AUTHORING AMERICAN: AN EXPLORATION AND INTERPRETATION OF IDENTITY 
PRACTICES IN AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

Matthew M. Green

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education (Culture, Curriculum and Change).

Chapel Hill
2015

Approved by:
Lynda Stone
George Noblit
Xue Rong
Sherick Hughes
Karla Martin
ABSTRACT

Matthew M. Green: Authoring American: An Exploration and Interpretation of Identity Practices in an Elementary Classroom
(Under the direction of Lynda Stone)

This dissertation is a study of how 5th grade students come to experience, construct, and understand ‘American’ identity, and sameness and difference, both related to and separate from ‘American’ in the context of one rural North Carolina school. This dissertation seeks to answer three research questions regarding identity, American identity and elementary age children: (1) How is a figured world of ‘American’ played out in one classroom’s practices? (2) In what ways do 5th grade students identify sameness and difference with regard to who they and others are? (3) Overall, What is ‘American’ identity and their relationship to it?
To my participants - While you are anonymous here, I am indebted to you for allowing me into your classroom and your lives and for sharing your stories, experiences and yourselves with me.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It’s not very often that you get a chance to sit down and actually write out your appreciation for others. I feel like I never really say thank you enough, or tell people how much I appreciate them, or tell them how much my life is better because they are a part of it. For me at least, it always seem that the words, feeling, thoughts and sentiments are there, but not always said.

Thank you to my committee of five intelligent, wise and caring individuals. Lynda Stone, George Noblit, Xue Rong, Sherick Hughes and Karla Martin. Lynda, you have been with me for 7 years through my Masters and PhD. Thank you for you continuous support and efforts to push me to be a more thoughtful scholar and academic. George, I will honestly and truly miss our office next-door conversations. They were always thought provoking, insightful and most of all enjoyable. Xue, thank you for pushing me academically and providing me opportunities to expand my research horizons. Sherick, I am so glad that I met you oh so many years ago and you could share this dissertation process with me. You are both a colleague and a friend. Karla, thank you for all of your support, willful listening to me complain and spew ideas about my data in the early stages.

Thank you Judith Meece and Janice Anderson. You both joined my committee late and on short notice, but doing so enabled me to reach this point. Thank you to the many faculty members who I have had the pleasure of working with and getting to know over the years. I have enjoyed our conversations, our collaborations, our laughs and sometimes our commiserations.
Thank you ‘Ms. Washington’, while anonymous in this dissertation, you are a friend and welcomed me into your classroom and the lives of your students this year. I loved every second of it.

Jodi, Laurie, Caroline, Kara, Mike – Thank you for making Student Affairs a warm and welcoming place, for allowing me to use the fridge, the coffee maker, the cakes and candies, thank you for the conversations and the smiles. It always felt good knowing where my first stop was every time I walked into Peabody. Thank you Martinette, I always looked forward to greasy lunches and the conversations that accompanied them. I don’t know if I will ever be able to replace the greasy lunch crew and I will always remember the hypotenuse. Thank you to Deb Eaker-Rich for tirelessly supporting students and working with me anytime a problem was in need of a solution.

Thank you to the Bryan family. Jamie, Catherine, Carolyn, Alison, Jackie, Bucket and Jim. You welcomed me into your home figuratively and literally. I have enjoyed getting to know all of you, especially Tuesday dinners with Momo and singing the 12 Day of Christmas. Through tragedy and triumph your support has been steadfast and instrumental in my success and how much I have love Chapel Hill.

To Skip, Henry, Matt, Blaine and Ben, thank you for constantly keeping me humble and making sure I knew what the most important 4 day weekend of the year was. To Bobby, Dan, Crowe, Phipps and Butts, thank you for the constant conversation about absolutely any topic under the sun and at every hour of the day. To Scott, Chris and Greg, thank you for the banter that sometimes can only be described as the most asinine of things. Anybody who has been close to my phone over the past 3 years knows how much I enjoy keeping in touch with all of my friends.
Alison, Summer and Tim, thank you for the conversations and comradery in the C.R.E.D. this year. You all have made sure I wasn’t sighing before sighing time, didn’t drink too much coffee, interacted with other human and promoted positivity. Thank you Dani for all the laughs, hugs and being in this struggle with me, thank you Esme never ceasing to push me to be better and for your humor, thank you to my cohort for making this journey more enjoyable, thank you to all the teachers, former students and colleagues for being an integral part of my Chapel Hill and School of Ed. experience.

Thank you to Matt Miller. I’ve enjoyed the ride no matter how tough. Sitting at the desk next to you this year helped me laugh and stay sane. And above all else thank you for always reminding me that in all of this madness – “Hegel is arguing that the reality is merely an a priori adjunct of non-naturalistic ethics, Kant via the categorical imperative is holding that ontologically it exists only in the imagination, and Marx claims it was offside.”

Thank you Mandy Bean. I honestly would not have made it through this year without you. You got to see it all and thank you for always being a friend when I needed it most. Thank you for the Saturday coffee and work sessions, for being the other half of the GreenBean, for your sense of humor, for happy hours and especially for all the hugs. Thanks for not being a sparrow.

To Ashley Boyd, I don't think words can quiet capture everything this paragraph could, or should, or needs to say. I could never have imagined 5 years ago how much meeting you in our very first class would mean. Thank you for the conversations about anything, everything and nothing all at the same time, for sharing your quirkiness with me and your cheese fries, for explaining BIG jewelry to me and giving me advice about shoes, for your love of Carolina Basketball and blueberry cheese. Thank you for telling me to ‘just keep swimming’, for your
encouragement, for pushing me, for inspiring me with your passion and for your support. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your journey. Thank you for all shared laughs and smiles and memories. Most of all, thank you for always allowing me to be me. Thank you for everything. As much as I could try and want to express my appreciation and gratitude here - words are never enough.

Anne Bryan - Sometimes thank you isn’t enough. It isn’t enough to capture the appreciation. It isn’t enough to convey thoughts and feelings. It isn’t enough to tell someone how much they have truly made a difference. That is certainly the case here. I have leaned on your more than anybody else through everything. Thank you for the lunches, for the daily calendars, for convincing me to go to the gym and listening to me grumble about it the whole way. Thank you for the open door to your office, for the trips to YoPo, picking me up when I was down, for being my cheerleader, and continuously giving. Thank you seems insignificant when I look at the ways in which you have impacted my life. You are truly a trusted confidant and friend. You cannot be replaced and I hope that I never have to try. I will always be there to eat sandwiches if you need me to.

Thank you to my family. Mom and Dad, you have loved, supported, sacrificed and continuously given. I am truly grateful for that even if I do not express it enough, or call home as often as would be ideal. Thank you for putting up with me during all of these years. Thank you for helping even when I am being stubborn and hard headed. I can think of no greater influence on why I am where I am today than the life and experiences that you have given me. Thank you Megan. For being a big sister, taking me out to dinner when I couldn’t afford it myself and asking me about my life and work even when I didn’t feel like sharing. I hope that one day I can support you the same way that you have supported me. To my dog Milo who has seen the good,
the bad and the ugly in all of this. You will never be able to read this, but I hope that I can be as good to you as you have been to me.

As I sit here and think about how much these acknowledgements are not just about a dissertation, but about a life and the people that populate that life I realize that these words and pages can only begin to express my appreciation. Thank you to all the people who have helped, changed me and impacted me in ways I may never know. There are so many people that have supported me through the years and meant so much in making Chapel Hill my home. I cannot thank you all enough.
Table of Contents

List of Tables ........................................................................................................................................ xiv

List of Figures ......................................................................................................................................... xv

I: Introduction and Rationale .................................................................................................................. 1

Context of Schooling ............................................................................................................................... 5

Children's Views on Identity, Race and Ethnicity .................................................................................. 7

Boundaries of Identity ............................................................................................................................... 9

II: Theoretical Considerations ................................................................................................................ 15

Identity-in-Practice Framework ............................................................................................................. 16

Figured World ........................................................................................................................................ 17

Positionality .......................................................................................................................................... 19

Self-Authoring ...................................................................................................................................... 21

Making Worlds ..................................................................................................................................... 23

Identity-in-Practice Research ................................................................................................................ 25

III: Research Methods and Design ....................................................................................................... 31

The Plan ................................................................................................................................................. 31

The Recruitment .................................................................................................................................. 34
The Collection .......................................................................................................................... 35
The Participants, The Classroom, The School ................................................................. 37
Paralleling Grounded Theory ......................................................................................... 41
The Man, The Reflection, The Positionality ................................................................. 53

IV: ‘American’ Identity-In-Practice ................................................................................. 63

Figured Worlds ................................................................................................................... 63
Defining Cultural Symbols .............................................................................................. 64
Defining Cultural Artifacts .............................................................................................. 76
Defining Cultural Tools ..................................................................................................... 79
Subject Position ............................................................................................................... 81
Authoring Identity ........................................................................................................... 87
Use of Cultural Tools ......................................................................................................... 88
Enacting Cultural Symbols .............................................................................................. 92
Cultural Legacies ............................................................................................................. 95
Barriers to Authoring ........................................................................................................ 98
Making-Worlds .................................................................................................................. 101
Limitations of Identity in Practice .................................................................................. 102

V: Redes, Space and Identity .......................................................................................... 105

Physical Space, Similarity and Difference ...................................................................... 106
Classroom ......................................................................................................................... 107
Groupings ........................................................................................................................................... 108
Outside of School. ................................................................................................................................ 111
Physical Space and American Identity.................................................................................................. 112
National Identity and Country ............................................................................................................. 113
National Identity as School and Home ................................................................................................. 116
Social Space, Similarity and Difference ............................................................................................... 118
Friends .................................................................................................................................................. 119
Familiarity ............................................................................................................................................... 120
Social Space and American Identity ..................................................................................................... 122
Family .................................................................................................................................................... 122
Peers ...................................................................................................................................................... 125
Symbolic Space, Similarity and Difference ............................................................................................ 127
Interests/Personalities ............................................................................................................................ 127
Curriculum ............................................................................................................................................... 129
Symbolic Space and American Identity ................................................................................................. 131
Cultural Traditions ................................................................................................................................. 132
Language and Skin Color ...................................................................................................................... 134
Curriculum ............................................................................................................................................... 141
Changes in Space/Identity ....................................................................................................................... 147
VI: Discussion and Further Implications ............................................................................................... 155
Summary of Results .................................................................................................................. 155
Implications for Practice ........................................................................................................ 159
Implications for Research ...................................................................................................... 161
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................. 162
Appendix A ............................................................................................................................. 166
Appendix B ............................................................................................................................. 169
Appendix C ............................................................................................................................. 170
Appendix D ............................................................................................................................. 171
Appendix E ............................................................................................................................. 172
Appendix F ............................................................................................................................. 174
References ............................................................................................................................. 177
List of Tables

Table 1. Brief Description of Study Participants .......................................................... 54
List of Figures

Figure 1. Classroom Diagram ........................................................................................................ 56
Figure 2. Identity and Redes Conceptual Framework .................................................................... 67
I: Introduction and Rationale

This dissertation is a study of how 5th grade students come to experience, construct, and understand ‘American’ identity, sameness and difference, both related to and separate from ‘American’ in the context of one rural North Carolina school. As North Carolina experiences new and changing diversities, so to do North Carolina schools. The ways in which students across this spectrum of diversity experience, construct and understand ‘American’ identity, their sameness and difference in school significantly influences how students orient their identities in relation to others and institutions. The ways in which students experience peers, classrooms and schools in North Carolina greatly affects the formation of identities for all students.

For immigrant children – or children of immigrants – or students who are merely seen as immigrants – understanding of ‘American’ identity and the reification of ‘American’ identity may be especially salient (Baptista, 1983; Graham, 2005; Olsen, 1996; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Suárez-Orozco, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999). Identity significantly influences how people come to understand themselves and others and their places in the world. Much research has identified the role of schools in identity formations, in students’ worldviews, outlooks on life and education, peer and teacher relationships, and academic orientations (Green, 2010; Montes, 2007; Perreira, Fuligni & Potochnick, 2010; Rubin, 2007; Urrieta, 2007; Wortham, 2006).

This dissertation seeks to answer three questions:

(1) How is a figured world of ‘American’ played out in one classroom’s practices?
(2) In what ways do 5th grade students identify sameness and difference with regard to who they and others are?

(3) Overall, what is ‘American’ identity and their relationship to it?

To answer these questions I build on literature by using two interpretive frames for analysis. This dissertation is an exercise in both inductive and deductive analysis. Firstly, by using *identity-in-practice* (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998) as an analytic framework, this study explains how students construct identity in relation to ‘American’ identity, how this identity is authored and how the navigation of identity affects their experiences with peers and in classrooms. Secondly, through a grounded theory approach, this study also examines the themes that emerged through observation and interviews with students, both in describing similarity and difference in peers and their multiple relationships that student have to ‘American’ identity.

The structure of this dissertation is in six parts; (1) Introduction and Rationale, (2) Theoretical Considerations, (3) Research Methods and Design, (4) ‘American’ Identity-In-Practice, (5) Redes, Space and Identity, and (6) Discussion and Further Implications. Chapter One provides the rationale for the study and introduces and frames the phenomenon of interest. To contextualize this study I first identify and synthesize existing literature on immigrant identity and schooling experiences. This is done because the literature that frames this phenomenon, the context of schooling, and the contexts of the ways in which students construct boundaries and categorizations is centered around the ‘American’/‘Immigrant’ dialogism. Herein specific emphasis is placed on national identity and the historically problematic nature of this phenomenon. The focus for the study initially began with immigrant identity, and while it shifted in focus to the construction of ‘American’ and all students, the nature of ‘immigrant’ identity remains a core factor in the initial frame of the study and its conception.
It is also important to note that much of the research on immigrant identity focuses on adolescent immigrant student experiences, not elementary age students. Much of the existing literature identifies race and ethnicity as key factors in the schooling experiences of immigrant students. Thus, I provide a brief background on research into children’s views about race and ethnicity, differentiating them from older students. Lastly, I problematize the literature to place this study within the context of previous, emerging and future research on the intersection of identity in general, national identity and student experiences in schools.

