultural settings. I highlighted the distinctions in participation methods and how students use their language to create communities. Not only do words and discourse styles reflect culture, but so do many non-verbal acts.

In this chapter I provide examples of how non-verbal communication reflects cultural norms in the multiethnic classroom while constructing a community of practice. Non-verbal communicative differences include the need and rules for eye contact, space between speakers, hierarchical structure (gender, age, status), type and amount of facial expression, laughter, and politeness rules (Erickson, 1993). Philips (1983) explores the relationship between verbal and nonverbal behavior in communication, claiming that interaction comes from something cultural and that "moving a couch, and engaging in a ritual dance, nonverbal behavior is the primary source of information and provides the context for any talk which occurs" (p. 5). She discusses three basic functions of nonverbal behaviors - conveying emotional information, providing basic social information about oneself - through dress and physical presentation - and finally, facilitating the regulation of talk: "for a linguistic message to be sent successfully, it is crucial that the speaker secure the attention of the hearer" (p. 6). According to Saville-Troike and Kleifgen (1986), children must learn social cues, nonverbal signals, a different culture – to become a competent member of that new culture – what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately in any given situation.

Argyle (1983) breaks non-verbal communication into eight categories including
facial expression, gaze, gestures and other bodily movements, bodily posture, spatial behavior, clothes and appearance, and non-verbal acts of speech. For this study, I use some of Argyle’s categories, and add others that throughout the course of observation were particularly salient for the classroom community. In this chapter I focus on five non-verbal communicators in the multicultural classroom space:

- Gaze and eye contact,
- Gestures and hand-raising,
- Posture,
- Laughter,
- Clothes and appearance.

**Gaze and Eye contact**

Expectations and appropriateness related to gaze and eye contact vary by culture and community and can cause miscommunication in the classroom. In fact, Greenbaum and Greenbaum’s study of American Indian education (1983) found that an Indian student might avert his or her eyes out of respect and politeness, whereas a mainstream American teacher might frame that as being sullen or evasive (p. 19). The most noted nonverbal differences were talk/silence sequencing in conversation – long periods of comfortable silence and less times peaking, voice loudness – the use of intensity to open the floor and signal turn-taking, and gaze – staring during conversation is impolite or grounds for violence, and increased gaze outside of conversation is typical (p. 28). Greenbaum and Greenbaum also explain the basic value conflicts that are behind the nonverbal communication, such as the American Indian preference of watching and waiting over verbal participation, avoidance of conflict, and a dislike of individual public performance (p. 20). Although this study does not deal with Native Americans, understanding the
differences in meaning of a non-verbal communicator such as gaze or eye contact is critical.

Staring and eye contact are also often misunderstood between cultures in classrooms. Gaze direction also shows that the teacher is always the recipient of any student discussion or talk. "This particular pattern of gaze direction supports and impression conveyed by the system for regulating talk that students are not supposed to play a role in regulating the talk of their peers" (Philips 1986, p.76). In Anglo American culture, it is not appropriate to stare at strangers in public places, but a must when in conversation. In contrast, Hispanics stare at passing people on the street, but do not use prolonged eye contact with someone that he is talking to (Curt, p. 38). Direct eye contact during dialogue is only reserved for romance or anger. Men do not even make much eye contact with their own wives; this is how uncommon it is (Curt, p.57). Perhaps for Hispanic-Americans, this distinction is not as great, but the lack of eye contact and gaze is evident in my observations.

During one discussion, Gerardo constantly looks away from Ms. H and toward a girl that he keeps whispering to in Spanish. This prompts Ms. H to break from her class discussion to say the following:

**MS. H:** Gerardo, I know you’re listening when you look at me.

Gerardo looks up and makes deliberate eye contact with Ms. H. until she looks away, continuing speaking to the full class. He does not respond with anything verbal, but acknowledges her reprimand through gaze.

This seems in line with Delgado-Gaitan (1994) who discusses the importance of critical thinking in the United States, characterized by verbal analysis, questioning, and argumentation, and its direct clash with the importance of respect in Mexican culture.
Mexican American children are taught to greet elders, not to argue with them. In conversation, children “are to be good listeners and can participate in a conversation only when solicited” (p. 64). While some students will say, “I was paying attention”, or even respond with an “ok”, Gerardo does not argue, but accepts the reprimand.

In the dominant American classroom culture, there are certain expectations between an authority figure and child in terms of gaze and eye contact. A difference between expectations is clearly depicted in this following situation, where a student is expected to look “front and center” and any other type of gaze communicates non-interest, distractedness, or even rudeness.

**MS. H:** Any questions about what I wrote on the board?

Ok um again guys I don’t want to have to remind you.

It makes for a nasty dynamic. If I write it on the board,

I just said it 15 minutes ago, you write it down in your notes.

That is what I expect you to do.


Don’t tell me you can’t see the board.

Gerardo. Don’t make me call you out in the middle of class.

Just get it done.

In both classes that I observed, the female Latino students, other than two exceptions, do not make eye contact with the teacher, but will make eye contact with other students, and even me, as the ethnographer. In the ninth grade class, one of the Hispanic girls, “Bianca,” does make consistent eye contact with the many Hispanic boys in her class, facilitating jokes and laughter between them. All of the Hispanic girls in my two observed classrooms will also make eye contact with me and smile hello, but do not make eye contact with the teacher until the teacher directly talks to them.
Gestures and Hand-raising

Gestures can also communicate as much as language. In the classroom, hand-raising can signify respect, interest, confusion, but a lack of hand-raising might communicate non-interest, rudeness, over confidence, or even being bored. The meaning is in the context and the cultural perspectives of all participants.

In this 12th grade class, teacher nomination is most common, as discussed in Chapter Four on Participation. However, there is room for some volunteering via the hand raise, and it is important to note the differences in use – who raises their hand at all, for starters, but also the different manners in which the student employs this communicator. The importance of raising one’s hand in the traditional American classroom is demonstrated in this short narrative:

**MS. C:**

If we come across a word you don’t know

RAISE. YOUR. HAND.

There’s gonna be a lot of those. Don’t feel bad.

Or there’s something a sentence that is read that

You don’t understand

Raise your hand.

First there is a difference in the meaning of the hand-raise. I found that, overall, females in the class use the hand-raise to request the floor, as a volunteering resource to gain attention and wait for a verbal cue from the teacher to give them permission to speak. In contrast, the males that raise their hands use it more as a marker of taking the floor, and as they raise their hand, will begin to speak.

Second, I analyze who uses this non-verbal communicator and the manner of the physical act itself. The Asian American female in the twelfth grade class only speaks
after raising her hand and being given the floor by the teacher. She does not volunteer often, but if she does, the floor is requested every time by a hand-raise. Her hand-raise is hesitant, only halfway into the air, with a bent arm. In comparison, there is one Hispanic girl in this class who volunteers. The rest do not and only will speak in the full class discussion if they are the recipients of a cold-call. This one Hispanic female student always raises her hand to request permission to contribute, but her hand-raise is a quick, straight-up-in-the-air movement with no hesitation. In my observations, the African American, Asian American, and Hispanic males in the class do not generally raise their hands. The White males in the class will raise it in a flagging motion, often with a pointer finger going up in the air, halfway, as they begin to speak.

