



Title of Project:

Learning English as an L2 in PreK:
Socialization, Acquisition, and Identity

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Project Summary:

“Kids are like sponges” goes the saying. Yet accounts from teachers and empirical studies from researchers paint a more complex picture of preschoolers learning a second language in school. This project draws on two bodies of literature: work exploring social factors in L2 learning for young children and research examining the link between identity and L2 learning in older learners. Drawing on poststructuralist theory (Weedon, 1987; Davies & Harré, 1990), this study views identity as a social achievement, negotiated through interaction. It seeks to understand the relationship between classroom social context, student identity, and English learning for four-year-old ELLs during their prekindergarten in public school.

This year-long nested case study focuses on two Head Start PreK classrooms in neighboring school districts of the same newly multilingual mid-Atlantic city. Through participant observation, interviewing, and video recording, it combines ethnographic and discourse analytic methods to explore the contributions of classroom level factors (e.g. curriculum and teacher ideology) and student level factors (especially social identity) to students’ English learning outcomes. The two classrooms will be used as contrastive cases in order to examine the relationship between discourses of language and learning, class curriculum, and the subject positions available for English learners in each class. Within each classroom case, contrastive student cases will allow an exploration of the relationship between student identity and L2 outcomes. Video recording will provide longitudinal language data for each focal student. Social network analysis (Friedkin & Thomas, 1997) will contribute to understanding the students’ social positions in their classrooms.