In the second chapter, I examine the theoretical considerations of an *identity-in-practice* framework and how this identity framework has been used in education literature. I provide some of the theoretical background on how Holland et al. (1998) bridge and ‘suture’ culturalist and constructivist theory to create the *identity-in-practice* framework. This chapter also works to explain it four categorizations – *figured worlds, positionality, self-authoring* and *making worlds*. After explicating the theoretical underpinnings of *identity-in-practice* theory I examine how researchers have approached identity through this framework and discuss how the framework has been used and applied in education research.

The third chapter details the research methods of the dissertation. First, I present the research design including the methodological considerations and rationale for the target population. Second, I describe the process of recruitment and identification of a participant classroom and participant students. Third, I provide an overview of data collection procedures, timeline and the types of data that were collected. Fourth, I provide an overview of participants, classroom, school and district contexts, describing both demographic data, as well as descriptive data on classroom structure and programs. Fifth, I explain the construction of the grounded theory, the process for the formation of the approach to analysis and the process I went through.
to construct my framework. Lastly, I present the ways in which my own subject position, action and interaction in the classroom and with students intersected with the research.

In the fourth chapter I present findings utilizing the identity-in-practice theoretical framework. Within this chapter I first set out the four components of identity-in-practice - figured worlds, positionality, self-authoring and making worlds. Within construction of the figured world(s) of ‘American’ identity I offer data on how students construct and define cultural symbols, artifacts and tools. These elements were used specifically because they were what emerged from the observational, interview, focus group and artifact data. Secondly I examine how students experience and construct subject positions in relation to peers and the socio-historic context. In the shift to thinking about subject position and authoring, student change their thinking about ‘American’ identity and the elements presented here are from the ways in which students described cultural tools, symbols and legacies. I further describe the barriers students experience in authoring identity. Lastly I discuss the student’s ability, or lack of ability, in constructing new figured worlds of identity.

The fifth chapter I propose an alternative understanding of the data as constructed around a grounded theory of space. This is a framework that emerged from observations, interviews, focus groups and artifact data as outlined in Chapter Three. First, I describe the ways in which students’ identities of similarity, difference and ‘American’ identity is experience and shaped through the arrangement and structure of physical space. Secondly, I discuss the ways in which students’ identities of similarity, difference and ‘American’ identity is experienced and shaped through the arrangement and structure of symbolic space. Further I go on to examine the ways in which students’ identities of similarity, difference and ‘American’ identity is experienced and shaped through the arrangement and structure of symbolic space. Lastly, I examine the ways in
which students’ identities of similarity, difference and ‘American’ identity change when the arrangement and structure of space changes.

In the final chapter, I present a summary of the data from chapters Four and Five as they relate to the research questions. I then provide a discussion of the data in relation to the theoretical frameworks presented and prior research. I conclude with the limitations of this study and the ways in which this study relates to other and future research.

Context of Schooling

North Carolina’s population has significantly changed over the past twenty years, leading the state to be labeled an “Emerging Gateway State” for immigrant populations (Singer, 2004; Anrig & Wang, 2006). The term “Emerging Gateway State” stems from the identification of previous immigrant hot spots, including Florida, Texas, California and New York, as doorways into the United States where immigrant populations eventually settled. The foreign-born population in North Carolina grew 67%, from 2000 to 2010, with the foreign-born population representing 7.5% of the North Carolina population with Asian and Hispanic people representing the largest foreign-born groups (Migration Policy Institute, 2012). This influx of new residents to the state is also reflected in the student population in North Carolina schools. In North Carolina children residing with at least one immigrant parent at home accounted for 16.9% of children under the age of 18 in 2010 (Migration Policy Institute, 2012).

North Carolina’s immigrant population is continuing to growing rapidly and is leading to a changing landscape of students in schools. North Carolina has always been a state with a diverse population, from the time of initial European immigration and initiation of slavery, along with the presence of Native American tribes. The new and changing diversity of students in
North Carolina schools is an essential element to how they come to form identities in relation to each other. Understanding the new diversities of populations, communities and students that have been established in North Carolina schools is significant for researchers and educators.

The positive and negative ways in which identity interacts with the schooling process has been studied. In general, schools are sites that allow for interaction between private and public social spaces. Positively, students bring their personal contexts, including life histories and experiences, to school. The negative impact of schooling exponentially affects the identities of native-born minorities as well as immigrants and children of immigrants. For some, students’ lives fit school and for others they do not. Here research has shown that America’s schools historically have been designed to strip immigrant students of their heritage identity in favor of an ‘American’ identity (Baptista, 1983; Graham, 2005; Olsen, 1996; Tyack, 2003). One result of this process has been differential allocation of educational resources among students (El Haj, 2007). How immigrant students experience schooling affects how they come to position themselves in American society, as well as the ways in which they are able to access educational, cultural, and life resources.

Identities of children and youth as well as adults may or may not directly be tied to a country of origin, former citizenship or current citizenship (Dejaeghere & McCleary, 2010; Delgado, Bernal, Aleman & Carmonal, 2008; El-Haj, 2007). In this sense, ‘American’ identity is more than just possession of national citizenship. For newcomers, whatever status or origin, national identity may always be one of comparison. As Sarup (1996) explains, “identity is only conceivable in and through difference. That one is not what the Other is, is critical in defining who one is” (p. 47).
The coupling of American citizenship and American identity does not necessarily exist as it once did. Focusing on the historical and still contemporary push to ‘Americanize’ the young, one body of literature makes the case that what has come to be known as ‘subtractive schooling,’ that is, the ‘white-washing’ of heritage identity (Olsen, 1996; Suárez-Orozco, C. & Suárez-Orozco, M.M., 1995; Suárez-Orozco, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999). This results is a divestment of social, cultural, and academic capital for these students and in turn marginalizes them at school (Valenzuela, 1999). As indicated above, within issues of national identity, race and ethnicity continue to be key factors (Devos, Gavin & Quintana, 2010; El Haj, 2007; Green, 2010; Rong & Brown, 2002; Urrieta, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999; Waters, 1994).

**Children's Views on Identity, Race and Ethnicity**

The perspectives of young children are an aspect of immigrant identity literature that has not received much attention in previous research. In particular, what is lacking is how elementary students experience, construct and understand identity in relation to their peers and in relation to categorical labels and classifications such as “American.” Some prior literature does describes the beginning formation of children's political attitudes in their elementary years, with schools playing the largest role in developing attitudes, beliefs and conceptions of national allegiances (Hess & Turney-Purta, 1967).

In the late eighties, Aboud (1988) explained how children see peers: “the child's awareness of ethnic groupings also takes the form of perceiving certain similarities between members of the same group and perceiving certain differences between members of different groups” (p. 47). For young children, similarities and differences are used to organize and categorize themselves and peers into groups based mostly on perceptual and physical characteristics (Aboud, 1988; Hirschfeld, 1996). By the age of seven, students have a strong
understanding of ethnic and racial differences in appearance, specifically between Whites and Blacks. By the age of nine or ten, children are aware of myriad ethnic groups and are able to identify differences beyond a Black/White dichotomy (Aboud, 1988). Further, young children use different metrics when categorizing peers as similar or different. Specifically, skin color is often used as a measure of dissimilarity more than a measure of similarity, whereas culture and common history is seen as important when classifying peers as similar (Aboud, 1988; Lambert & Klineberg, 1967). In young children, beliefs about race develop into a body of knowledge from which inferences are made about category members, far beyond the range of interpersonal experiences (Hirschfeld, 1996). Interestingly, these beliefs often lead children to build stereotypes based on their limited understanding of category groups, and these stereotyped understandings of peers and groups are more rigidly believed by children than adults (Ambady, Shih, Kim & Pittinsky, 2001). The rigidity of stereotypes which students construct on limited understanding of peers, difference and self can lead them to implicitly activate sociocultural stereotypes in their own behaviors, which then can have an impact on students’ social and academic experiences in school (Ambady et al., 2001).

This study focuses on how students, especially elementary students, experience, construct and understand these categorizations and labels for each other. Children's views of their own identity constancy (the maintenance of identity over time despite change in outward appearance) is not as fixed as in adults; moreover children believe that they can be different people when they grow up, as opposed to always being who they presently are (Hirschfeld, 1996). Identity constancy, however, becomes more concrete as children grow older. The ability to change identity is not well documented in the literature, but children's belief that identity can change is important in considering how they construct notions of who is and isn't ‘American.’
Boundaries of Identity

As introduced above, research on the identity formations and schooling experiences of students has often been approached through the ‘immigrant’/‘American’ dialogism and by examining how groups and individuals with assumed collective identities assimilate or acculturate into American society. Assimilation has been defined as the process in which individuals give up multiple social, political, ethnic and racial characteristics or beliefs and come to adopt those of a new group or society (Gordon, 1964; Phinney, 1989, 1990; Quintana, Herrera & Nelson, 2010). Critiques of the assimilation model point out that immigrant adaptation is non-linear and much more of a complex process than perhaps initially conceived in the literature (Rumbaut, 1997).

Another iteration of the assimilation model is the “additive” model of acculturation in which individuals acquire new cultural capital while maintaining some degree of heritage capital (Gibson, 1995). Acculturation in this sense has been defined as the process of cultural exchange between different groups as they come into contact with one another over a period of time and how cultural characteristics of individuals change as a part of this process (Banks, 1999, Fuligni, 1998). Acculturation approaches identity as fluid because change and adaptation occur through cultural exchange between people as opposed to unidirectional flow of culture and identity. In sum, problems for understanding identity exist when it is understood that the notion of an ‘American’ national identity has evolved over time in relation to the concept of the United States being a culturally pluralistic society.

‘American’ identity has evolved to accept some groups into it, but not others (Baptiste, 1983). In this sense, the development of a national identity has been dictated by granting membership to certain individuals and populations and excluding others. This exclusion has
predominately been examined through the lens of the theories just identified. The examination of identity, in this respect, has always centered on the individual, group and collective identities, and on social inclusion/exclusion rather than how boundaries are created and group memberships are maintained.

The examination of identity in regards to immigrant students has recently moved away from static models of cultural characteristics to the examination of how the dynamic role social (re)production and (re)creation of *imagined communities* (Anderson, 2006; El Haj, 2007) plays into how national identity is defined and distinguished. *Imagined communities* are collectively held communities of social membership that exist despite the presence or lack thereof of social interaction among its members. The nation-state is an example of a modern *imagined community*, in that not all of its members interact socially with every other member. Within their imagination, they do believe that the community, nation-state, exists outside of themselves as a collective. Anderson (2006) argues that *imagined communities* represent the idea that national identity is held within socially imposed and reified constructs and only changes as needed for political advantages by the dominant group.

The privileging and positioning of certain imagined identities exemplify power that exist within identity by providing access to the valued cultural resources to members and not ‘others’. Cultural resources here are the habitually used cultural tools, artifacts and cultural means by which people enact particular identities of a world (Holland et al., 1998). The creation of subjectivities and assigning of collective identities to these subjects, along with the use of subject position for accessing or limiting cultural resources, creates the boundaries of an *imagined community*. Wortham (2006) puts forth the argument that social identification depends on publicly circulated models of identity, as these models get explicitly denoted or implicitly
indexed in actual events of identification. Holland et al. (1998) explain that this positioning of figured and positional identities is dependent on the mass circulation of cultural resources of the imagined community. The imagined community of ‘American’ national identity provides access through activities, performances, discourses and artifacts. To this end, the construction of national identity is very important to the understanding of the construction of boundaries of inclusion, exclusion, the construction of the ‘other’, or non-member, and how students experience these boundaries in and through schools.

Alba (2005) observed that the schooling environment of immigrant students often has a distinct effect by sometimes creating “blurred” or “bright” boundaries. Blurred boundaries create fewer distinctions between immigrants and native students, whereas “bright” boundaries make cultural traits and identity differences explicit, thereby elevating the possibility for social segregation between immigrants and native students. The creation of these boundaries is directly related to how students view and construct their own identities and those of their peers. The construction of these boundaries, bright or blurred, the ways in which students experience these boundaries, and how they affects their schooling experiences are the subjects of this study.

The way in which students construct and enact their conceptions of who is and is not ‘American’ is predicated on the collectively held imagined of what an ‘American’ is. Existing academic literature on immigrant students identifies them by immigrant sub-groups, largely based on racial and ethnic classification (Carter & Warikoo, 2009). This assumed/assigned membership of immigrant students to a sub-group has largely been a static classification, unable to be changed, with no emphasis placed on the creation of the classification. This body of literature is also based on perceived commonality of experience and collectivity of identity (Rouse, 1995).
The concept of identity, especially with immigrants, is often seen as a single “ethnic identity,” when it is actually a multitude of “selves” being acted on by competing outside forces (Quintana et al., 2010). Current literature on immigrant identity in education suggests that identity be understood as produced much more actively and dynamically, situating it as a cultural product that is created by people through interactions. What is significant in an identity-in-practice framework (Holland et al, 1998) is that the creation of a world that has become ‘figured’ through cultural production, as well as how individuals enact identity within this ‘figured world’. This means that people are able to enact identity and possibly enact classifications, rather than simply being a classification. However, the reified notion of ‘American’ as an imagined community allows an identity-in-practice framework to elucidate some of the complexities that students experience with identity, peers and school. This isn’t to deny that classifications exist; rather the goal is to provide context for this study within the literature.

Immigrant students do experience the subject position of their identity different from those native born. Some are positioned and positively labeled “model minority” or “smart” (Lee, 1996; Urrieta, 2009), while others are racialized into lower status groups (El Haj, 2007; Rong & Brown, 2002; Urrieta, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999; Waters, 1994). Latin@s living in the United States are consistently seen as less American than their Caucasian American counterparts because of perceived differences, thereby highlighting the boundaries and dissociations between ethnic and national identities (Devos et al., 2010; Green, 2010).

The nature of shifting immigrant school populations and demographics is not a new phenomenon for American public schools. Migration and the movement of humans and populations is at its core a human phenomenon. However, the ways in which populations are classified, categorized and grouped based on both real and imagined borders and boundaries also
is a political phenomenon. Schools often become sites for the political classification and identification of ‘American’ and ‘non-American’ to play out. Further problematizing the entrenchment of this categorization is the critiques of the label “immigrant” as many diaspora populations reject the notion of “not belonging,” which is often forced upon them in the “host” versus “newcomer” relationship (Villenas, 2007).