There is one specific situation in which a Spanish-speaking female student raises her hand for the first and only time that I observed. She does not seem comfortable speaking in English, and I have never heard her speak in the full-class context. In pair work, I heard her speak one time with an African American male student, where she claimed that she did not speak English well. He was encouraging, and ‘sure, you are speaking it now!’ In any case, this is the only time I have heard her address the teacher, and she does so by raising her hand half way and whispering, “miss”. The combination of the slight hand-raise – so slight that her hand is not even above her shoulder - and the whisper are very respectful, but it does not quickly gain Ms. H’s attention, as it is not the customary manner to gain a teacher’s attention when the teacher is talking to another student on the other side of the room.

A final example of a gesture full of meaning is the one use of the middle finger employed in this classroom. This insulting non-verbal communicator is used in a
situation where Ms. H inaccurately blames an African American male student for the two Spanish-speaking students that are loudly flirting in Spanish at the side of the classroom. Ms. H reprimands the African American male student, and asks him to move to a corner to stop the talking during quiet study time. She didn’t realize who was involved in the conversation, and she inaccurately places the blame on this male African American student who tries to protest but is immediately shushed. When Ms. H finally turns around, he gives the middle finger to the Hispanic section of the classroom that has avoided any reprimand.

**Posture**

Different cultures have different interpretations of posture and thus different expectations of posture in the classroom setting. Ms. H has expectations of what posture and direction mean as far as respect and attention, and does not hesitate to vocalize them. In this excerpt, Ms. H seems almost offended by Susan’s facing in the opposite direction, not even able to finish her statement: “if your back is to me…” She either does not want to explain what it signifies in her mind, or assumes that for Susan it would hold the same meaning. Susan is a Spanish-speaking female student in the twelfth grade class.

**MS. H:**

Susan, please turn around.

If your back is to me…Make sure you are facing me

My expectation is that you are writing this down.

I’m going to rephrase my instructions:

If I write something on the board,

You MUST WRITE IT DOWN.

Darien, I’m talking to you man.

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Ms. H also talks directly to Darien, who was most likely not writing down what she expected them to copy from the blackboard. Darien is an African American male in this class. While helpful to describe one’s expectations of posture, gaze, or eye contact, based on the understanding that these non-verbal communicators are culturally-based, it is very difficult to expect that a student could change their actions immediately, or even fully understand why they are expected to change the way that they act physically.

**Laughter**

I have discussed the use of language to create community, inclusion, and exclusion, such as the non-ratification of Spanish language by non-Latinos. In this study, I find that non-verbal communication, in this case, laughter, works in a similar manner in this multiethnic youth space. Both cultural and youth communities of practice are constructed through non-verbal communication of laughter. Laughter creates communities through both including some and excluding others.

I now provide examples of how laughter is used to create community in the ninth grade classroom. In this example, Ivan inaccurately pronounces Machiavelli – using a Hispanicized pronunciation of an Italian name - and is corrected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IVAN:</th>
<th>Machiavelli (with a ch)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MS. C:</td>
<td>Machiavelli! (with a k)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVAN:</td>
<td>Ah, Machiavelli (with a k). Con permiso, vieja (Full class – loud Laughter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS. C:</td>
<td>What did he say…?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEWIS:</td>
<td>Can we speak in Spanish?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in this transcription, Ivan’s response is to insult Ms. C by calling her an old woman and using a mocking tone in his Spanish phrase “*con permiso, vieja*” (“Sorry, old woman”). Only Spanish-speakers would understand this insult, and the understanding and
feeling of superiority through understanding the insult and joke create solid inclusion for the community of practice. At the same time, it easily excludes those that are not part of this community, as they simply cannot understand what is being said.

Not only is laughter employed in creating solidarity among a cultural group, but also functions as a unifier for the students, in contrast to the teachers. In this example, the class is discussing friendship.

**MS. C:** Friendships that are obtained by payment and not by greatness need to be earned they are not secured and in time of need cannot be relied upon. Imagine friendships here… they are your friend as long as they let you copy their homework…

**COKIE:** Barbara!!!

*(Laughter)*

Here Ms. C describes a friend as someone who is only nice to you if you let them copy your homework leading Cokie to calls out “Barbara!” This is followed by lengthy laughter, shared by the entire class. Obviously the students are all aware of a situation with Barbara and copying homework, or letting others copy her homework, something that Ms. C is not privy to. The students are indexing their shared knowledge that Ms. H does not share. This laughter creates solidarity among the students.

Another aspect of using laughter to create community is in the common situation of the students misunderstanding, responding with an inaccurate answer, or simply being confused about a topic. This is understandable and normal in a school situation, where they are present to learn. However, the students often use laughter to bond together when they are in the dark about new information in the classroom. I provide two examples of this common occurrence.

**MS. C:** There’s a word right there.
Do you know what clemency is?

LEWIS: A fruit
MS. C: *Clementine* is a fruit!
MS. C: Clemency would be the opposite of what word… in this title…
EDWIN: Cruelty
Ms C: Cruelty, so if you’re not cruel …
COKIE: CLEMENT!

In this first example, Lewis simply provides an incorrect response to a question posed by Ms. C. None of the students know the definition of the word, and Lewis was the only one who was brave enough (or had the sense of humor) to guess aloud. There is something solidifying for the students about this, and it is shared through laughter.

The second example is a more serious discussion on rights of monarchs in European history. The students do not understand the seriousness of the situation, and at first think they are talking about simply about relationships and sex. However, Ms. C emphasizes the seriousness of it by using the word “rape”. Suddenly the students are a little uncomfortable, and use laughter to show their discomfort, but also to sort of group together, as none of them were aware of the real meaning of the discussion. The boys do not understand that a monarch’s right to someone’s wife might include rape, and thus they think having such rights would be wonderful. The boys are very confused and think that “rights” to a woman might be romantic or involve a relationship where the woman would stand up for the monarch.
MS. C: So you’ve stolen her from her family?

you rape her every night?

and she’s gong to protect you?

(Laughter)

IVAN: Who said he’s going to rape her?

LEWIS: Where did raping come from?

MS. C: If it’s not consensual. She doesn’t want to be with you. It’s rape.

IVAN: No who doesn’t want to be with you?

LEWIS: I don’t rape

IVAN: Yeah, man.

MS. C: That’s good

LEWIS: She rapes me

(Laughter)

LEWIS: Like I take her and she like rapes me.

(Laughter)

The students are clearly surprised when Ms. C uses the word “rape” – “Who said he’s going to rape her?” asks Ivan. “Where did the raping come from?” asks Lewis. They laugh because they were all confused, as young students. The boys then take this into a joke, almost to confirm their group discomfort. Their community of practice does not typically discuss such topics, and as a group, they use laughter to share this commonality.

Finally, Ms. C uses laughter to express her own discomfort with this division between youth and adult communities, as well as cultural differences. In the following example, she clearly understands Child Protective Services, although her students do not. She may also realize that Cokie’s understanding of family and the role of parents as something different in a Hispanic culture versus Ms. C’s White American culture.
MS. C: Would anyone like someone with absolute power?
IVAN: Like your parents!
MS. C: No… if your parents were abusive you could get out. You could tell people and the government would take them away from you
IVAN: What’s the government gonna do when your mom finds you though? (laughing)
MS. C: Put her in jail
COKIE: Nooooooo

As Cokie seems increasingly uncomfortable with this conversation, Ms. C uses laughter as a sign of embarrassment and discomfort, solidifying herself as part of the “out-group” in the classroom. Overall, laughter is used to create community of practice – whether it be a youth community, or cultural community. The laughter signifies a shared joke or understanding, and more often than not, excludes the out-group.

