Summary:

This two and a half year-long critical ethnography considers “the cultural productions of the ESL student” (Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996) at a multilingual, multiethnic high school in Hawai‘i. Specifically, it considers two broadly competing cultural productions of ESL in the high school context, an official, school-sanctioned cultural production, and an oppositional “generation 1.5” ESL student cultural production. The former is examined through national and state educational and language policies aimed at ESL students, ESL program organization, intra-institutional relationships, curriculum, and instructional practices. The generation 1.5, or long-term, US-educated learners of ESL (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999), cultural productions are considered through analysis of an array of situated social practices these students take up in ESL classrooms that are both indexical of their resistance and that work to make the ESL program precisely what it is these students claim to be resisting: a slowed down, low-prestige, academically inconsequential program.

Six primary “performance strike” (Shor, 1992) practices are considered in microanalytic detail: not bringing books to class, not doing classwork, starting late and finishing early, resisting and reproducing “FOBeing,” bargaining, and “Worksheet Syndrome.” As well, four “defensive teaching” (McNeil, 1986) accommodations are similarly analysed: study hall, floating deadlines, alternative assignments, and test preparation. These practices are considered with respect to how they serve as socializing resources for newcomer and other non-generation-1.5 ESL students as well as teachers.

The study is broadly situated within a social practice theoretical framework, and draws specifically on communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and language socialization (Schiefflin & Ochs, 1996; Ochs, 1996; Duff, 2002, 2003). A central point is that as the ESL teachers and students are agents multiply situated in historical, political, and social contexts, the cultural productions of ESL are not simply one-way, top-down phenomena, nor are they mere reflections of negative societal valuations about immigrants, bi- and multilingualism, and non-native Englishes. Rather, they are jointly constructed by teachers and students in the social practices of everyday classroom life. In these terms, the study highlights the situated, contingent, multidirectional socialization
processes that occur among teachers and students, and how these can affect L2 teaching and learning.
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