The shift away from examining identity as a study of individuals or collectively held identities, towards understanding how identity is created and defined, plays an important role in understanding the boundaries that create difference. The complexity and intersection of experience, identity, movements of people and movements of borders/boundaries is a common phenomenon historically and currently within schools. Abu El-Haj (2007) has explained the significance that schools play in this intersection:

Schools play important roles in the construction of the symbolic boundaries of the nation – in constructing who is and is not a member of the nation – and in the provision of resources with which immigrant youth learn to belong to and navigate their new society. (p. 288)

The creation of boundaries is the first step in the production of barriers for immigrant youth in schools. Ong (1996) described this phenomenon of national identity membership as cultural citizenship, “a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society” (p. 738). The navigation of boundaries and resulting barriers associated with national identity is often a reciprocal negotiation of identity between the ‘American’, the ‘immigrant’ and the society. This self-making and being-made controls who is granted membership to national identities, along with the privileges or barriers associated with such identities (Ong, 1996; Quintana, Herrera & Nelson, 2010).
Whether incorporating immigrant identity and schooling experiences through an assimilation or acculturation identity framework, schools have an active role in not only producing barriers and inequalities to educational resources, but in reproducing them as well. Schools work in a variety of ways by limiting and/or providing access to educational resources to students through identity. The specific contributions of this dissertation are that through the use of this dual analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of how students experience, and construct, understand identity. Further, this dissertation not only adds to literature and research on identity, especially for elementary children, but also has multiple practical implications for teaching and curriculum. In the next chapter Holland et al. (1998) provide a framework that explains how identity exists and is enacted through access to, and activation of, cultural resources, cultural capital and use of cultural tools.
II: Theoretical Considerations

To frame this study and my approach to identity research, I rely heavily on the ‘identity-in-practice’ framework. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) constructed this framework through a combination of the fields of cultural anthropology and psychology creating a sociohistorical, “cultural studies of the person” (p.6) lens for examining identity. The frame utilized by them builds upon, and moves beyond, the culturalist approach of Bakhtin and the constructivist approach of Vygotsky. Combining the culturalist and constructivists approaches provides a framework that moves away from cultural determinism and allows for agency. Holland et al. write of this shift,

Our plan is to follow a different possibility for understanding the “suturing” of persons to position. From Bakhtinian-sociohistoric perspective, persons develop through and around the cultural forms by which they are identified, and identify themselves, in the context of their affiliation or disaffiliation with those associated with those forms and practices. A better metaphor for us is.....codevelopment – the linked development of people, cultural forms, and the social positions in particular historical worlds. (p.33)

Holland et al. (1998) explain that the purpose for bridging and ‘suturing’ these two traditions together is an effort to move identity theory forward toward a more nuanced hybrid understanding that involves both structure and agency. They continue,

to respect humans as social and cultural creatures and therefore bounded, yet to recognize the process whereby human collectives and individuals often move themselves – led by hope, desperations, or even playfulness, but certainly by no rational plan – from one set of socially and culturally formed subjectives to another. (p. 6)
Bridging Bahktin and Vygotsky allows for a new framework for understanding identity in that a person is not entirely driven either by internal logic or by social situations.

Holland et al. also borrow from the activity theory of Leontiev in which individuals are always in a state of active engagement with the environment in a historical, collectively defined, and socially constructed way. Activity theory views the individual’s interaction with a culturally constructed environment as a fluid interaction that could change daily, rather than a constant encounter/reactive dichotomy. Activity theory shares the understanding of how individuals are constantly engaged with their environment according to Bourdieu's (1977) practice theory and through the action of improvisations. Holland et al. make a clear distinction between their theory and that of Bourdieu in that Bourdieu's view of improvisation made an impact on the next generation, whereas they see improvisation of action as making a difference in the next interaction or moment of cultural production.

Holland et al. explain the suturing of these theories as a process of *heuristic development*, where a behavior is described as a person-in-practice, with activity/practice/behavior becoming symbols and icons which can be used in mediation of future behavior (p.40). The concept of *heuristic development* with regard to identity is beneficial because it moves away from extremes of cultural determinism and situational totalitarianism and focuses on a dual process of the creation of products that meet persons in practice, and appropriation of these products for use in the next moment of activity (Holland et al., 1998, p.40).

**Identity-in-Practice Framework**

Holland et al. construct identity-in-practice through four distinct areas – (1) *figured worlds*, (2) *positionality*, (3) *self-authoring* and (4) *making worlds*. The remainder of this chapter
identifies the theoretical foundations of the identity-in-practice framework, as well as explores the ways in which this framework has been used in past education research. Holland et al. (1998) define identity as “a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations” (p. 5). This understanding of identity relies on the premise that identity is lived in and through activity and social practices. Identities in this sense “trace our participation, especially agency, in socially produced, culturally constructed activities” (p. 41).

**Figured World**

The figured world plays a particularly central role in identity construction and practice for Holland et al. (1998). They define a figured world as “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p. 52). Holland et al. (1998) also note that “a figured world is formed and re-formed in relation to everyday activities and the events that ordain happenings within it” (p. 53). Using a figured world’s framework to understand identity allows for examination of the dual cultural process of both making and being made. In his research Urrieta (2007) further elaborates on the meaning of figured worlds:

Figured worlds are thus formed through social interaction, and in them people “figure” out who they are in relation to those around them. Through participation in figured worlds people can re-conceptualize who they are, or shift who they understand themselves to be, as individuals or members of collectives. Through this figuring, individuals also come to understand their ability to craft their future participation, agency, in and across figured worlds. (p. 120)

According to Holland et al. (1998), figured worlds have four distinct characteristics.

Figured worlds are only a part of a larger identity framework, but a very important part because of the codification and reification of meaning and power that is mapped onto artifacts and tools.
First, they are historical phenomena to which people either choose to enter or are recruited to, and they develop through the work of participants. Second, figured worlds are social encounters in which participants' subject positions matter. Third, figured worlds are socially organized and reproduced through participant interaction. Fourth, figured worlds distribute people through landscapes of action.

Furthermore the figured world rests upon people’s ability to form and reform in “as-if” communities. People's identity and agency are tied to the dialectical and dialogical nature of figured worlds as imaginative “as-if” realms. The (re)production of figured worlds through people works to carry out the co-production of activities, discourses, performances and artifacts. A dialogism is an open-ended coproduction of the social and cultural world in which cultural products are placed in socio-historic dialogue, both constructing meaning and being constructed. Holland et al. (1998) explain that objects are made into cultural tools collectively through the attribution of meaning and through constant use and interaction between people; these tools become resources for people to use through enactment. Figured worlds do not only exist in the imaginative “as-if” realm but as happenings in historical time. Embedded are issues of power and privilege associated within figured worlds.

This construction and maintenance of the figured world is an integral part of their overall identity-in-practice theory. Here Holland et al. give special attention to the works of Vygotsky in the structuring of the ‘figured world’. Specifically, They draw on his notion of collectively developed signs and symbols, the use of signs and symbols in constructing meaning, and the capacity of artifacts to shift the perceptual, cognitive and practical frame of activity. The figured world is populated and occupied through these signs, symbols and artifacts which construct our understanding of identity and meaning.
In constructing and deploying signs and symbols into the world, individuals collectively act to create meaning and shape a figured world. This figured world is populated not only by signs, symbols and artifacts, but also by people who practice and embody them. Within this figured world which acts to provide meaning and construction to identity, individuals are both positioned and position themselves. This process is the second element of the identity-in-practice framework; *positionality*, which specifically examines the role of the subject position in identity construction and practice.

*Positionality*

Positionality is where persons are positioned socially, within the figured world, and within the power and privilege associated with the positions within it. These positional identities are important for the identity-in-practice framework because, they place people relationally within a dialogism of self and other; and this relational positioning becomes internalized and embodied over time. The dialogism of self and other in this sense, is an intersection with many borderlands of meaning which come to conceptualize the subject. Holland et al. (1998) make the distinction theoretically between relational, positional and figurative identities, for them, relational identities have to do with behavior as indexical of claims to social relationship with others. They have to do with how one identifies one’s position relative to others, mediated through the ways one feels comfortable or constrained. (p.127)

Figurative identities, however, are entrenched in socio-historical narratives and cultural worlds. About these three forms they explain,
Positional identities have to do with the day-to-day and on-the-ground relations of power….with the social-interactional, social-relational structures of the lived world. Narrativized or figured identities, in contrast have to do with stories, acts, and characters that make the world a cultural world. (p. 127)

Perhaps put too simply, figurative identities are about signs that evoke storylines or plots among generic characters; positional identities are about acts that constitute relations of hierarchy, distance or perhaps affiliation. (p. 128)

The distinction that Holland et al. draw is that nuance between immediate interaction among two individuals characterized by difference and how this characterized meaning is created through assigning of meaning to the signs, symbols and characteristics of individuals within socio-historical context. This dichotomy for Holland et al. is again a distinction between the culturalist and constructivist positions and why there is a need to adopt ideas and theories from both fields.

For Holland et al., social positions develop heuristically over time and become dispositions through participation in and identification with positional identities which inhabit Bourdieu’s habitus. Social positions also work to become “fossilized,” internalized and embodied aspects of identity through “mundane activities” which become habit. Holland et al. explain for an individual,

Through continually objectifying or symbolizing himself enacting the sign, he becomes able to experience a version of himself as an object in a social world given meaning by these signs. Eventually this means of objectification, which is
a form of self-management, becomes what Vygotsky and Bakhtin called inner speech. (p. 142)

Along with the theoretical distinctions made in understanding and positioning of subjects as populated in figured worlds, Holland et al. also recognize controversy with regards to subject position and issues of enduring social categories that cut across many figured worlds and position individuals in concrete ways – most specifically the issue of race. While they do not reconcile the issue and impact of major socio-historic categorizations with their identity-in-practice framework, they accept and recognize the impact that these enduring identities have on construction of figured worlds and the practice of identity. Further, these enduring identities are so intertwined in social, physical and symbolic worlds that they are not cleanly separated from each other.

Positional identities, however, are not without disruption. Individuals have agency through the use of symbols, artifacts and tools. They continue,

The same semiotic mediators, adopted by people to guide their behavior…may serve to reproduce structures of privilege and identities, dominant and subordinate, defined within them, may also work as potential for liberation from social environment. (Holland et al, 1998, p. 143)

The third element of the identity-in-practice framework is space of authoring. Authoring provides actors within the figured world agency and capacity to put identities into practice.

**Self-Authoring**

Self-authoring is the ability of persons to utilize cultural tools, artifacts and legacies to practice an identity socially. In bridging the constructivist and culturalist fields and frameworks
Holland et al. (1998) point out the substantive reasoning behind it. In constructing the identity-in-practice framework it was necessary to articulate valuable aspects of inner and social speech. Bahktin emphasizes the inner speech, dialogic view, power, status, stratification and ownership that is missed in Vygotsky. As Holland et al. (1998) describe, Vygotsky provided a semantic, representational potential of mature linguistic practice and its potential for semiotic mediation, and thus gave less attention to what Bakhtin continued to emphasize, the pragmatic aspects of language – how it was used, how it communicated power and authority, how it was inscribed in status and influence. (p.178)

To construct the theoretical space for self-authoring, Holland et al. again marry Bakhtin, Vygotsky and dialogism. Bridging Bakhtin’s notion of ‘self-fashioning’ and Vygotsky’s ‘semiotic mediation’ provides a framework for self-authoring. Dialogism is important to the framework because it involves a self that always exists in a state of being “addressed” and in the process of “answering”. As Holland et al. explain, the self is positioned from which meaning is made, and through addressing and answering the world, the self “authors” the world (p. 173). The combination of Bakhtin and Vygotsky allows inner speech to move to social speech and into the practice and activity of identity.

Vygotsky’s concept of semiotic mediation, when conceptualizing “voluntary control of activity...through the mediation by cultural devices” (Holland et al, 1998, p. 35), provides an explanation for how the ‘I’ and the ‘Self’ are put into action and practice. The mediating device for this process is constructed through assigning meaning to an object or behavior, and then placing this symbolic object/behavior into an environment as part of a collectively formed system of meaning, which has been appropriated through individual’s social interaction with
others (Holland et al, 1998, p.36). When one begins directing speech inward toward oneself, the process of semiotic mediation and control of symbols to modify one’s mental environment and direct symbols towards behavior begins.

Semiotic mediation not only provides a reference for meaning making among individuals and collective systems, it also provides for agency. Semiotic mediation allows for one to gain control over one's behavior. Agency, through semiotic mediation, remains a social process in which symbols that are being mediated are collectively produced, learned through practice/action, but remain distributed among others over time, space and place (Holland et al, 1998, p.38). Agency is both individual and social through semiotic mediation. Holland et al. explain further that “semiotic mediation as a means to agency gives us a good vantage on the social and historical creation of identities as means to self-activity” (p.40).

This use of semiotic mediation provides a framework that moves away from cultural determinism and allows for agency. Holland et al. (1998) use Vygotsky’s concept of semiotic mediation when conceptualizing “voluntary control of activity...through the mediation by cultural devices” (p. 35). This move from ‘inner speech’ to ‘social speech’ directs one’s own behavior, action and practice, and organizes both expression and experience through this process of semiotic mediation. The last element of identity-in-practice is the ability to make, construct and re-construct ‘worlds’.

**Making Worlds**

The ways in which persons practice identity and utilize tools, artifacts and legacies determines how figured worlds are made and remade and how individuals positionally occupy
them. In authoring one’s self the interpersonal becomes the intrapersonal, and identity becomes inhabited. Holland et al. explain this process:

If inhabitation is the one moment of social reproduction when one figured world, one set of active identities, comes to dominate us as an author, then dishabituation is its complement. We unlearn bodily in the remove from dominant to emerging world, so that we return to the everyday, perhaps, with an altered subjectivity.