Clothes and Appearance

As we have seen, communication creates communities, particularly in an increase in sharing communication features between cultures. Not only does their language reflect an almost cross-cultural sharing of features, but the non-verbal communicator of clothes and appearance also reflect a less traditional African American culture. In fact, there seems to be a sort of mix of hipster and African-American culture dominating trends in fashion, music, and language in the two observed classrooms. The males in this class wear dark framed glasses and skinny jeans, almost a preppy style of dressing, like that of the “hipster” culture. The New York Times was perhaps the first to label this cultural movement of Black hipsters as “blipsters” (Pressler, 2007). Pressler defines the blipster
as “a person who is Black and also can be stereotyped by appearance, musical taste and/or social scene as a hipster” or “Young people who wear tight jeans and Vans and skateboard through the projects” (2007). The male African American students in this study seem to easily fit into this definition, and, as Olopade (2009) explains, it is much more difficult to label a female as a blipster. Harvard professor Marcyliena Morgan explains that this Black hipster movement is something that softens “the boundaries around Black-male fashion” (quoted in Olopade, 2009). This cross-cultural style of dressing is well represented in these observed classrooms. The African American boys wear skinny jeans with a lot of neon colors, skateboarding shoes, t-shirts with obscure hipster bands, and dark-framed glasses. This blipster culture is another way that cultures are overlapping in multicultural settings and that a community of practice spanning cultures is defined.

**Conclusion**

Gaze, gestures, posture, laughter, and clothing communicate values and beliefs – culture. To the American teacher, gaze and posture communicate attention, or perhaps even respect in the classroom setting. The lack of either is specifically addressed – even in a verbal reprimand. The frequency and type of hand-raising vary between culture and gender in this ethnographic study. When a teacher requires it, White males raise their hands to signal their taking the floor or the beginning of a turn. Asian American and Latina girls will use it to request the floor, and will wait for it to be given by the teacher. Minority male students rarely, if at all, use hand raising, waiting instead to spontaneously take the floor or to wait for a cold-call nomination.

Laughter is a community builder. Often, it is culturally or linguistically formed
community, but in this multiethnic environment, it is also a constructor of a youth community of practice. Both types often aim the laughter at an “outsider” or at something an outsider may not understand. Finally, clothing is a non-verbal communication resource. In this study, I focus on fashion as a cross-cultural communicator, and discuss the emergence of the “blipster” identity in this multiethnic school.

In these analytical chapters, I have discussed methods of communication – from participation to language sharing to nonverbal communication. I now move to analysis of what these choices in communication mean for students’ identity in a multicultural setting. In the next chapter, I provide examples of how Latino students construct a cultural identity through language and conclude with a discussion of an intercultural youth identity, constructed through communication.
Chapter Seven: Language and Identity in the Multilingual Classroom

Linguistic and communication choices are directly related to one’s cultural identity. Goffman (1963) explains that the self is constructed through discourse – and that language choices are key to one’s identity construction. We are not defined by ourselves, but by how others perceive us. Identity, whether on an individual, social, or institutional level, is something that we are constantly building and negotiating throughout our lives through our interaction with others (Thornborrow, 2004). Delpit and Dowdy (2002) agree, describing one’s language as being a reflection of their culture and cultural identity - a reflection of family, tradition, and community. “Our home language is as viscerally tied to our beings as existence itself,” Delpit writes, “just as our skin provides us with a means to negotiate our interactions with this world… our language plays an equally pivotal role in determining who we are” (xvii). In this study, students index their cultural identity through language, as well as create a youth identity.

Communication affects community building in the youth multiethnic space, and language is also used to determine social groups in a culture. "People use language to indicate social allegiances” and to show which groups they belong to (Sterling, 1996 p. 1). The in and out groups are defined, and language is then employed to “express and create the relationship of solidarity” – through distance and formality or intimacy and familiarity (Sterling, 2). This rings true in my observations, as students use code-switching, laughter, and non-ratification of linguistic sharing to create solidarity within cultural groups. "Just as linguistic choices create and maintain power and solidarity dimensions of role relationships, speakers can also use language to indicate social allegiances, that is, which groups they are members of and which groups they are not"
Ivan’s earlier quote of “Don’t try to be Hispanic, man” does just this: telling classmates what groups they can or cannot be part of.

Not only is culture simply related to communication, but this relationship is a reflection of one’s identity. Ochs (1993) discusses how language and identity are related: “social identity is a crucial dimension of the social meaning of particular linguistic constructions”, she writes. The two are distantly but importantly related, especially in determining cultural universals in the construction of social identity through language. Ochs claims that all societies would have affirmative and negative particles for agreement, disagreement, acceptance, rejection, as well as linguistic acts for greeting, announcing, thanking, assessing, complimenting, claiming, suggesting, granting permission, complaining, etc. (p. 299). The major difference between cultural constructions of social identity is in “which acts and stances are preferred and prevalent cultural resources for building particular identities. In one community, a stance or act may be widely used to construct some social identity, whereas in another that stance or act is rarely drawn on to construct that identity (p. 300). In summary, speakers establish social identities through two means; social acts (behaviors) and stances (point of view, attitude).

“Language is one of the most intimate expressions of identity, indeed the ‘skin that we speak,’” describes Delpit (2002, p. 47). In The Skin that We Speak, the inherent connection between language and identity is expressed: “Our language embraces us long before we are defined by any other medium of identity. In our mother’s womb we hear and feel the sounds, the rhythms, the cadences of our ‘mother tongue’… our home language is as viscerally tied to our beings as existence itself… it is no wonder that our
first language becomes intimately connected to our identity” (Delpit and Dowdy, 2002, p. xvii). It seems impossible to separate language and identity, and this is evident as the analysis of this chapter progresses.

An understanding of identity development is important for a study of education and communication and culture. Tatum (1997) discusses identity development in adolescence for minorities, focusing on individual ethnic and cultural groups. She cites the stages of William Cross’ theory of racial identity development as pertinent to adolescents. The stages included Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion/emersion, Internalization, and Internalization/commitment (Tatum, 1997, p. 55). Each child goes through these stages as they reach maturation. First, in the “pre-encounter” stage, racial identity is not even under examination. In the stage of “Encounter” – event or series of events forces young person to “acknowledge the personal impact of racism” (55) examination of one’s racial or ethnic identity “may begin as early as junior high school” (55). In adolescence, then, “race becomes personally salient” for minority youth, asking themselves how they should act, what they should do, etc. (60). It is because of this questioning as they mature, that adolescents will group themselves with those of similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds – to learn how to answer these questions – why all the Black kids are sitting together in the cafeteria. In my observations, the idea of cultural identity is constantly at the forefront of discussion – in either self-identification, identifying other’s cultural or ethnic identity, or through, as I describe in this chapter, labeling, topic choice, or meta-discursive behavior. These identifiers all index a community of practice.
Community of Practice

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999) demonstrate the idea of “community of practice” in language and identity studies. A community of practice is an “aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor” that includes “ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations - in short, practices - emerge in the course of their joint activity around that endeavor”. The authors continue by explaining that “social relations form around these activities, the activities form around relationships, and particular kinds of knowledge and expertise become part of individuals’ identities and places in the community. It is not the assemblance or the purpose that defines the community of practice; rather, a community of practice is simultaneously defined by its membership and the shared practice in which that membership is engaged” (2). Eckert (2008) continues by arguing that linguistic variation and style, or identity, this “persona style” is the “best level for approaching the meaning of variation, for it is at this level that we connect linguistic styles with other stylistic systems such as clothing and other commoditized signs and with the kinds of ideological constructions that speakers share and interpret and that thereby populate the social imagination” (Eckert, 2008, p. 456).