(p.238)

The creation of new figured worlds (or re-figuring of worlds) begins in the imagination with activity which ignores the immediate setting, constitutive condition and cultural conventions. Holland et al. explain this phenomenon through the concept of ‘play’, in that through ‘play’ the imagination becomes the embodied, and the possibility of other social and cultural productions become material. Drawing off of Vygotsky again, the capacity for individuals to engage in symbolic and semiotic mediation is central to understanding the role of ‘play’ in construction of new figured worlds and identity. Holland et al. describe this succinctly in that, “The social practice of ‘acting otherwise’ becomes the grounds for our ‘thinking otherwise’” (p.236).

In sum the interaction between individuals and the constructions of the figured world which they occupy and inhabit creates the space for the creation of new figured worlds. The construction of new figured worlds allows for new imaginaries and identities to be created, embodied, and practiced. This ability to make worlds, the construction of new figured worlds, brings the framework full circle in providing agency within structure and an understanding of identity that is neither solely constructivist nor solely culturally deterministic. Holland et al. (1998) thus construct identity-in-practice through the four distinct elements, figured worlds,
positionality, self-authoring and making worlds. The elements identity-in-practice are concurrent in nature, with all components inherently tied to, and dependent upon, the others. In constructing this framework Holland et al. have sutured the interaction between inner speech and social speech, between constructivism and cultural determinism, examining how identity becomes activity.

Identity-in-Practice Research

Research using the identity-in-practice framework is still emerging in many fields. In the field of education, research has focused mostly on the concept of figured worlds itself and has already been used to better understand a multitude of phenomena. For example, figured worlds theory has been used to explain how students, teachers, and educators in general construct certain identities in and around school and how these identities influence students' experience of schooling, teacher training, teacher perceptions and other related experiences. In this vein, Fedecho, Graham, Hudson-Ross (2005), Hatt (2007), Luttrel and Parker (2001), Urrieta (2007, 2009), Rainio (2008), Rubin (2007) and Rush and Fedcho (2008) have all highlighted the ways in which individuals come to “figure” themselves and others in socially constructed “worlds” within schools, classrooms and institutions of higher education.

Such studies work to operationalize the ways in which identity is not intrinsically held, but is manifested in the real world through an identity-in-practice framework. How students come to “figure” who they are in relation to others across multiple socially constructed “worlds” form student identities as a cultural product and determine how they come to understand themselves, as well as the ways in which they relate and interact to peers, teachers, administrators and the institution of schooling.
These studies emphasize figured worlds and make concrete some of the components of identity-in-practice. In what follows, Urrieta’s (2007) study specifically focused on groups of college and adult aged self-identified Chicana/o Activist Educators between 2001 and 2003. Hatt (2007) began collecting data in 2005 with a group of eighteen 18-24 year olds who withdrew or were expelled from high school. Rubin (2007) studied high school students in a single 9th grade social studies classroom. Fedcho, Graham, and Hudson-Ross (2005) described how teacher researchers and teacher educators co-constructed figured worlds and the ways that unsettling states between figured worlds creates opportunities for examining practice, research and collaboration. Rainio (2008) utilized figured worlds theory to explain how elementary age students and a teacher in a Finnish classroom take up roles of characters in “play worlds”. Rush and Fedcho (2008) examined how a single undergraduate middle school education student and a single speech pathology student experienced a collision of figured worlds and utilized improvisation to navigate through an inquiry based course. Luttrell and Parker (2001) examined the lack of fit between teenagers’ home experiences and their choices with reading and writing and school based reading and writing assignments.

Urrieta (2007) examined way in which Chicna/o educator activists “remade” themselves as activist educators in an act of “self-authoring” within a figured world of Chicana/o educator activists. His study showed that for these activists, identity production occurred conceptually as well as procedurally. Conceptually, their figured world of educator activist involved a new figuration of the world that changed how people viewed and acted in the world, both through reinterpreting their pasts and developing new understandings of themselves. Procedurally, these educator activists (re)produced and enacted cultural forms by embracing cultural artifacts specific to their new view of the world and identity.
Hatt (2007) examined how the figured world of “smartness” is constructed in schools. She found that smartness as a figured world is comprised of three key components: artifacts, discourse and identity. She further examined the artifacts that students used to represent being “smart” and what students associated with “smartness.” The students’ smartness artifacts included grades, books, diplomas, gifted classification, honors classes, scoring well on tests, participation in college prep courses and having a large vocabulary (Hatt, 2007). These artifacts that represented students’ understandings of smartness as a cultural product were “tangible”, concrete products within the environment.

Hatt (2007) also explored students’ self-identities in relation to how school legitimated the identity of being smart or not smart. The legitimate identities found in schools were those of students who embodied the artifacts of smartness and performed the expected behaviors. At the same time, marginalized identities were created in contrast. Hatt (2007) showed that students figure identities as responses to what is seen as legitimate. For her, “students are figuring academic identities in different ways in direct responses to what schools frame as a “legitimate” identity” (p. 157).

Rubin (2007) investigated the figured world of learning in an urban high school. She identified the discursive practices, categories and interactions which constituted the figured world of learning, as well as the ways in which students' identities took shape. Students’ understandings of good students were represented by “compliance with rote, repetitive tasks that were distanced from meaning, amid humiliating interactions and unflattering categorizations” (p. 240). Rubin found that, from a student’s perspective, the figured world of learning was comprised of a good student who got good grades, was compliant, worked quickly and did not present behavioral problems or issues, as well as not needing help from a teacher. Similar to
Hatt’s (2007) study of smartness, students’ identities as learners were being constrained by the rigid definition of a figured world, and their ability to enact this identity affected their ability to become “smart.”

Fedcho, Graham and Hudson-Ross (2005) situated their research on figured worlds around the praxis of teacher educators, teacher candidates and mentor teachers. The researchers also viewed figured worlds as physically located, meaning that teachers’ figured worlds were based on teaching context and research community. The researchers described this as ‘the wobble’ which is “that authored space of uncertainty that lies between and among figured worlds” (p. 175). This research focuses primarily on agency and participants’ use and ability to use ‘improvisation’ as a tool for authoring within their own contexts. Further, the researchers focused on the way context of teaching worked to stabilize and destabilize participants’ concepts of school, teaching, and learning. Year-long engagement across classrooms allowed teachers to re-author their understanding of figured world through dialogue with students, teachers and researchers. The ‘wobble’ described by the authors represents the destabilizing nature of challenges to teachers’ understanding of their context and position in figured worlds.

The “play world” which Rainio (2008) examined was a collectively imagined world in which students and teachers constructed the figured world and occupied it through play. Rainio took up Holland et al’s (1998) notion of play worlds being spaces of authoring that are socially constructed and reliant on cultural resources for enacting. Rainio views the play world of personifying characters in pedagogical practice as the manufacturing of a classroom figured world. Rainio relied on the improvisational aspects of play in figured worlds and the ways in which improvisation is used as agency. Rainio also takes up the notion of power that the teacher has over students with regard to the institution of schooling. She does not take up the argument
that the teacher holds power in the figured world by controlling meaning making and the cultural artifacts and resources that are allowed to be used in the figured world. In this context, Rainio noted that the use of tools and symbols always subordinates the user to the power of tools and symbols.

As Rush and Fedcho (2008) put it, their research “focused on how students in the [middle grades education] course were making sense of the concepts being introduced and were using this process of meaning making to alter their perceptions of themselves as educators and as speech-language pathologists” (pg. 124). The focus of their article is the interaction between individuals with socially ascribed identities and how they come to interact and improvise identities in the college setting. The authors utilize figured worlds to examine how social institutions influence individual identities and how individuals improvise to create agency. Specifically, improvisation as a primary focus and factor in the identity-in-practice framework. Through improvisation actors ‘refigure’ the cultural worlds they inhabit.

Luttrell and Parker (2001) focused on construction of a figured world of literacy at school, and they explored how students utilize improvisation to navigate and enact writing and literacy within the social institution of a single high school, this is despite teachers labeling students as lazy or unmotivated. The authors explored how figured world creation and improvisation empowered actors to adapt and achieve agency in spite of teachers preconceptions.

Overall this body of education research illustrates how school can play a vitally important role in the construction of students' identities. The ways in which students “figure” themselves within various socially constructed “worlds” affects their experiences in school. The construction of figured worlds in school creates socially constructed boundaries for students. Three studies described above illustrate that boundaries, as Hatt (2007) has shown, were
constructed through the assigning of meaning to artifacts within discourse. Urrieta (2007) also pointed out that these boundaries played out conceptually through participants’ reinterpretation of their figured world and procedurally through their enacting of artifacts. Finally, Rubin (2007) provided a lens for understanding how practices and interactions of schools worked to shape both conceptual and procedural identities through the use of artifacts and discourse.

The commonality of among all studies is that they employed figured worlds and parts of identity-in-practice as an interpretive framework to analyze and categorize data. These studies also utilize a variety of research methodologies and represent a range of contexts that provide a lens into how identity-in-practice can be used in education research to examine the role of identity and the construction of figured worlds in schools. While, this study is however not a direct replication of any of these previous studies, it does follow in their approach by using identity-in-practice as a framework with which to interpret data and identity construction and it shares some methodological similarities. Further, none of these studies are focused on elementary age students’ constructions and experiences of sameness, difference and ‘American’ identity. Further, these studies only draw upon certain aspects of the identity-in-practice framework, mainly focusing on self-authoring and what tools, symbols and artifacts constitute various figured worlds. In extending this body of literature, this dissertation aims to address all four elements of the identity-in-practice framework – figured worlds, positionality, self-authoring and making worlds – in examining ‘American’ identity, sameness and difference.
III: Research Methods and Design

Throughout the research process the research methods and design intersected with multiple contextual and methodological factors. This chapter outline the factors, elements and context relevant to the data collection, analysis and interpretation of this study. It begins with a description of the dissertation, including the planned design and how it fits together methodologically. A description of the data collection process is provided, along with a contextual description of the students, school and school district to situate the study. The study and development of an emergent interpretation of data prompted the construction of a grounded theory approach. The final section describes the ways in which the researcher influenced data and possibly study participants, the limitations to this form of data collection, and the possible impact of the researcher’s position on the research.

The Plan

At the outset of this dissertation the goal was to mirror prior research that utilized identity-in-practice as a theoretical framework to conduct an ethnographic case study examining how one classroom of 5th grade students saw differences between themselves and others and their relationship to ‘American’ identity. Difference, Sarup (1996) explains, is the basis of identity, “identity is only conceivable in and through difference. That one is not what the ‘Other’ is, is critical in defining who one is” (p. 47). I thought I knew what I was looking for, and I mapped out the types of interactions, observations, interviews, focus groups and analysis of artifacts for my research design that I knew would yield results within my deductive framework.
The shared patterns of culture within this classroom in this case are the way in which identities are formed. According to Holland and Lave (2001), identity formation and all identities are grounded in culture; identity formation is, at its core, a study of culture and creation of cultural products between people. An exploratory case study approach seemed best suited for this study because it is context dependent, and context dependent knowledge is at the heart of activity and the phenomenon (Flyvberg, 2006). This study examines how students construct identity through difference in the socio-historical time and place of their classroom. Context is paramount.

The use of an anthropological identity framework at the outset of the study was also very important as it represents the basis of the initiating literature, methodology and research design. However, the research design was amended to make the investigation, phenomenon and topic more easily translated for 5th grade students. This study aimed to bridge the utilization of academic language with the voices of participants. Students’ knowledge and understandings of each other, and the element of figured worlds in which their identities operate, and provided the context for which actions and application of cultural tools and artifacts create agency.

Further, this study is concerned with "What" and "When," although the researcher has no control over the behavioral events, and the study is about a contemporary issue (Yin, 1993; 1994). As introduced, this issue concerns the identities and schooling experiences of young children in a diverse state. The goal of this study is to elucidate some of the experiences and constructions of elementary age immigrant and native-born students in their creation of identities. Case study research is also beneficial for this study because of its closeness to real-life with a wealth of nuanced detailed situations (Flyvberg, 2006). The study aims to expand identity literature by exploring the factors or experiences that influence the cultural construction
of identity and how the construction of identity differs in students based on their socio-historic subject positions.

Fifth grade students in North Carolina were identified for this study for two reasons. First, it is the grade in which North Carolina students learn about United States history, as well as the history of other regions of North America, Canada and Mexico. As a result, the curriculum attempts to make clear distinctions regarding who and what constitutes American history and establishes American artifacts. Second, Fifth grade is also the age in which children's political attitudes develop rapidly with icons and symbols that become crucial focal points for their attachment to national identity (Hess & Turney-Purta, 1967). The intersection of the curriculum with the schooling experiences of students in the fifth grade is powerful in reinforcing notions of difference.

Fifth grade was also selected because it embodies the oldest students by age and grade level in elementary schools in North Carolina. Referring back to previous literature, much of the research on how students construct notions of national identity has focused on immigrant identity and has taken place in high school settings. There is very little understanding of how elementary aged students come to understand their own identity, the identity of others, and the construction of national identity in schools and how those understandings shape their experiences. One reason for selecting a fifth grade cohort to research is the expectation that fifth graders will be better able to articulate their understanding of their experiences and differences of identity better than younger children. Moreover, there is a greater likelihood that fifth grade students will have spent multiple years in the American public school system than students in lower elementary grade levels.

The nature of an elementary classroom containing a single cohort of students lends itself
to having multiple and varied interactions with students. Data collection can occur across multiple settings while students engage in activities throughout the day. The age-graded, single classroom nature of elementary school classrooms allows for the same students to remain together across school activities. This is not the case in most public middle and high schools.

The Recruitment

Recruitment for this study occurred in two phases. The first phase began in May 2014 and encompassed finding a classroom which would provide a rich context. The second phase began in mid-September 2014, after a classroom had been identified, with recruitment of participants within the classroom.

The goal of the first phase was to locate a classroom and school which would provide similar demographic characteristics of prior research that examined how students constructed and saw national identity in schools. Being located in an ‘Emerging Gateway State’ for Hispanic immigrants, the search and recruitment for this study was focused on public schools with a large but not predominant Hispanic population in central North Carolina counties. The goal being to find a school and classroom that had equal representations of racial diversity. The search began by identifying schools that both matched initial criteria and were also schools with which I had professional contacts. As a former classroom teacher who attended college in central North Carolina and through my work with the elementary education program at a major university in central North Carolina, I have colleagues and former students across the target region. I reached out via email to a specific colleague I knew personally, as we student-taught in the same semester at the same college. I consciously reached out to this colleague, Ms. Washington, because I knew that the school and the classroom both met the criteria and context I had aimed to find.
The second phase of recruitment began September of 2014 after approval from the university IRB and the local education agency. I recruited students in Ms. Washington’s classroom through an in-person presentation, consent letters and recruitment letters to parents/legal guardians. During this recruitment phase I went to Ms. Washington’s class to talk to students about the project and its scope, along with what my role and their role would be. I also attended a curriculum night for parents to directly answer any of their questions.

The Collection

Data in this study was collected from five data sources: interviews, observations, including informal conversations, focus groups, surveys and classroom artifacts. Data collection occurred over the course of four months from mid-September 2014 to mid-December 2014. Collection began with observations and an initial survey, which allowed me to gather data and frame questions going into initial interviews with the participants. Initial observations and survey data also helped to provide context, develop questions further and gather some information regarding how students shaped and constructed categorizations of themselves and peers. After the initial survey, and while observations were still ongoing, individual interviews were conducted. At the end of the data collection process after all interviews were completed, two focus group sessions were held with eight students.

The initial survey was constructed in three parts. The first asked students to list five peers who were most similar to them in their class, five peers who were most different. This section of the survey was designed to provide data on how students saw themselves and others relationally and in terms of similarity and difference. It also allowed me to ask students about the reason for classification during the individual interviews. The second asked student to write down five labels they would give themselves that describe who they are. This section was
designed to provide data on how students saw themselves and what characteristics, traits or labels they felt were important and accurately described themselves. The third section of the survey, asked students to categorize themselves by race. This section was designed to collect data on how students identified in relation to institutional frameworks and socio-historical categorizations of race. This is not to assume students have a singular racial identity, or a binary racial identity, but to examine the impact of socio-historic construction of race and how students locate themselves within that construct. The categories were borrowed from the Grove County school district reporting data on race. These three survey methods provided data on how students identify in relation to peers, identify personally and identify in relation to institutional categorization. Surveys were used to both create interview protocols and to create a social map of the class that rendered a visual representation of how students categorized peers as similar and different.

Observations were done in class, during recess and during lunch. Observations did not occur during students ‘specials’ such as PE, Art, and Music. Observational data included informal conversations, seating arrangements, student groupings, student self-groupings, teacher led class discussions, curricular content, students’ work samples and classroom artifacts. My initial status was not to constitute a data source; it was to be a non-participant observer. However, this quickly evolved into participatory observation as I was recruited to teach small groups and observe students during different tasks and activities. Students also asked me to play sports at recess and to participate in gym class and myriad other activities. Inclusion in the daily routines of classroom life, as well as informal discussions and conversations with students, provided greater depth, detail and richness of student’s lives, experiences and views.
Forty-three interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants across the length of data collection and were semi-structured in nature. The original goal was to conduct two interviews with each student, but because of student attendance, classroom schedules, school schedules and necessity, very few students were only interviewed once. These students were asked about the same topics as students who were interviewed twice. Interviews varied in length from 10-30 minutes and were conducted in the school library at a table away from other students in the class in order to maintain confidentiality. Each interview was adapted from a common interview protocol to ensure common themes were addressed and to ensure that questions that arose from observations were incorporated. This method also provided flexibility in the interview protocols that honored each student’s voice rather than presupposing what factors shaped identity.

Eight students were selected to participate in the focus group sessions. These two sessions happened on back-to-back days, both with all eight students present. Students represented a cross section of gender and race and also represented key informants from throughout the data collection process. Focus groups were conducted in the classroom while other students were in the cafeteria. The focus group sessions were semi-structured, like the interviews, and themes were taken from observations, student interviews and prior literature. The use of interviews, observations, focus groups and artifact collection provided multiple data sources that enabled triangulation. Overall, the research design focused on collecting data in multiple ways across a common case, the classroom. All data collection protocols and templates can be found in the Appendixes.

The Participants, The Classroom, The School
Southern Elementary School is located in Grove County, a rural county in the central North Carolina and is located near three major universities. The Grove County School District is 62.5% White, 16.6% Hispanic and 15.5% Black. In 2013 Southern Elementary enrolled 625 students (42.5% White, 42% Hispanic and 11% Black). Both Grove County School District and Southern Elementary are approximately 48.7% Female and 51.3% Male. Southern Elementary has a larger Hispanic population than other Grove County schools and the average for other elementary schools in the state. Significantly, Southern Elementary has an equal population of White and Hispanic students.

Ms. Washington’s class had 26 students. This study included 23 of these students - eleven male and twelve female students. One student self-identified as Black, eight identified as Hispanic and fourteen identified as White. Brief demographic data about participants is found in Table 1. All participants spoke proficient English, meaning no students were enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) Services as determined by the school ESL specialists, while Anna, Carolina, Emma, Gabriel, Tom, Randy and Zoey also regularly spoke to each other in Spanish. Rowan, while speaking some Spanish, was the only student who identified as Hispanic who is not fluent in that language. Sixty-two and one-half percent of students at Southern Elementary were deemed ‘needy’ by the school district according to economic data and qualified for free or reduced lunch, compared to 56% statewide. Of methodological note, when presenting data in Chapters Four and Five I will be referring to students by their first name only and not categorize students by demographic and gender data. This is purposeful in illustrating the complexity experienced by the students and not to place categorizations on students.
Table 1. Brief Description of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Joey</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Kelsey</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilly</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Rowan</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Star</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erika</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Zoey</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Students created their own pseudonyms. Race was self-identified as part of the initial survey. Race categories of survey used school district classifications to maintain consistency in reporting of contextual demographic data.

Fifty-five percent of Southern Elementary teachers have 10+ years of experience, but the teacher turnover rate is 17%, which is higher than the district and statewide average of 13%. Ms. Washington was in her ninth year of teaching in North Carolina and sixth year of teaching at Southern Elementary. She is also National Board Certified in Literacy: Reading Language Arts for Early and Middle Childhood and previously won Grove County Teacher of the Year award. She is White and identifies as a heterosexual female. She was raised in the Grove County area and has always resided in the area where her immediate family and grandparents remain. She was trained as a teacher at a small private university approximately 30 minutes west of Grove County and Southern Elementary School.

Beyond the demographic and socioeconomic data, Ms. Washington’s class had many other characteristics that contributed to the classroom context. One major difference between Ms. Washington’s class and most public school classrooms is that this is her second year with this cohort of students. Ms. Washington was one of several teachers at Southern Elementary
‘looped’ with the students in the class, meaning that almost all the students were together for both fourth and fifth grade. Only Eric and Jenny were additions to the class for fifth grade. Students and Ms. Washington also indicated that three students had left the class to join other classes or go to different schools. Another pedagogical aspect of Ms. Washington’s class that was unique is that no students leave the room for remedial services.

Further, Ms. Washington maintains a strong relationship with students’ families. She regularly organizes curriculum nights for parents, student presentations to showcase learning for parents, as well as weekend excursions for students and students families based around community service, local landmarks and physical fitness activities. Additionally, Ms. Washington loves US History and her unit on the American Revolution is her favorite subject to teach. This is partially a reason that I chose Ms. Washington’s classroom, because of the prevalence of social studies curriculum. While the curriculum for American colonization and the American Revolution was part of the 5th grade curriculum, Ms. Washington’s class covered topic involving American Indians and Native Americans in 4th grade.

Literacy specialists came into the room and worked with the students who need services provided. The only time students left the classroom for academic services was for the Academically/Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program. Six students (Brittany, Bobby, Kelsey, Jenny, Luke and Michael) went to the AIG specialist several times a week in the afternoon. The class had a pet turtle named Jasper that students took care of. Within the classroom there were six tables with four or five students at each table. Each table had a ‘captain’ who was elected by the class. Table captains then decided who sits at what table. Each month tables and captains changed. A diagram of the classroom can be found in Figure 1.
Paralleling Grounded Theory

I never meant to end up where I did, nor did I know where I had been until long after I arrived. Four months of data collection, 23 participants, 43 interviews totaling 20 hours, two focus groups, countless hours of observations and interactions, 135 pages of field notes, 111 specific analytic codes, three qualitative analysis software packages and multiple analysis attempts later, I have come to realize that I have committed multiple reckless acts of grounded theory along the way. As a result this study has been framed not only by my initial expectations, initial research design and theoretical framework, but also by the disequilibrium I experienced as
a researcher. In turning to grounded theory, I left *identity-in-practice* theory and sought to construct a different understanding of the data.

As I write this dissertation I am confronted with the fact that in my attempt to construct a conceptual framework with which to interpret the data, and in formulating a way of explaining and understanding the data I actually engaged in a grounded theory process. As outlined by Charmaz (2006) constructing grounded theory is a process of data immersion in which the researcher moves from broad, open coding of data to the formulation of specifically present categorizations and a theoretical/conceptual framework which works to explain the phenomenon of interest. The grounded theory process begins with initial, open coding of data. This coding provides descriptions of what content is present in data. Following initial, open coding the researcher reflects on the data, constructing initial memos, reflections, categorizations and themes.

Coding of initial content and creation of themes occurs concurrently with the data collection process so that the researcher engages in a constant comparative analysis in which there is a comparison of new data to the content and themes formed from prior data. Through constant comparative analysis the researcher refines code themes, categories in the creation of broader axial codes and also more specific focused code for new data. The process of data collection and grounded theory come to a conclusion as the researcher begins to reflect on the constructed codes and themes identified in the data and integrates reflective memos with diagraming of the concepts through the first writing of the findings. In constructing this draft the researcher must turn to literature to inform, situate and position the newly constructed conceptual/theoretical framework. This chapter outlines my often fractured process of coding, reflecting and constructing a new theoretical framework and integrates a sampling of literature
which helps to situate and frame the framework and phenomenon. The description of the process that follows does not rigidly follow all the tenets of grounded theory, as engaging in this process was purposeful, yet not planned.

As I lived the data collection experience and relived it again through field notes, memo writing, coding and recoding of data and analysis, I wrestled with the ownership of who was the knower and what was the known. The first week of data collection I was observing, and I was seeing exactly what I had expected to see based on the literature about identity in the classroom; race and language were an ever present aspect, and both were manifested in different ways. The Hispanic males and white males had two distinct lunch groups, while the white females congregated together with limited intermingling with Hispanic females. A group of four Hispanic females almost always interacted exclusively with one another. Race and language were at the forefront of my initial analysis, including the observations I made, the questions I asked and the assumptions I was making.

Initially, I saw the construction of boundaries that prior literature from Chapter One had described and the ways in which ethnicity, race, language and school curriculum constructed understandings of white, Eurocentric ‘American’ identity, and how this was reproduced by students and how ‘subtractive schooling’ manifested itself in this classroom. When I started talking to students, I began talking less and listening more. Engaging in conversations together, the students and I clearly saw the same events, actions, and people but we saw them differently. I started asking questions about them and their peers and about their relationship to school, to each other, and to ‘America’.

Two weeks into data collection, at the end of September, I began to struggle with the disequilibrium between what I knew I was seeing and what students were telling me they were
seeing. Through my sustained daily interactions and reflections about each day of data collection, I began to wrestle with the mess that had evolved out of my ‘clear cut’ deductive study, data, theoretical framework and findings. To take a quote from my reflection that day,

*September 30th* - There is a lot of salient colorblindness in the classroom. There are definitely differences that students see, but these are not described by students so far. There is a clear distinction between the way people are categorized in their social studies texts and the way they categorize themselves. There is a lot just bubbling under the surface. Gotta figure out how it’s coded. How does it manifest itself?

I knew the academic context with which to explain students’ lack of seeing race the way that I did. I could see race and ethnicity so clearly and knew it was there but I was struggling to figure out how students saw race. What I observed matched the descriptions of literature that documented the ways in which race was swept under the rug in elementary schools and students would be taught to be ‘colorblind’ (Lewis, 2001). Students named race in reference to social studies curriculum and texts they were reading, but did not apply the same categorization to their classmates. Another reflection a month into data collection, describes this phenomenon.

*October 13th* - Race – Students definitely understand race and ethnicity, they reference it regularly. But they don’t draw categorizations across racial lines. The ways in which they classify people is largely through interpersonal relationships and traits. They classify other students with terms like “nice,” “positive attitude,” “hard worker,” etc. Students identify their own and others race, they don’t place categories on them with the exception of ‘fellow Spanish speakers.’ Very often they know and make the distinction with who they use Spanish with and when they use Spanish, but that’s it.

Halfway through my data collection I came to a stark realization. I sat down to begin the process of coding and analysis: I read all of my interviews, re-read the field notes, re-lived my data. When I began this process of making sense of what I was seeing, I came to realize how,

---

1 Methodological note: All field notes and interviews will be presented in original unedited form and tense. This is done to preserve authenticity of the data.
from the outset of my project, I had limited and biased my findings unconsciously. I read my interviews and student responses and started seeing the responses I didn’t follow up on, the questions I didn’t ask, the things I didn’t notice, and the questions I didn’t follow up on because I had gotten the answer I was expecting. Attempting to relive my data forced me to both re-humanize my participants, who I had come to know, and to rethink my questions, analytic framework and analysis in order to reimagine student responses through a new lens.

This disequilibrium forced me to reconceptualize how I was viewing the classroom. As I became more familiar with students and their classroom, with the personalities and peculiarities, I started to look for alternate explanations for what I had been seeing. The preexisting explanations I thought I was seeing weren’t fitting with the evidence I was gathering. As I tried to make sense of what I had come to name ‘The Mess’, I would read over my data and move from projecting my inferences onto it, to figuring out what contextual themes students referred to and how I could find commonality in the ways they described and explained their experiences and lives and what they saw as their lived experience.