Bucholtz (1999) describes the connection between the more recent “Practice Theory” and language: “the idea that the social world is best viewed as a set of practices” (204) that began with Bourdieu and Certau. Her study describes the linguistic practices of the community of “nerd girls” – that their choices of phonology, syntax, lexicon, and discourse all create this “nerd” identity. As Bucholtz explains, ‘Nerd girls’ conscious
opposition to this ideology is evident in every aspect of their lives, from language to hexis to other aspects of self-presentation” (213). It is clear that all areas of communication – from verbal to non-verbal to topic of discourse to phonology – create the identity of a specific community of practice.

In the Pew Hispanic Center’s 2008 report on Hispanics and Education, the authors claim that, while White students have felt less isolated from minority students, “at the same time, Black and Hispanic students have become slightly more isolated from White students” (Fry and Gonzales, 2008, p. 9). The assertion and communication of their identities is important in feeling like part of a group, and in this study, students do so through classroom discourse and communication. This isolation is consistent with Pew’s 2009 report on “How Young Latinos Come of Age in America”. This study explains that, while Latinos in the U.S. claim they are satisfied with their lives, they are more likely to drop out of school, become teen parents, or live in poverty. Latinos also have gone against typical improvements in such areas between generations, and U.S.-born Latinos are not doing better than foreign-born Latinos in the U.S. This study shows that the term “American” is only used by 33% of U.S. born Latinos, in contrast to the term “Hispanic” or “Latino” or the country that their parents left to raise their children in the States (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). It is not until third-generation or higher, do 50% of Hispanic youths use the term “American” to self-identify.

In this ethnography, I found strong constructions of community of practice as well as real barriers to joining the community of practice. Through student communication, sharing of language, ratification of language, and construction of identity, students form their own youth minority community of practice. Their verbal interactions, such as
borrowing linguistic features of minority variations or ratifying language sharing, create a community of practice, as does their nonverbal communication, like laughter. The welcoming atmosphere of this community of practice is crucial to encouraging all students to participate, allowing them to discuss topics comfortably, and engage in high level conversations. Unfortunately, in my observations, the two teachers are not included nor do they participate in the community of practice. The inclusion of the teacher into the classroom community of practice is crucial to clear, thorough, and constructive conversation.

In this chapter, I focus on how the Latino students at Multicultural High school construct their Latino identity through classroom communication. Latinos are the most numerous minority in this high school, and especially in the ninth grade classroom that I observed. I base this chapter on Latino identity on theoretical research in language and identity, paired with statistical data on Latino youth in the U.S. Finally, I provide evidence of the existence and construction of a shared, non-cultural youth identity that emerges in this multiethnic space.

**Latino Identity**

Through language choices and variation and topic choice, these ninth grade Latino students communicated and constructed their Latino identity through classroom communication. Code switching and the non-ratification of other ethnicities’ use of Spanish, family, religion, and machismo represent common themes and patterns that emerged in the construction of Latino identity in the ninth grade classroom at Wakefield High School. Although nearly the majority of the school’s population, the teacher studied in these observations was White, and her understanding of those common themes often
mismatched with the Latino students’ communication of them, excluding her from participation in their community of practice.

Aoki (2000) discusses the use of code switching as part of identity construction. “Code switching enacts an identity claims without making an explicit statement such a “I am Mexican American. It illuminates the communicative event, as cultural site, with a focus on the dynamics of language use to accomplish particular sociocommunicative ends” (209). The theme of family and religion would emerge, and often in opposition to the less traditional beliefs and values of the White teacher – such as in marriage without a priest, or acting in opposition to one’s family. Finally, themes of machismo, a protection of females, and the power of the male appeared throughout the hours of observation, whether in the volunteering for a female student, or offering to get her supplies for the class. Aoki also focuses on the major themes in Mexican-American communication being hard work, family, and religion.

At The Multicultural High School, Latino students, by labeling ethnicity, machismo, along with discussion of family, religion, construct their cultural identity through communication.

Labeling

Aoki (2000) explains that the use of ethnic labels in talk mark cultural identities. This is true in this ninth grade classroom, as there is a constant reminder of who is from where, and who is what ethnicity. The two boys in the following ninth grade conversation are Dominican and often display a disdain for other Latin American nations, including Costa Rica.

**LEWIS:** I can’t wait for swimming to start.

**IVAN:** You go to my country and swim…
LEWIS: I want to go to Costa Rica

IVAN: Costa Rica, boyyyy, he got no taste.

Ivan positions himself as a non-Costa Rican Hispanic, and takes it a step further by excluding Lewis from the in-group through language. Lewis is Asian American, and “he got no taste”. Ivan puts down Lewis for thinking that Costa Rica might be a good place to travel, when clearly it is not Ivan’s home country. The phrase “he got no taste” quickly excludes Lewis from the Latino group.

The next dialogue again deals with labeling of Latin American nations and their relationship to them. Code switching (as discussed in Chapter Five on Language Sharing) into Spanish is utilized as the students clearly position themselves as Hispanic or not – through a claimed relationship to Fidel Castro or volunteering their knowledge of dictators. The phrase “oye chico” is thrown out into the conversation by some of the boys to demonstrate their Latino identity, when the talk turns to Fidel Castro. The conversation closes with the declaration of superiority of Ivan’s home country, the Dominican Republic. In this predominantly Latino classroom, every opportunity is taken to label oneself as Hispanic, even if through inaccurate claims, as illustrated in the next example.

MS. C: The point of all this discussion is that here in our country there isn’t a single person with total power; it is the foundation of this country.

Teacher: In North Korea they do, does anyone know his name?

EDWIN: Kim Jung Il

COokie: Who is the president of Russia?

IVAN: So in…

LEWIS: That reminds me of that movie “Air Force One”
I know the dictator of Cuba

Castro

What’s his name?

La familia Castro

Fidel Castro and he kind of gave power to his brother

I know Fidel Castro!

My dad used to work with him.

No really. I know him.

Fidel Castro, absolute power

Oye chico!

Oye chico!

In the 1700s many monarchs had absolute power nobody could question that authority.

How do you think you might react, if you were in that country?

Is this before or after Castro?

For example if I was in Cuba

I would swim to Dominican Republic.

I’d start swimmin’

Ivan most likely does not personally know the Fidel Castro but claims Castro as a marker or label of a Latino identity. Two other boys join in the support for this labeling by taking turns shouting, “Oye, chico!” Even as Ms. C continues in her discussion of absolute power in the 1700s, Edwin takes the opportunity to relate it right back to Castro: “Is this before or after Castro?” he asks. This opens the floor for Ivan to continue with more labeling, but now to compare Cuba to his own country of heritage: The Dominican Republic. Although Castro is a great figure to claim as a label of Latino identity, he must clarify that if he actually were in Cuba, he would need to leave so desperately to go to the
Dominican Republic, that he’d “start swimmin’!” It is also interesting to note the exclusion of non-Latinos again, as Lewis (Asian American) attempts to participate in this discussion, but is not ratified or acknowledged in any way at all. His only overlapping turn in this discussion (“That reminds me of that movie ‘Air Force One’”) is quickly moved past for the identity talk focused around the topic of Fidel Castro.

This next claim by Ivan is also an inaccurate one, but useful for labeling himself as Hispanic, once again. Although he has repeatedly declared his country of origin to be the Dominican Republic, Ivan not only claims personal familiarity with Fidel Castro, but explorer Hernan Cortes as one of his own.