My analysis and coding for this dissertation occurred in two methods, deductively and inductively. Deductively the analysis and coding occurred by applying elements of identity-in-practice to the data. This meant placing observations, interviews and artifacts into predetermined categorizations, identifying elements of identity-in-practice such as figured symbols, artifacts and tools that populate he figured world of ‘American’. This deductive analysis identified and constructed the specific elements of ‘American’ identity according to the identity-in-practice framework identified in chapter two. However for much of the data I was presented with did not fit neatly into the categorization of identity-in-practice. I reexamined data and I kept trying to force student responses into deductive categorizations and classifications, but
they wouldn’t fit neatly. As a result, I was forced to approach the data inductively building off students’ responses, rather than the predetermined framework.

Inductively I engaged first in in vivo initial coding, constant comparative analysis and created axial codes as introduced above (Charmaz, 2006). I worked to understand the experiences of students and their identities from the ground up, without a predetermined theory or conceptual framework. I was engaging in the process of examining the data through a new lens. To do this I coded data specifically for what students discussed and what I observed (e.g. recess, math groups, sports, classmates, curriculum, brothers, sisters, parents, etc). This quasi-invivo coding allowed me to identify the subjects that students were talking about in interviews, during observations and in the classroom artifacts. Invivo coding is the process of coding for specific words or phrases in data. Throughout this process I was constantly comparing new data, interviews and observational field notes with previous data to see if codes still fit, and I sometimes found myself adding new codes to match the language of participants.

During this process I also compared codes for similarities in order to group similar codes and data around similar themes in what Charmaz (2006) describes as axial coding. Axial coding is the process by which individual codes are grouped according to emergent themes. As I engaged in the process of axial coding, I continued to examine codes with new data and attempted to apply my newly emerging ‘frame’ to the data to see if it fit. This was an engagement in the constant comparative methods and allowed me to see saturation in my inductive, grounded framework.

Through this process, I was able to construct codes for both a deductive identity-in-practice framework and an inductive grounded theory framework. The analysis yielded over 100 specific codes. From these codes I parsed down categorizations axially around themes centering
on student descriptions of physical, social and symbolic space. The formation of these categorizations can be seen in another reflection of my field notes from November 3rd.

11/3/15 –

10:46 - Math Stations

- Randy and Zoey are working together. I am noticing today that student’s familiarity, sharing space of groups, stations, partnerships are played out and the interaction, time of interactions, depth of interactions influences how students see each other, categorize each other and make distinctions. The boundaries of similarity/difference/race/gender are dissolved in some ways. Gabriel and Tom are in math groups together and they interact outside and describe each other as friends, Zoey and Randy are the same, Rowan and Anna are the same. All are groups in math groups, in physical groups, in shared physical spaces. At this particular moment, at this particular intersection the power of presence, the power of physically engaging, creates context for social space, social boundaries, symbolic boundaries and space to expand or contract. I am constantly asking the questions of why students group themselves but deny the interactions of race when I see their groupings. The physical space, the symbolic spaces, the social space, is created through the familiar and the strange, the known and the unknown. Identities are played out in symbolic and social spaces that are mapped on the physical spaces students inhabit. These spaces are always in flux and fluid, constantly changing, shaping and reshaping themselves, shifting identities, power, in and out of physical spaces crashing into one another and across each other, not living at moments or in singularities in time. The spaces are relative to those who occupy them. The shifting present, the shifting past allows throws students into a constant flux. Flux of identity and occupation of spaces both physical, social and symbolic. Students are occupying identities of the past, present and also the projections of who they believe themselves to be in the future. Possibilities of potentialities.
  - NOW BORDER CROSSINGS? Third Space? Borderlands?— HOW STUDENTS CROSS THESE PHYSICAL AND SYMBOLIC SPACES – I don’t know!
  - Jerry and Joey move to work with each other. Again, same math grouping, listed each other as #1 similar person on each’s surveys. Michael and Emilly are in the same math groups. Cross gender, both listed each other as similar. This is when there is clearly a gender difference.

11:30 – Lunch – The class goes to the room next door for a presentation from the technology teacher with Ms. Washington’s class and another class.

- Randy when he walks into the room he immediately goes over to his friends to talk and try to sit with them. This is the same friend that he talks to sometimes outside and at lunch even though the student is sitting at another table.
Immediately after talking with his friend James (shorter, smaller Hispanic male), he goes and talks with Alex (the same one as noted before during lunch, larger Hispanic boy). Space – Randy went to occupy physical space with these other two students that he shared despite difference in different classroom space. Flux and intersection dependent on space – Physical, Social, Symbolic.

- ACROSS SPACE, WITHIN SPACE – Structure’s influences on social/symbolic and the social impact on structure.

The construction of axial codes and a framework for the data takes further shape with a reflective memo I write myself on November 7th. During that week the themes of space and structure were becoming more present in interviews and over the next three days I began to look at my observations through the three forms of space that I had been constructing. My notes on November 7th are below.

11/7/14
*Thought – Structure seems to dictate the spaces we can occupy and the agency within the structures. The physical, social and symbolic spaces created, constructed and occupied by students are interconnected and dictate how students interact and how they create identity. These structures are culturally constructed and deconstructed. They are not ever present and exist as figured worlds collide, collapse (through meaning making and controlling how meaning is made) and overtake each other.

*Space and access – Linkage and Leverage (Livitsky and Way) – reference the way linkages structure space and access space for students – American is reified and not a physical thing, so it is only constructed and signs have to point to signs to construct meaning – it is the imagined community held constructed in our minds.

The disequilibrium of understanding also forced me to interrogate new literature to better understand how concepts of space, place, identity and spatiality could help in describing the phenomenon and situate my emergent framework within relevant literature. This sampling of new literature brought me specifically to the works of Monica McKinney (Clues from the Classroom), Herni Lefebrve (The Production of Space), Arturo Escobar (Territories of Difference), and Edward Soja (Thirdspace). As I compared new and old data, integrated new
codes, and categorized axially the codes, and turned to a sampling of literature, I was able to construct a framework around identity being tied to a spatiality of place, as composed of physical space, social space and symbolic space. With these new axial codes of space I began the writing process that eventually turned into Chapter Five of this dissertation.

While organizing my thinking about a framework of space I explored how conceptions of spatiality exist in the literature and how these spaces might interact with identity. In order to explicate my thinking I started with the examination of McKinney (2004), which describes the ways in which physical space of the classroom conveys certain meanings and classroom spaces become places in that they hold more meaning than is physically present. Further, spatiality of classrooms for McKinney (2004) represents the construction of areas of access or constraint to agency. The construction and use of space as place in McKinney (2004) led me to look to try to find theoretical and conceptual links between the descriptions of space students were using to describe how they understood similarity, difference and ‘American’ identity.

In addition, the theorizing Lefebvre (1977/1992) provides a link between the physical and social spaces and maintains that social relationships only have social existence to the extent that they have spatial existence (p. 129). In this sense, social space is constructed through the use, structure and arrangement of physical space. Within this construction and connection of physical and social space, Soja (1996) explains that space is not solely structure which reproduces structure, but space can manipulated and used to negotiate position and agency. He (1996) provides a conceptual link between the physical/social space and symbolic space, “The outcomes of socio-spatial differentiation, division, containment, and struggle are cumulatively concretized and conceptualized in spatial practices, in representations of space and in spaces of representation” (p. 87). Both Soja (1996) and Lefebvre (1977/1992) articulate the ways in which
spaces of representation exist through the forms of symbols, texts, discourses and other coded symbolisms. While McKinney, Lefebvre and Soja provide some conceptual literature about the link between physical, social and symbolic space, they focus on the ways in which space and people interact and how space/place is structured, and do not examine identity specifically.

To connect space/place to identity and better inform my conceptual framework I turned to the work of Arturo Escobar (2008) and the concept of redes. Escobar explains his conception of place thus: “by place we mean the engagement with and experience of a particular location with some measure of roundedness (however unstable), boundaries (however permeable), and connections to everyday life, even if its identity is constructed and never fixed” (p.30). Escobar (2008) explains further that the arrangements and structures of place are “defined as wholes whose properties emerge from the interaction between parts; they can be any entity: interpersonal networks, cities, markets, nation-states, etc. This view conveys a sense of the irreducible social complexity in the world” (p.287).

In this sense, the physical, social and symbolic spaces constitute structures and arrangements of place. For the students in this study, these structures and arrangements take multiple physical, social and symbolic forms. Students describe the physical space in the form of the classroom, classroom groupings, school, home and country. Further students describe social space in the form of friends, familiarity, family and peers. Symbolic space for the students in Ms. Washington’s class is described in the form of interests, personalities, curriculum, cultural traditions, skin color and language. Further Escobar explains, that structures are both “self-organized and other-organized” (p.309). In this sense, structures and arrangements of space, which one may enter into are organized, produced and reproduced through use and by user.
I utilize the concept of *redes* as a metaphor for understanding spatial practices specifically. The concept of *redes* provides an understanding not only of the arrangement and structuring of space, but also the ways in which spaces are used and function to shape identity. This is with the understanding that space and identity are always in movement and flux. *Redes*, according to Escobar (2008), are ‘structures’ or ‘arrangements’. The term *redes*, a Spanish word that has no exact English translation, also conveys that relations, structures and arrangements are always in movement. These structures, or arrangements, are shaped by use and user, always being made and repaired for function and use.

The concept of *redes* also works in describing how *space* comes to shape students’ identities of similar and different, as well as ‘American’ identity. As Escobar (2008) describes, ‘sites’ in a spatial approach are “context for event-relations in terms of people’s activities. A site thus become ‘an emergent property of its interacting human and non-human inhabitants’; they are manifolds that do not precede the interactive process that [structure] them (p. 290)” and sites only exist as far as they have interactive, spatial connections. The interaction and relationship between the individual and the sites is a key mechanism for how space and place function to shape identity through redes. Escobar explicates,

Identities are dialogic and relational; they arise from but cannot be reduced to the articulation of difference through encounters with others; they involved the drawing of boundaries, the selective incorporation of some elements and the concomitant exclusion or marginalization of others.” (p. 203)

The physical, social and symbolic arrangements represent the *redes* of these students’ lives, structuring the ways in which their identities function in relation to peers, as well as ‘American’ identity. Thinking about the ways in which *redes* function to structure and shape
students’ lives, I attempted to construct a visualization of this framework of *space*, *redes* and *identity* which can be found in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Identity and Redes Conceptual Framework**

This conceptual framework in Figure 2 is organized around three constructions of *space*, *physical*, *social*, and *symbolic*. These *spaces* exist only within and through *redes*, and *physical*, *social* and *symbolic space* together form the construction of *place*. Identity is enacted only through the *redes* of *space*, but not before *redes* function to shape identity and provide access to *space*. Identity thus functions through the use of arrangements of *space*, with the arrangements of space acting back on identity to shape and provide access. *Space* and *redes* are always in
movement, shaped through use and user, always being made and repaired for function and use. *Redes* are neither singular nor unidirectional, but rather are amalgamations. The combination of space, arrangement, structure, access, use and function of space shapes how students in this study see, construct and experience identity. As Escobar describes this process,

“the properties of the whole emerge from the interactions between the parts, bearing in mind that the more simple entities are themselves [structures] of sorts. Moreover, through their participation in networks, elements (such as individuals) can become components of various [structures] operating at different levels.”

(p. 287)

This framework is a suggestive drawing together of ideas, taking specific concepts out of their strong traditions and putting forth an exploratory grounded theory. The theory of *redes* provides a metaphor or frame with which to understand and conceptually organize students’ experiences and descriptions of *space, place* and *identity*. Following up on this framework would require the bridging of the theories used here in much more depth.

*The Man, The Reflection, The Positionality*

From the beginning of the research project, I knew that I would become a major factor in data collection, analysis/interpretation and the overall findings of this study. With this in mind, I was conscious of how students interacted with me and how I responded. Throughout the data collection process, I made weekly, sometimes daily, reflections on the way I perceived my positionality in relation to them and the ways I worked to gain trust and access and to offer reciprocity; this was paramount.
One of the first factors that influenced my interaction with students and this was my background and approach to the research and data collection. I approached this study interested in studying the construction of national identity, specifically ‘American’ identity as it relates to immigrant students. I had expected this study to be comprised of gathering data from a deductive analytic framework. My hope and desire had been that I would be able to decenter myself from observations, interviews, focus groups and artifact analysis. However, I knew this was not possible, and it was only near the end of data collection, analysis and writing that I saw how ingrained my bias, scope and focus had been throughout.

I entered this study as a former elementary school teacher and ten years experience in diverse settings of diverse groups of children. I believed that my experience would benefit me as I engaged them in conversation and gained their trust. This background led me to this study and away from literature about identity in adolescent populations. As a researcher who is reflecting on his practice, I should mention that when I enter an elementary classroom, I do so with confidence. My teaching experience, education training and familiarity with the contexts of an elementary schools and classroom make me comfortable. As an former elementary school teacher, I am used to interacting with students and empowering them for learning purposes. I approached this research similarly, with the belief that I would empower students as “knowers” and have them explain their experiences to me.

Approaching this research one of the main obstacles I thought I would face was language and race. I am only fluent in English; I am white; I am a male; and I feared that these categorizations might cause students to feel uncomfortable in sharing openly and honestly. I feared that students of color might see me as an outsider, while White students might view me as an ally. I was prepared to gain trust and build rapport through sustained immersion and
interaction with students and their families and by working for reciprocity and transparency in the research process.

Wanting to create a transparent environment from the first day I was in Ms. Washington’s classroom, I explained my study and answered student questions. The students were energetic and inquisitive about what I was interested in and why I was interested in it. Most of the questions pertained to how I would collect data, who would see the interviews, and what I would be asking them. Near the end of the first week of the study, I reflected on this initial day of explanation, the data that I had been collecting, and my attempts to gain access and build trust. An excerpt from my field notes highlights this point.

*I think students are genuinely interested in what I am studying, but are also hesitant of it being an unknown. They are curious of what interviews will be like and what participation will be like. I find myself trying to convince them that nothing will really change.*

On September 19th, four days into the data collection process and after reflecting on the first couple of days, I decided I needed to explain the study further because students were still curious and I felt they were hesitant because of my presence. After lunch I engaged students again, but this time provided specific examples of questions I would ask. After this clarification, students seemed to understand the study better, and some (i.e., Brittany, Emma, Billy and Luke) sought me out later to tell me things they had noticed and had been thinking about the classroom and their peers.

Shortly thereafter I tried to familiarize myself with the students as much as possible and interact with them on a daily basis, purposefully interjecting myself into their daily routines with small conversations about activities and the classroom and how things ran. I did this to put them
at the center of power, as the possessors of knowledge, and to show that I was interested in their everyday experiences and their views of the classroom. I also did this to gauge which students were very talkative and willing to share and which were more reserved.

Throughout data collection I also tried to include myself in planned class activities that occurred within and outside of normal school hours. The goal of inclusions described below was to interact with students and their families as much as possible and to familiarize students with my presence by seeing and talking to me. The first week of data collection I ran the “Mile Run” with the students (I came in third, losing out only to Bobby and Gabriel, but I beat Ms. Washington and Brittany by four seconds). The second week I participated as the class went on a hike at a local mountain. Not all of the class was present, but many of the students were there along with their brothers, sisters and parents. Many of us carpooled; I drove Ms. Washington, Anna and Anna’s mother as well as my dog Milo. The addition of Milo ended up being a great way for students to feel comfortable with me, as many of them wanted to interact with him, ask me questions and pet him. For many of the students the hike and incorporating my personal life opened up a lens into who I was and allowed them to have knowledge of my life, rather than just my position in the classroom as an adult and a researcher. The significance of the hike was evident on Monday when Kelsey, Luke, Anna and Carolina told other students about both my joining and bringing my dog.

Another inclusion involved my attendance at “Math Night,” which allowed me to interact with both parents and students early in the study and answer questions for parents who had not yet returned consent forms. This event also allowed students to see that I was going to be around more than just during the day. The next day at school students made reference of my presence there to classmates. Throughout data collection, extracurricular activities became part of my
normal observation schedule: nature hike, math night, pumpkin carving night, and fall fest for the entire school provided opportunities to interact with students and their families and become part of my own experience of the school and classroom community.

These efforts to build rapport and gain trust with students often yielded welcoming interactions. However, data collection and rapport were not always easily accomplished. One main issue that kept arising was my role as a participant observer. During my time in Ms. Washington’s class, I interacted with students on multiple levels. I not only observed; I worked with small math groups; I helped explain science concepts; I helped students find resources and answers to myriad questions regarding their everyday lives of students. These activities blurred the lines between my role as researcher and that of ‘adult’ and ‘teacher’. Despite my best efforts to ensure that I was seen as a non-authoritarian figure, half way through data collection, Ms. Washington shared a realization. I had become the designated bathroom permission granter. Students went to Ms. Washington with all of their academic questions and by-passed her completely to ask me for permission to go to the bathroom when she was occupied. It became clear that, depending on the situation, I had become an observer, interviewer, teacher and permission giver.

Beyond juggling my multiple roles in the classroom, I also had multiple subject-positions. Students positioned me in a multitude of ways across different contexts. Before entering Ms. Washington’s classroom, I had thought that language differences might be problematic if an interpreter was needed. Fortunately, all students in the classroom were proficient in English. This, however, did not keep language from influencing data collection. My field notes illustrate an interaction between me and students during Spanish class.
There were a couple of student interactions during Spanish in which students, Michael, Gabriel, Carolina, and Jenny made reference to my supposed lack of knowledge of Spanish. This assumption was not based on me asking questions about Spanish or my attempt to use Spanish in the classroom. I haven’t had any Spanish language interactions with students. Many of the interactions assumed I COULDN’T understand the Spanish numbers that the students were saying. Many of the White students tried to get me to sympathize with their struggles with understanding what many Hispanic classmates were saying. I did not try to indicate whether I knew Spanish or did not know Spanish, but the overwhelming sense I got was that students thought I did not know Spanish and suffered from the same frustrations and difficulties that other White students did. At one point I told Michael “I am familiar with the numbers” and he continued to try to rationalize my need for a number/word reference sheet to translate and follow the conversation.

So language, while surfacing in student assumptions about me rarely proved to be an actual barrier between observations, interviews and building rapport with students. The assumptions students built on my perceived lack of understanding and use of language did not deter them from talking to me and often, as seen in the notes above, illuminated assumptions they made about language and identity. In the data collection process language usage issues seemed to only appear early.

One day in September I noticed Tom and Gabriel talking during lunch. They were two students who spoke Spanish to each other most often. My reflection on the incident is detailed below.

I noticed that when I asked Tom and Gabriel what they were talking about at lunch, the conversation shifted rather quickly to a new conversation that would be safe in a space where I was wanting to talk. It indicated to me that I was not welcome in the original conversation. This is an interesting detail to make note of. Some students include me in conversations and invite me in. Joey regularly wants to talk to me about sports and other things associated with me. Many of the male students seem to be sufficiently happy having conversation with their friends about topics they are all familiar with.
Significantly as data collection continued, Gabriel and I developed a strong bond over soccer, soccer players, and talking about professional soccer teams. While many other students enjoyed playing soccer during recess, Gabriel watched soccer on TV and followed players he liked. Talking about soccer and playing soccer at recess proved to be a common bond between us. During my individual interview with Gabriel, he asked me several questions about my favorite soccer players and favorite teams. I answered willingly and told Gabriel that this was only fair because he answered all of my questions. Further, students began to feel more comfortable using Spanish with and around me. A month into data collection many of the bilingual and many of the English speaking students had nicknamed me ‘Senior Verde’.

October 9th - Today some of the bilingual (Spanish/English) speaking students started referring to me as Senor Verde, which is Mr. Green in Spanish. They told some of the English speaking students how to say it and what it means during lunch and got some of the English speaking students to call me Senor Verde as well. During Social Studies Randy and Zoey ask if they can continue to call me Senor Verde, I say “of course, it’s my name”. This is an interesting interaction because Spanish is only rarely spoken in the classroom and in social settings it is only spoken occasionally. The insider and outsider identities of ‘Spanish speakers’ is an important concept for the Hispanic students. Not all of the students have complete mastery of Spanish (from what I can tell). Some students tell me that Spanish is spoken at home, and there is a mixture whether their parents know Spanish or English or both.

Despite all my attempts to gain trust and build rapport through various avenues, I continually found that informal conversations often produced just as rich and thick descriptions as interviews. Developing an interview protocol to promote dialogue with the students was one of the most challenging aspects of data collection. While identifying topics, themes and questions was easy for me, framing them in a way that would elucidate descriptive answers was much more complex and often futile.
I notice that when I directly ask students questions that they respond with “I don’t know” more than they do when I just have a conversation with them. I am trying to think of ways to get the interviews to draw out rich responses from the students rather than short yes or no answers.

However, while interviews and informal conversations yielded mixed results, it is noteworthy that prolonged immersion had its benefits in making students more comfortable in conversation with me. Another factor that lead to rich, thick descriptions during interviews was asking questions with concrete examples from my observations. When asked about specific things that I observed in their class, things they were familiar with because they lived them daily, students provided very detailed answers and talked in depth and for a greater length of time.

All second interviews were significantly longer than the first set of interviews. For many students this was because of the familiarity with me as a researcher, and they stated thus. Another contributing factor was the emergent nature of the questions in that they were derived from my observations, so students were familiar with the topic because they lived the experiences I was asking about, and the questions I asked often related to daily interactions, actions and organization of the classroom.

When initially discussing abstract concepts, like ‘American’, with no point of reference or context for the students, they were less talkative, shared less and often gave short answers. Students found questions about concrete examples easier to answer and explain than questions about abstract concepts. Rowan and Jenny elaborated on these feelings after our second interviews. My field notes below recount the conversations with each of them.

Jenny noted that open ended questions were harder and made her think, and that she liked the questions that were “pick from a list of multiple choices” because they were easier.
Rowan noted that the second interview was easier than the first interview. I didn’t ask her many of the more complicated, nuanced questions because there was a good flow to the interview, and she was easily able to identify concrete things that related to class and the questions I was asking. She seemed nervous at the beginning of the interview, but as we started talking about class and concrete things, she opened up and was more willing to talk. I think this was related to me noting that I observed things in class that she also observed. When I mentioned things that she agreed with or that she also noticed, she talked a lot more openly and freely.

Throughout the interviewing and data collection process, I was consciously and unconsciously focused on dialogue. Talking to students, having students talk to me, listening to conversations, and immersing myself in the classroom during data collection always centered on speech. Speech represented the lens to student experience for me. The first day of data collection I made note of the way in which I was constructing the classroom.

I am worried about the dominant theme of narrative that I am (sub)consciously creating and noticing vs. the unspoken narrative of the students that aren’t vocal, who’s actions I don’t notice as much, who might not grab my attention through action or inaction. With 23 participants being observed it is challenging deciding where to focus and how to gather as much data as possible or whether to focus on specific students at specific times or focus on students interactions or focus on student action. I am hoping some themes emerge so that I can focus on key informants instead of just taking notes on whoever is talking and what they are talking about.

Finally, as I immersed myself in the data collection process, themes began to emerge, but speech and narrative remained the dominant discourse consciously and unconsciously. My focus during interviews was on dialogue with students and engaging them in what was said. My focus during class discussions was on what students made public through statements. My focus during observations, artifact collection and analysis was entirely driven by the explicit and expository. The biggest critique of me in this research process is that I heard what I wanted to hear. I saw
what I wanted to see. I examined what I wanted to examine. Through this research process I have most certainly missed more than I caught, and I have only a fraction of the experience that was lived, constructed and experienced.
IV: ‘American’ Identity-In-Practice

From Chapter Two, the identity-in-practice framework outlined by Holland et al. (1998) provides a useful lens with which to view and interpret identity through the practice of identity. The bridging of socio-historical culturalist and constructivist epistemological frameworks allows for an understanding of identity in terms of construction and enaction. This chapter focuses on the ways in which observations, surveys, field notes, interviews, focus groups, and artifact data are interpreted through the lens of an identity-in-practice framework, specifically how a figured world of ‘American’ played out in Ms. Washington’s classroom. This chapter will outline the ways in which a figured world of ‘American’ was constructed through cultural symbols, tools and artifacts. Also described are the ways in which students were assigned and occupied subject positions, the ways in which they authored themselves in relation to the figured world of ‘American’ and lastly the possibilities of construction of new figured worlds. Given the centrality of the concept of ‘American’ it will no longer be specially identified. The conclusion of this chapter will identify gaps in identity-in-practice theory and transition to the grounded theory conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Three.

Figured Worlds

Figured worlds are historically constructed, socially organized, and enacted realms which act to distribute and classify people through participation. The construction of figured worlds establishes the framework of identity and meaning upon which identity-in-practice is based. Within Ms. Washington’s class the figured worlds of American were constructed based on students’ understandings of cultural symbols, tools and artifacts. Cultural symbols, tools and
artifacts are all elements Holland et al. (1998) outline as central components of figured worlds. In chapter these elements are described and identified through students’ interviews, observations, focus group interviews and artifact analysis. These cultural constructions were embodied, enacted and deployed by students into and onto figured worlds as a cultural production of identity. The possession and use of these cultural symbols, tools and artifacts created the contexts upon which students understood their relationship to American identity and the way in which American identity was played out in their classroom.

Defining Cultural Symbols

Students in Ms. Washington’s class assigned multiple cultural symbols to American identity. These cultural symbols populated the figured works which establish the cultural representations which, when enacted, produced American identity. Symbols of American identity were one way in which students understand their own identities. Through the association of symbols with identity, the students constructed notions of what is, and what is not, American.

For many students one way that American identity was symbolized was through activities and actions such as the pledge of allegiance. Emilly describes the pledge through her eyes.

To me it means a symbol of our country. Like when you’re saying that we pledge to be a part of this country, that’s what it means to me. [Emilly]

For Emilly the pledge of allegiance was a cultural symbol which represented the construction of American identity. This was not the only symbol from which students came to understand American identity, but it was a prevalent representation in the classroom. Also through describing the pledge, Emily discursively positioned herself as a member of the American imagined community through the statement of the pledge being a symbol of ‘our’ country.
Michael also echoed the pledge of allegiance representing American identity among other traditions.

Researcher: Are there other traditions that make a person American?

Michael: American?

Researcher: American?

Michael: Probably not, but saying the pledge would.

Researcher: Saying the pledge?

Michael: That's why the pledge has significance kind of because that symbolizes once again freedom and that you are American, but you don't have to sing it. It's still good because then it shows that you're truly American. Yeah, that's what I think.

Michael views the pledge as a cultural tradition which represented membership to American identity. The use of cultural traditions as representations of national identity was made by several students. The pledge in this sense, as a representation of national, American identity, was also a marker of the boundaries of American identity for students.

Carolina explained the pledge and the relationship she has to it versus the relationship her family had to the pledge.

It means you promise to do the good things, not to do bad things. Like you promise that you won't ever betray the United States, I guess. You say, "I pledge allegiance to the flag, of the United States, or to the Republic," so you pledge to America that you will try your best and do good things and not bad things. [Carolina]

My mom, my dad and my other family is in Mexico. Well, not my mom. My dad's in Mexico. Most of my family is in Mexico. They pledge a different pledge. Even though I was born here, that's why I do that pledge. [Carolina]
Carolina described through both pledge, the concept of the nation-state and the symbolic boundaries of representation that accompany the reification of national identity in association with the *imagined community*. She made a distinction between herself and her parents with regard to the pledge and what it symbolized. For Carolina, her family and other people in Mexico would say a different pledge because they belong to a different nation-state than she did. They belong to a different *imagined community*, despite sharing the same family history and heritage. This construction of difference is evident in what she states, “They pledge a different pledge”. This construction of boundaries of representation through the use and assignment of the pledge as a cultural symbol creates two different categorizations, American and ‘other’.