**IVAN:** Hernan Cortes, he comes from my country. *Hola, papa!*

Here, Ms. C has named Hernan Cortes as one of the explorers in the Golden Age, and Ivan is quick to claim him as a marker of Hispanic-ness. Similar to the earlier use of “*Oye chico!*”, he turns to a fellow Hispanic classmate, Edwin, and shouts, “*Hola, papa!*” in excitement. He is not literally saying, “hello, father,” but is used as an exclamatory, “yeah!” This is a phrase commonly used in informal conversations in this classroom, particularly by fellow Hispanic male students, and is received with laughter and a sudden flurry of Spanish discussion.

I now provide one more example of a semi-accurate claim by Ivan that is used to label the cultural identity of himself and his Hispanic classmates.

**MS. C:** When did he sail?

**LEWIS:** 1492
MS. C: Which country?

IVAN: Us! The Spaniards!

COKIE: Spain!

MS. C: Yes, Spain paid for his trip.

Do you remember the... queen?

COKIE: Elizabeth?

MS. C: Queen Isabella. And king…

COKIE: James!

In this short discussion of Christopher Columbus, Ms. C asks what nation Columbus came from. There are two fallacies in this discussion. First, Christopher Columbus was probably Italian, not Spanish. The Spanish-speaking students seem excited to be able to claim Columbus as a symbol of their cultural identity, as Ivan exclaims, “Us! The Spaniards!” He uses the pronoun “us” to align himself with Spain, when in fact, we have learned that he hails from the Dominican Republic. He includes all Spanish-speaking people, perhaps, as part of this Hispanic identity. Cokie is excited to find that Columbus was Spanish, and shrieks, “Spain!” as a follow-up to Ivan’s claim.

The use of labeling can be to distinguish the “in” group or the “out” group, signifying who participates in and who does not participate in their community of practice. In this dialogue, first the country of Ivan’s and other student’s origin is named and even shouted in excitement. Although Ivan may or may not have been to Columbus’ house in the Dominican Republic, he must hold this stance, and says “Yeah I been there” – which causes some whispered Spanish discussion and laughter by the four boys in that one corner.

MS. C: No that was a long time later … where did he land?
IVAN: *En el Caribe*

MS. C: Well uh, yes

Ivan: The Dominican republic!!!

MS. C: Have you seen his house, Ivan? You can still go visit it…

IVAN: Yeah I been there

(*inaudible Spanish between four Hispanic males. Causes hysterical laughter.*)

MS. C: He called the island Hispaniola, today it’s the DR and Haití.

He also went to Cuba.

IVAN: Whoaaaa Cubbbaaa…

MS. C: ok well however he called them Indians.

Why?

He thought he made it to Asia.

He knew they weren’t Chinese.

They were dark.

(*Most students turn to look at Lewis, who is Asian.*)

LEWIS: Ahh! Ha-ha! (*almost a spoken laughter, out of discomfort*)

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MS. C: He always believed he made it to Asia

COKIE: So when he died…

IVAN: People, be quiet!

You know his house is like well it’s like a town

his house is right here and the water is right there

and you can see the water from it

and they say he supposed to like keep boats right there and stuff

MS. C: If you ever go to the Dominican Republic with Ivan,

you will know the secrets of Columbus

IVAN: Yeahhh boyyyy
In the second half of this dialogue, students use labeling not only to mark themselves and their own cultural identity, but to distinguish between who shares that identity and who does not. When Ms. C simply mentions the continent of Asia, and people that were not Chinese, almost all of the students either turn to look, or very obviously shift their gaze to Lewis, an Asian American. This causes him real discomfort, most likely because of the sudden amount of attention on him because of his being labeled as part of the “other”.

I provide a final example for the labeling as part of the cultural identity construction. Here, the Latino students label George Lopez, a well-known Latino comedian, as a marker of Latino identity. Much of his work is related to race-relations and Hispanic culture. His stage character adopts an almost exaggerated Chicano dialect, and he comes up in discussions in this ninth grade classroom frequently. Here is one example.

**IVAN:** You guys watch George Lopez yesterday?

**MS. C:** Ivan.

**IVAN:** No it shows you why how people cheat in soccer. This girl grabs, ok for example, there’s this girl standing right here

This girl, this girl ok, you just grab her by the hair

**EDWIN:** Oh yeah I saw that!!

**LEWIS:** Oh my god he like punched her?

**EDWIN:** She was like

Yeah she was crushed

**LEWIS:** Yeahhh! ha-ha

**COKIE:** It was so violent. It’s like not how you play soccer.
Once Ivan brings up George Lopez, Ms. C immediately says, “Ivan” with a warning tone to her voice. He shows how it is related to the conversation on the ends justifying the means, and continues. Edwin creates solidarity by saying, “oh yeah I saw that!” and expanding upon Ivan’s discussion. The labeling of George Lopez as an identity marker, as well as the shared understanding and description of the story creates solidarity within this ethnic group. I have shown how labeling by Latino students “index solidarity within their ethnic groups and to, purposefully and inadvertently, exclude those outside their ethnic group” (Paris, 2008, p. 111), and now move to the importance of family in this community.

*Family*

Aoki (2000) points out in his study of Mexican Americans, that his informants “discuss in detail the topic of family and its social importance” (217). In the observed ninth grade classroom, family, the importance of family, and especially the role of parents, routinely was brought into class discussions. The following quote was at the end of a short side conversation about getting in fights with parents. Although they may argue or disagree with their parents, they are incredibly important. As one of the ninth grade Hispanic males claimed,

> If you kill my dad, then ill kill you. I fight with my dad sometimes but if you kill my dad. I swear that would be the last day of your whole life.

Often, the discussion of parents in conversations is when it contradicts a view of the teacher. In this section, the teacher explains that, if abused, a child could have their parent taken away from the child. One Hispanic female cannot comprehend why anyone would want his or her mother taken and put in jail.

**MS. C:** Would anyone like someone with absolute power?
IVAN: Like your parents!

MS. C: No… if your parents were abusive you could get out.
You could tell people and the government would take them away from you.

IVAN: What’s the government gonna do when your mom finds you though? (Laughing)

MS. C: Put her in jail

COKIE: Noooo

MS. C: Anyway that’s besides the point.

COKIE: I wouldn’t put my mom in jail!

MS. C: Well, what if she was… beating you? Ha-ha (laughing)

COKIE: Nooo

This discussion of family and parents is in direct opposition to Cokie’s understanding of family and parents. She cannot move past Ms. C’s statement that parents could be abusive, or that the government would somehow come between someone and their family. First, she cries, “Noooo!” and then “I wouldn’t put my mom in jail!” Even when Ms. C takes this to an extreme, and asks, “What if she was… beating you?” Cokie cannot make this connection that is so against all of her beliefs, ideas, and values.

In the following conversation about “The Prince” and the idea that a just ruler must look at all perspectives before making a decision, Ms. C uses the importance and experience with family to make a connection with the children.

MS. C: Think before you punch. Be slow before you act. Think before you act.
Who has a younger brother or sister?

COKIE: Me!

IVAN: I am the youngest.

MS. C: So you might have a different perspective.
Have you ever had a situation where you know they are really wrong?
and then mom and dad come in and who gets in trouble, you!! The older one!

**IVAN:** Ohh no me I do

**LEWIS:** My parents…

**IVAN:** My dad always blames me!

**EDWIN:** My little sister gets blamed…ha-ha

**MS. C:** Ivan, ok you always get blamed regardless

**IVAN:** When I get blamed I just…

**LEWIS:** Ok so what he says here is to be a good prince, a good parent, or a good teacher, you must look at all sides first

**IVAN:** Can I give this to my mom or something?

**COKIE:** Yes.

**IVAN:** I’m gonna give this to my mama!

Because family is traditionally important to the Latino culture, the use of family and family relations as a connection to the students’ real experiences makes for a solid, successful lesson. The students are able to grasp the concept from “The Prince” and take it to heart so much as to want to tell their parents about it: “I’m gonna give this to my mama!” says Ivan. It is clear that family plays a crucial role in the Latino culture, and within this family structure are clear gender roles that are discussed in the next section.

**Machismo**

Latino culture has specific expectations for gender roles, as “machismo,” or an exaggerated masculinity. Even these young students clearly embraced this ideal, evident in their classroom communication. Throughout my observations, there was the constant use of terms such as “Ladies, first”. Male Hispanic students give their female students first choice for the use of classroom markers, glue, scissors, etc. When they are asked to grab textbooks from the bookshelf, the Hispanic students offer to pass them out to the
female Hispanic students without fail. In this following example, one Hispanic male student even volunteers a female to read aloud, so that she does not have to raise her hand. He notices she might like to read and does the work for her. Unfortunately, the teacher does not take it seriously – and in the hours of observation, only one of the Hispanic girls in the class, that often volunteers and speaks up, has ever read aloud.

MS. C: Okayyy we’re gonna start reading in “voices from the past”

IVAN: Ladies first.

MS. C: Who wants to read?

LEWIS: I’ll read it!

IVAN: Bianca, go ahead!

MS. C: Well actually [Lewis] volunteered first...so…

MS. C: Hold on I can only pay attention to one voice at a time?

IVAN: Ladies first!

In this next section, Ivan and a female Hispanic classmate are assigned to work together in a group. Suddenly, Ivan’s voice is low, and he leans in closely to speak. The students are asked to complete a short project, which involves first having each pair line up for a textbook, and some art supplies. Most of the pairs are dividing the work to get all of the supplies more quickly. However, Ivan takes on a strong male role, and will not allow his female partner to do any of the work.

IVAN: Hey you know you don’t have to do anything.

Ill do it all for you.

Don’t even get up to get that paper.

You know I’ll do it all.

(Inaudible whisper in Spanish)

The exaggerated masculinity, or machismo, is clearly communicated in the Latino interactions with Latina peers. I provide examples of Ivan’s offering to do the work for a
female student, volunteering in class for another, and using the phrase “ladies, first” frequently. Other Latino male students will let girls leave the class ahead of them or when passing out materials, will provide them to the girls first. Along with machismo, shared religion, and constant reference to and discussion of it, is another topic used to construct Latino identity.

Religion

Religion is a common theme in the Latino-majority ninth grade classroom. Aoki (2000) also found this in his ethnography – the idea of “Somos Catolicos” – “We are Catholics” (219). He points out that this form of “to be” is the permanent, unchanging one (in contrast to “estar” which is changeable). An integral part of the traditional Hispanic identity, the Latino students construct it in the following wedding and honeymoon discussion with their teacher. It is her first day back after her honeymoon.

IVAN: How was it? □
MS. C: No walkin’ down the aisle or anything
COKIE: What?
MS. C: No I didn’t do that
EDWIN: What!
DIEGO: What?
COKIE: Why not?
MS. C: What do you mean why not?
EDWIN: Where did you come from then?
MS. C: I was under the ground…
COKIE: Seriously?
MS. C: …and up I just came
(laughter) □
LEWIS: How was it though?
MS. C: Ummmm… How was it exactly…
LEWIS: Oh did you forget?
MS. C: Um, no I didn’t forget, I just didn’t take the time to
LEWIS: *(looking at photo on wall)*
Is that your husband?
MS. C: Yes, no, not the one on the wall - that’s my dog.
MS. C: Ok so well it was at an art gallery actually
in Old Town Alexandria and…
we were inside and outside at the beginning
and at the wedding PART, it was outside:
And my sister and brother-in-law sang a little song:
At the time, my fiancé and I just were standing,
outside of the garden and.. just went in… Sooo
Here’s the door
COKIE: So your dad didn’t give you away?
MS. C: No I gave myself away. I don’t belong to my husband.
EDWIN: Wait, WHAT!
MS. C: We waited for the song to finish.
And then Mr. Taylor and his wife

did the vows, said welcome, do you take her…
IVAN: You didn’t get married by a priest?
MS. C: Yeah we got legally married in the morning
EDWIN: You didn’t get married by a church?
STUDENTS: Ohhhhhhh
MS. C: Mr. Taylor is certified so, so he didn’t need any “legalness”
STUDENTS: Ohhh!!!
MS. C: Sooo… So we said our little vows
COKIE: Was he in a tux?
Here, there is much incredulity expressed by the Hispanic students in relation to the lack of tradition and religion in this wedding story. First, Ms. C shocks them by relating that she did NOT walk down the aisle. “What?”, “What?” and “Why not?” meet this statement by Ms. C. It is not until she makes a joke about being underground instead of at the end of an aisle are the students able to move past this upset. Things go smoothly until Cokie asks for clarification: “Your dad didn’t give you away?” Again, there are strong, shocked reactions to Ms. C’s response: “Wait, WHAT?” asks Edwin, shocked. Even after Ms. C explains the situation, Edwin still cannot fully understand: “You didn’t get married by a church?” Although not directly religion, it is the traditions and customs of a Catholic community that are in question in this preceding dialogue. These students have probably only been exposed to the traditional Catholic wedding, and thus have certain expectations and ideas about what a wedding is like. Ms. C’s description does not fit their understanding, and thus their Latino identity is indexed.

This common discussion of religion also appears in the ninth grade discussion of Machiavelli. It is shocking to these students that the upstanding values of Christianity are possibly questioned.

**MS. C:** Ok, so he said don’t follow Christian rules when you’re trying to lead a country because people are liars and will deceive you if you...

so you need to forget about your conscience

and the things you think are right and do whatever means necessary

to keep your … country stable…

**IVAN:** Uhhhh… did he say Christians are liars?
EDWIN: Really, he did?
LEWIS: No he said all men are liars
MS. C: No… just people in general
IVAN: We’re not liars. (3 seconds) We lie for love!

The students misunderstand the information, and Ivan must clarify. When Edwin hears Ivan’s question, he is also shocked: “Really, he did?” Lewis straightens them out though, and Ms. C clarifies it more accurately. Ivan seems to recover from the shock of a possible Christianity-bash with a lighthearted response: “We lie for love!”

In the next section, Cokie, the Hispanic girl that is always willing to participate, corrects Lewis, the Asian American male, in his assumption that it is “Jewish people” who wear the “little hats,” as opposed to the pope. The tone of the murmuring, in the classroom of ten Hispanics and one White male, is surprise that Lewis was confused, as they might assume all know about the pope.

COKIE: That's the pope with the little hat…
LEWIS: ohhh thought that was Jewish people
COKIE: No… this is Christian people
ALL: (nodding, murmuring in agreement)

I present one last example of the importance of religion in the Latino identity, and the way that this importance and centrality in the students’ lives is expressed in their classroom communication. Ms. C is reading aloud from the textbook about divine authority for monarchs: “It is through God that He rules. The royal throne is not of a man but the throne of God himself. The person of kings is sacred and to move against them is a crime since their power comes from on high.”

MS. C: So what is the author saying about kings?
EDWIN: They were chosen by God.

MS. C: How can you question that?

IVAN: You can’t question God.

COKIE: Yeah, you can’t.

Based on comments by Ms. C, and the tone of her voice, her clarification question of “How can you question that?” is rather cynical and sarcastic. Yet although Ms. C does not find divine right to be a possibility in any way, the students’ perception of God and religion is clear. They fully understand the textbook’s description, and Edwin easily summarizes it. Yet when Ms. C prods with her perhaps rhetorical question, the students continue: “You can’t question God” and “Yeah, you can’t”. It is clear the traditional importance of religion to their Latino identity.

Exclusion of Outgroup

Although most of this chapter has described how the Latino students positively construct their Latino identity in a multiethnic space, they also will create inclusion by excluding other students. In the following example, Latino Ivan deliberately labels Lewis as the “other” through a discussion of the Philippines. Although I am not sure of Lewis’ ethnic background specifically, he outwardly seems to be of Asian descent and often makes references to being Asian in his speech. At the same time, he appears to be good friends with his Latino peers, and, as presented in Chapter Six on language sharing, is quick to use both Spanish phrases and AAVE features in his speech.

COKIE: What about Magellan?

MS. C: They killed him in the Philippines

IVAN: Oh like Lewis’ people!

LEWIS: Ohhhh great. Thanks.
Here, Lewis is set apart from the majority group in this classroom by being told that those in the Philippines are “Lewis’ people”. Lewis’ tone is not a happy one. He does not appreciate being labeled as different in this discussion. The Hispanic students effectively exclude him through their labeling.

**Shared Youth Identity**

I conclude this chapter that has focused on the construction of cultural identities in a multicultural environment, by providing examples of a shared youth identity in which all of the students can participate. As part of this youth minority community of practice, students of different individual cultural backgrounds participate in shared identity construction through communication. I use discussion of the “other”, jerk dancing, technology, and President Obama as four common ideas with which students of all backgrounds can identify.

First, there is a shared minority youth identity that is expressed in the discussion of the Whiteness of all studied historical figures in the World History or U.S. Government classes.

**MS. C:** So why are we studying European explorers?
Are they the only ones that matter?

**ALL:** Yes.

It almost goes without saying that high school classes often make it seem that the European explorers “are the only ones that matter”. Although Ms. C was trying to make a point that there are indeed OTHER groups that matter, the students end the discussion abruptly, and even as Ms. C attempts to continue the explanation, the students are no longer listening.

**MS. C:** It’s fine you can give him any skin color you want…
and then cut it out

IVAN: Can we cut it out and make it look like, like you know crazy

COKIE: I’m giving orange eye liner

LEWIS: Your guy is White.

IVAN: They’re all White anyways

LEWIS: Muchas graciasss…

MS. C: That’s true they all were…

We're studying the European renaissance

But you can rewrite history and make it any color you want.

Again, the discussion turns to the Whiteness of the historical figures studied in class, and there is a shared minority identity constructed in the children’s language. They are doing a project where they create the faces of famous Renaissance players. Lewis points out that Ivan’s “guy is White” in an almost insulting tone, that it is a negative thing that Ivan’s character is White. Ivan replies that “they’re all White anyways,” that there is nothing he can do about it. Labeling of the “other” creates a shared minority youth identity in this classroom.

Jerk dancing

In my observations of the ninth grade classes, there was a constant reference to the idea of “jerk dancing”. The students were very excited to share their knowledge of it with me. During class breaks between activities, Ms. C allows the students to play music or engage in small talk. Almost every time, this provided the opportunity to discuss, or even attempt to engage in, jerk dancing. At other times, the Latino students had discussed Reggaeton music, asked me if I liked it, tried to get the girls, especially Barbara, one of the Latina students, to dance with them. Jerk dancing, however, was something that everybody showed interest in, including the White male, Dylan. Lewis, the Asian American student
was the first to bring up discussion of jerk dancing. Being out of touch with popular youth culture in many respects, I was unfamiliar with this phenomenon. The New York Times, interestingly enough, had just published an article on this dancing – hailing it as an intercultural phenomenon that was one of the first music and dance combinations to reach across many ethnic and racial groups. As Trebay (2009) describes:

“But what attracted him to jerking, he added, were the same things that make so many jerking videos contagious: its fresh neo-punk style, its simple beats and the sense that anyone with a degree of coordination can learn the dance. ‘We just decided for ourselves that there’s no color in jerking,’ he said. ‘If you feel it, go get it and show them you’re straight with it.’”

Youth of all backgrounds are able to participate in this activity, and the Internet is full of videos of these diverse teens sharing their jerk dancing skills. This is simply one consistent example of a pop culture phenomenon that has spanned cultures and races, and perhaps is representative of the direction that cultural identity is moving in the new youth multiethnic space.

Related to jerk dancing are phrases from the hip hop community. Lewis and Ivan are both comfortable using the term “Gucci” in class.

IVAN: The girl is gonna kill me

LEWIS: It’s all Gucci man, I got it, the girl will protect me. It’s all Gucci.

Gucci is high fashion brand name, which in pop culture represents something expensive, quality, or exclusive. According to the Urban Dictionary, the phrase means everything is good, or even high quality, and “because Gucci is rich and ballin’ therefore he is good, cool, and just pimpin’” (Urbandictionary.com). The Gucci brand is often referenced in
hip hop music, and these young students have embraced the phrase, and through it construct a youth identity.

**Technology**

The use of and the discussion about technology also unifies the students as a community, perhaps even in contradiction to the teachers, who may or may not understand all references to technology. The day is full of references to websites, Facebook, Pandora, iPods, Hulu, and text messaging. It is clear that the teachers often are not completely sure to what the students are referencing, although both teachers are very comfortable asking if they are talking about a TV show or a website, or something else, as the name may make it difficult to determine the media format discussed. This short excerpt is a powerful example of how technology and technology terms make their way into all discussions.

**MS. C:** So what is a pretext?

**LEWIS:** A pre-text message.

**COKIE:** Yeah a pre-text message.

**Ms. C:** Do you want to circle that word and define it?

**It means a REASON.**

Ms. C is so used to the technology and text messaging references that she does not even react to this misunderstanding of what a “pretext” versus a “pre-text message” might be. Cell phones are not allowed during class, but especially in the twelfth grade classroom, they are the center of a constant battle between teachers and students. Whether or not the teachers always notice, from my view as the ethnographer, there is constant text messaging in students’ laps or under their coats on their desks. Students will
also blatantly lie if asked if they are using a cell phone in class. The constant use of technology clearly creates a shared youth identity and the exclusion of the teacher.

**Obama references as part of youth identity**

Finally, reference to President Barack Obama by students in this multiethnic space is a common way to construct a youth identity. President Obama is known for having gained the support of the youth vote in the 2008 election. He has especially inspired the minority youth communities, as a youthful and minority man himself. Not only is he popular worldwide, but even made a national speech on education at this very high school months after his inauguration, making him even more well-known in this school community. All students use every opportunity to discuss Obama, the youthful and popular current president. In this short transcription, their adoration of him is apparent, as well as the youthful idea that he is without fault.

**MS. C:** That is fickle. Not loyal. That’s what it says: nobody is really loyal

**LEWIS:** Obama is loyal!

* (Laughter)

In this final example of Obama talk, the class is discussing “The Prince” and Ms. C is attempting to create real-life connections.

**MS. C:** So besides the prince…Who might this advice apply to in real life?

**LEWIS:** Obama?

**IVAN:** Your parents!

**EDWIN:** Obama.

**Male voice:** Obama!

**MS. C:** Ok, the president. Who else?

**IVAN:** Obama

**MS. C:** Yes, any political leader…
It is so commonplace for the students to relate things to President Obama, that Ms. C is easily frustrated with their using him as an answer to so many questions. First she says, “Ok, the president. Who else?” trying to move the conversation forward by saying, “Yes, any political leader…” until the students come up with any other answer.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter the relationship between language and identity – both Latino and intercultural youth – is clear. As Baez explains regarding Latino identity: “Culture, identity, and language may be inextricable from each other” (Baez, 2002, p. 129).

First, I have presented ways in which Latino students construct their cultural identity through communication. More specifically, they label their cultural identity and the “other” through naming, family, religion, and machismo. Finally, it is through the exclusion of an “out-group” through language that their solidarity is confirmed.

I also provided examples of how the move toward more multicultural and multiethnic communities of practice provides the setting for the construction of a shared youth identity in this space. First, minority youth create the “other” to create inclusion. The creation of an “out group” is necessary, and in this case they position the teachers as the out-group based on the age difference. Through the topic selection such as jerk dancing, technology, and President Obama, a shared youth identity is created in these classrooms. By using shared identity communicators and markers and excluding teachers, minority youth construct their own community of practice.
Chapter Eight: Conclusions

Through participation, language sharing, nonverbal communication, and identity construction, minority students in this study create their own community of practice. This is critical to an efficient learning environment. In their article, “The School as a Community of Engaged Learners,” Eckert, Goldman and Wenger (1997) state that “schools must foster communities of practice in which participation, including subject matter learning, is a valued resource for social identity and social interaction both in school and out” (p. 23). Students demonstrate high levels of communicative and cultural competence, and it is necessary that teachers begin to participate in these student communities of practice to ensure high-levels of learning.

There are clear cultural differences in participation in these multiethnic classrooms. Minority students are less likely to volunteer in a formal Initiation, Response, Evaluation setting, but are more likely to participate in the instructional conversation discourse structure. Minority students are also more likely to participate in small group arrangements versus that of the full-class, when they are the statistical minority. Minority females are more likely to gain the floor through hand-raising, and White males are more likely to compete for the floor in a multiethnic setting.

Language sharing is used for the construction of a multiethnic youth identity. Latino and Asian American students were found to employ features of AAVE, however, Latino students specifically did not ratify the use of their linguistic resources by other groups, and even condemned borrowing of Spanish pronunciation or phrases by those in the out-group. African American students held high communicative competence, code switching between features of AAVE in small groups, and especially monocultural
groups, but used more Standard American English in the classroom setting. Nonverbal communication does not differ extremely between cultures in this setting, but play a crucial role in the creation of a youth community. Laughter, especially, is used for constructing an in-group versus out-group. Finally, the connection between language and identity was prevalent in this ethnographic study. Latino students used code switching and “Spanglish” to mark their identity, as well as a continuous labeling of countries, historical figures, and terms as belonging to the Latino community. Lastly, I determined a shared youth identity, through shared understandings of the popular “jerk dance”, technology, and President Obama as topics that span culture and ethnicities.

Throughout this study, from participation to identity construction, there was a shared minority community and identity constructed through verbal and non-verbal communication. In this high school, minorities are in fact the majority, as they make up 89% of the student population. Although from a variety of backgrounds, including Hispanic, African American, and Asian American, they share the need to mark their individual cultural identities, but also to be part of this multicultural school community.

What does this say about Cultural and Communicative Competence? These students have a high level of both competencies, as they exhibit code switching between varieties of English as well as between different languages. Students are able to incorporate their home communication styles into the multicultural communication of the classroom. In contrast, it seems that the teachers have one style of teaching that is not always inclusive of students of all backgrounds.

So, what is “Minority Talk”? As classrooms become increasingly diverse, the line between “minority variations of English” is becoming blurred. Latinos do not necessarily
speak English in one manner that contrasts the way in which African Americans speak. However, this communication style is not completely reflective of a “standard” American English classroom communication pattern either. Minority students are sharing features, sharing topics, and sharing identity markers in these multiethnic spaces.

Students are effectively sharing language features and communicating with other students, while creating a cross-cultural youth identity through language, a minority youth community of practice. Teachers, however, are not participants in the community of practice, which leads to less efficient learning environments.

Policy implications

I began this thesis by discussing Arlington County’s “Council for Cultural Competence” and the push to have “Courageous Conversations” about diversity and cultural differences. Is this top-down effort enough? Is it making any difference in the classroom itself? According to my observations, it is not. A top-down approach regarding diversity is not enough. Instead of school policy devoted to high-level discussion of cultural diversity and inclusion, policy must be created to bring such awareness to the classroom, via teacher education and workshops for students. While students are demonstrating effective uses of language, and thus a high level of communicative competence, teachers are without doubt, constructed as outsiders, non-participants of the community of practice.

Looking toward national education policy, such as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, it is critical that the focus be less on standards and assessment data and more on what is happening within classrooms. Researchers and policymakers need to focus on how to change results through changing day to day
classroom interactions through teacher education and preparation for diverse classrooms. Teacher training programs need to focus on communicative and cultural competency, preparing teachers to effectively communicate classroom goals and instructions in increasingly and constantly changing classroom demographics. Schools need the funding to create offices like this County’s Minority Achievement Office, that focus on cultural differences, and provide the support needed to succeed in a multicultural setting.

Finally, policymakers should provide funding for and recognize more than quantitative research to support education policies. As anyone who has spent time in a classroom could vouch for, there is a large gap between policies and what is actually happening within the classrooms. There is a need for more funded ethnographic, or qualitative research combined with statistical data to paint a more clear and accurate picture of the public education system today to better improve upon it. Policy cannot be determined based solely on national and state assessment scores, but how teachers do or do not improve such scores.

**Practical Application**

This research can be applied to improving participation and academic achievement in the classroom. First, teachers must first be made aware of cultural differences in communication. Both “cold calling” and “instructional conversation” are used by teachers in my observations, and both exclude many students from participating – whether it is through the floor being closed unless called on by the teacher, or whether it is so open that not all students are able to take the floor. Understanding home communication styles is crucial: in areas of participation, code-switching, features of minority variations of English, as well as the relationship between language and cultural
identity. Whether mandated as part of teacher certification, or taught in workshops or even online forums, this understanding is critical to having high teacher quality.

To put this understanding into practice, teacher education must be expanded to include sociolinguistic research and application. Teachers must be provided with basic distinctions between communicative and linguistic resources of different cultural groups. Not only must they be aware of differences to hold a more accepting and understanding view of linguistic diversity, but also must be taught to include all students through different classroom arrangements. As minority students are often more comfortable speaking with peers over authority figures, there should be variation in full-class instruction and small-group interaction.

Further research

As the U.S. population changes, and as minorities become the majority, and as public school classrooms reflect such demographic shifts, more research must be done into effectively engaging students of all backgrounds, and preventing miscommunications and misunderstandings between students and teachers. Paris (2008, 2009) is one of the first to venture into educational ethnographies of multiethnic spaces, and there is a need for this to continue. Policy makers, administrators, curriculum-writers, and teachers must be prepared with an understanding of how communication changes in these increasingly diverse populations.

Although this study provides patterns and changes in communication styles of minority students in two small classrooms in one public high school, it cannot be applied to every setting, community, and diverse classroom. If the achievement gap is between ethnic and racial groups, and if such groups have different means of communicating, it is
critical that educators and policymakers consider these distinctions. As the cultural makeup of school settings change, there is a need for research in diverse public schools around the nation to find broader patterns in classroom activity. Researchers must look not only at how students’ communicative competency is changing, but at teachers’ flexibility in classroom management and methodology and what works best for a multiethnic classroom. Such research would be applied to teacher training, as teacher effectiveness is found to be one of the greatest factors to improving the achievement gap.
References


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