The pledge of allegiance was part of the daily routine at Southern Elementary School. The pledge followed the morning announcements, and all students were required to stand but were not required to say the pledge. Immediately following the pledge an American themed song played. El-Haj (2005) has described these daily routines as rituals within schools that promote nationalism of an imagined American community. In her words Jenny explains –

> In third grade it was really crazy. When Mr. Smith [technology specialist who runs the morning announcements] first came here, apparently he didn't understand that you're supposed to do an American song. So he ended up playing songs like the Backwards Alphabet and stuff. [Jenny]

Along with the pledge, celebrations, traditions and holidays were often seen as something that would symbolized a person being American or not. These rituals actively functioned to construct the American imagined community and narrative of American identity. Within the narrative of the pledge, many students also saw freedom and being free as distinctly American. The stories and narratives of the indigenous peoples, slaves and other marginalized populations
were not part of the free, American narrative. Michael illustrated how celebration of holidays and traditions also acted to construct distinct representations of American identity.

You can be parts of American. Being full American is you have to be truly American like American flags hanging over your house on July fourth, setting off fireworks, Christmas, Halloween; American tradition to be American. You can be part American but you also could be full. [Michael]

Students regularly utilize holidays, traditions and rituals in the construction of cultural symbols which populate the figured worlds of American identity. They use holidays and traditions as a means of categorization and classification to construct boundaries and borders of difference. Many students experienced an intersection of these boundaries, as described by Carolina, who previously explained that her family practices.

Well, I feel like I'm not American whenever, like say, Christmas eve, or New Year’s eve, whenever we're going, like by family I guess, because we're like all Hispanic, so I don't feel like I'm American. I feel American when, like I guess, when I say the pledge of allegiance because it's saying, like you pledge, like you're going to do this and that.

Well, I really like, don't care about it, but sometimes I would care about like, because when it's fourth of July, in Mexico it's not the fourth of July. I don’t know when it is, but it's another day. Like everything, like the dates are different. Like I guess, except for some events like Mother’s day I think, Father's day. Like those are the same. [Carolina]

Carolina explained the symbols in which figured worlds intersect, and as Holland et al. described – crashed into one another. The key here is that the figured world of American and ‘other’ remain clear to Carolina. But the intersection of the symbols, representations that populated multiple figured worlds, only intersected and crashed into one another within her
person, within her intimate identity. Carolina sees herself as possessed symbols that occupy two dialogic figured worlds. Carolina possessed symbols and representations of American and symbols and representations of ‘other’. The categorization of these holidays and traditions as difference, and as the borders/boundaries of identity, are summarized when Carolina says “we’re all Hispanics”.

Anna expands on Carolina’s feelings and provides another example of using holidays and traditions as symbols of American identity.

Anna: What you celebrate, like maybe people ... Here people celebrate Valentine's Day, but if you're from another place, you can celebrate the Day ... Sometimes people here don't celebrate Day of the Dead, but when you're part of Mexico, and you celebrate it, too.

Researcher: Is that something that you celebrate?
Anna: Sometimes.

Researcher: Sometimes? Okay. How would you know if somebody is American or not? If you had to think about it? Is there a way to tell? You mentioned the celebrations that people have.

Anna: Yeah, if you celebrate something and ... Like sometimes people don't celebrate what we celebrate here, like Valentine's Day or ... 

Researcher: Are there other ways that you can tell?
Anna: Sometimes by their color, because if you're from Africa, then maybe you celebrate other different things than what we celebrate here.

Along with the use of traditions and holidays as symbols of American and ‘other’, Anna expanded the use of symbols in categorization to skin color. When asked directly, some students explicitly stated that skin color was representative of American identity. Here are three examples.
Researcher: In your mind, what makes a person American?
Rowan: Probably that they … maybe they have white skin …

Tom: Sometimes Americans are white, most of the time, but some Hispanic people also are born here, because Hispanic people come move here.

Tom: Well, because most people came from England and Europe, so they were white. They didn't come from Mexico or other places where Hispanic lives.

Brittany: Well, sometimes the color of their skin. Sometimes you can't really tell because they’re Spanish and American or African-American.

The use of skin color and race for many students wasn’t as clear cut a dialogism as Rowan, Brittany and Tom stated. Many students recognized skin color and used it to categorize individuals and groups and to label differences of skin color based on perceived heritage. However, they were also quick to state that skin color, race and heritage didn’t matter. Kelsey, David and Jenny provide examples of this point.

And, I don't know if appearance really matters, because like I said before, African Americans, we consider them Americans, and their skin is black. So, and like I used to think that Americans were usually white, because I didn't know any better. I was young. But now I know that Americans can have many different skins. It's not really a question of appearance. [Kelsey]

Well I don't really think that your ethnicity really matters in the case of American, because there are so many other types of people living in it. There's white men, people that came from Africa, so African Americans, some Hispanic. There are a lot of different cultures. [David]

Researcher: If you were to just see somebody, how would you know if they were American or not?
Jenny: If you just looked at them, you probably couldn't tell, but if they were white, you would probably assume, and if they were here, you would probably assume that they were American. If you're over in Spain and you see a white person, you probably wouldn't be able to tell unless you hear them speak.

Researcher: Okay, so language?

Jenny: Yeah, but sometimes you can't tell like that.

Researcher: Okay. So it's complicated?

Jenny: Yeah. You could tell the difference if they have an English accent or Australian, but if they talk like this, they could still be from somewhere else.

Of note here is that while students stated that race, skin color and ethnicity did not matter in the construction of American identity, all of them still used identifications of race, skin color and ethnicity in the categorization of people and differences of heritage. The discursive use of race, ethnicity and skin color as symbols for a group of people demonstrates that while there is a conscious statement of race not being important, there is a seemingly unconscious construction of exclusion for students of color. While it should be noted that Jenny, Kelsey and David are all self-identified white students, this trend was not solely white.

Students who participated in the focus group were from a cross section of races and were asked about the issue of race being important.

Emilly: Like, I have lots of friends who are from different places. I don't really care what color their skin is. I just care how nice they are. They are very, very nice. A lot of people are very nice.

Joey: I'm really kind of stuck in between the middle. It does matter, but at the same time, it really does matter to me. I feel like I can lean towards where it really doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what the color of your skin are, what Emilly said. You should always be accepted in the world. But, the color of your skin does matter to ...
should matter to you, because you are one of a kind. You are who you are.

Taylor: I agree with Carolina and Emilly. I agree. Like they said, it's not what's on the outside. It's like what's on the inside. It's like what's in your heart. Like what you want. How you treat other people and... it's not really about really what you think color is. I kind of disagree with Joey a little bit. What color you are shouldn't really matter to you. It’s just who, like because like if you think you're like for instance a black, like an African-American or something, that doesn't mean you should think that you should only hang out with them. It's your heritage should be important but not your color.

Erika: I think I'm changing gears now that it doesn't really matter who you are. It's not as important.

Carolina: The only thing that I think is important, is for me it is important because I'm proud of like my culture.

Zoey: I don't necessarily think it’s important when you're at school. At school, you have friends that don't care of how your skin color is. Most of your friends that you have don't care about your skin color. That won't necessarily be important at school. Everybody thinks of themselves as different.

Erika: Well, everybody knows me. I really don't care about who people are. It doesn't really matter to me about your skin color.

Students in the focus group had mixed beliefs about the importance and place of skin color in their lives. Most notably students of color more often stated they were proud in what they described as their ‘heritage’ in one-on-one interviews and again in the focus group. When part of the focus group Taylor stated that race and skin color shouldn’t matter to people, but people should be proud of their heritage, but in her second one-on-one interview she stated that she was proud of being white, and it was important to her. At the end of the final focus group session and in a brief moment of humor, Zoey points out these categorical distinctions and how students do come to assign symbols to groups of people within the terrain of the figured world.
Zoey: I don't necessarily think it's important when you're at school. At school, you have friends that don't care of how your skin color is. Most of your friends that you have don't care about your skin color. That won't necessarily be important at school. Everybody thinks of themselves as different.

Researcher: Okay. Is it important to you?

Zoey: No. Sometimes I think I'm white because I like lots of coffee.

Zoey’s points out that students do experienced categorizations of race, in what Holland et al. (1998) would call positionality, or subject positions. Students experienced their positions in relation to others, and these positions are socially determined and often intersected across figured worlds within personal identities. By assigning symbols, characteristics and labels to groups, students acknowledged that certain traits are seen as representative of certain identities. This discursive construction of symbols and representations is a key aspect of defining the figured worlds of American and constructing American identity.

For students across race, skin color and ethnicity, language represented a bigger conscious symbol of American identity than race or skin color did.

Researcher: When you think of an American person, what do you think about?

Randy: I think of everybody, because if they're born in the United States, they're an American. They don't have to be different colors. I just think of every single one of my friends are.

Researcher: Okay. So everybody. Are there any characteristics that necessarily make a person American?

Randy: Talk in English.

Randy explained that being American didn’t have to be distinct colors and that while language also represented a symbol of American identity, it is also a tool that individuals can use
to become American. Language in this sense represented a cultural tool of figured worlds. So language is both a symbol, which in the figured worlds of American is assigned to represent identity membership, and was also a tool used in gaining inclusion into the membership of the imagined community. For many students, language was both a symbol and a tool associated with the construction of American identity and populated the American figured world. Below is a sampling of how four students talked about language in relation to American identity.

Researcher: Okay. Do you consider your parents American?
Zoey: Mmm, my mom talks mostly Spanish. She doesn't not know English. She does know English, but I have to teach her

I agree because maybe sometimes people that weren't born here don't know how to speak English, or maybe they speak another language, like in third grade this kid came, but he didn't know how to speak English, because he came from Mexico. [Anna]

Michael: For verbal communication it can depend because you can still be full American and speak twelve different languages.

You would still be American. I would think language could be a possible factor, but it would be the first language you ever spoke because you can have many, many languages, but what's the first one you ever spoke because that depends.

It would be where you are depending on language. If you were in India you'd speak ... Actually there's way too many. Here, let's say you're in Spain. You'd speak Spanish, but if you were in Portugal, you'd speak Portuguese.

Researcher: If you were in America ...
Michael: You'd speak English.

Language sometimes. They speak English, and sometimes other people speak other language like French, Spanish and stuff like that. [Carolina]
For some students, language was representative of national identity, and English was a symbol of American identity. When I asked Zoey if she considered her parent’s American, her response was immediately a reference to language, which exposed the discursive boundary that language represented between membership in American identity and status as ‘other’. Anna also made reference to language when asked about characteristics of being American. For Anna, who is bilingual in Spanish and English, language still represented a marker, a symbol, a representation and a tool within the figured worlds of American identity.

Carolina provided a more nuanced example of how language intersected with American identity. When referring to ‘Americans’, she uses the word ‘they’ as opposed to ‘we’. While Carolina identified as American, this showed that language and being bilingual creates a complex intersection between representations of identity and the daily lives and experiences of students. She places Spanish (along with French) outside of the boundaries of American, thus Spanish became a representation of something ‘other’ than American. Michael provides an example of trying to reconcile his understanding of the new diversity in schools and the culturally reified symbols of the figured worlds of American identity. He explains that to him American was a pan-lingual identity in which people can possess multiple languages. His explanation evoked notions of other languages and nation-states with which he is familiar. In this process Michael used languages as representative of borders which may be physical, symbolic, national or personal. Language in this sense provided a cultural symbol of membership to an imagined community.

Curriculum also regularly worked to construct symbols and boundaries of American identity. For example, in Ms. Washington’s classroom students studied colonization and the American Revolution. During this time students regularly interacted with texts that utilized
representations which populate the figured worlds of American identity. Representations of ‘Americans’ were regularly white European males. American colonization was also associated with the concept of ‘progress’ and ‘freedom’. The curricular resources employed representations of American into the figured worlds of American identity, and students often utilized these resources in developing their understanding of boundaries. This pattern can be seen specifically when students made a distinction between American settlers and Native American populations.

Native American is like more different than Americans because they were natives. I think it was like Indians. They were different. They used animals instead of like Americans do, and like sometimes they use guns or other different types of weapons, but they ... they just used like bear tooths or their skin to do stuff like make clothes or used the teeth as weapons. [Randy]

The reason it would be Native Americans because that was the original American. I mean that was a long time ago way before us, way before all those crazy traditions we have now. Yeah, that would be Native American. Now American nowadays is a lot different from Native American. Native American would be living in woodlands with very minimal, well minimal protection. While America nowadays you can roam around with a gun. All you need is a permit. It's a lot different. [Michael]

I think Americans are like us, just regular American and Native Americans are like the Indians I think. Like we saw on video with the ... Yeah, I think they're the Native Americans. [Emma]

Native Americans, they live by the wild. They like to hunt their own food. They don't use guns; they use spears. But Americans, they use guns because probably they're too scared to go hunt but for their own. But I think they're different because the Native American's live by the wild, and the Americans don’t. [Zoey]

Along with the students’ views of the difference between ‘Native American’ and American, the curriculum provided very few counter narratives to European progress and modernity as well as very few counter narratives to Native American aggression. For example,
videos reinforced narratives of colonists protecting themselves against Native American aggression. Further, Europeans, colonists and American were seen as “building up” and “founding”, while the land before colonization was seen as having nothing and being undeveloped.

While some responses made exceptions for Native Americans being ‘Original Americans’, for these students ‘Native American’ was seemingly held as a derivation of American and in contrast to the narrative of progress and ‘founding’ that accompanied the classroom curriculum. Placing American on a continuum and within a hierarchy produced dominant normative and subordinate identities in relation to American and other. The derivation from the single identifier of American signals that a person is a member of a subordinate group, such as the case with ‘Native American’. The dominant and normative nature of American makes all other groups subordinate and secondary to the dominant group or term. While students make the argument that multiple populations are within the umbrella of American, their discursive classification seemingly reflects a hierarchy within and across the figured worlds of American identity.

*Defining Cultural Artifacts*

Along with the symbols that populate figured worlds, constructing representations of identity utilizes cultural artifacts that represent the materiality of figured worlds and identity. The physical, tangible nature of cultural artifacts act, as Holland et al. (1998) put it, as a “mediator in human action” (p.60). For students in Ms. Washington’s class, cultural artifacts most often took the forms of documents, foods and clothing. Michael explained how documents provided a powerful artifact of American identity in this way.
Think about your credentials though like your driver’s license. That's important. Most people in America have a driver’s license, and that is used as credentials and such ... Like that, a permit ... wait, no. I forgot what it was. You have to be a certain year of age. [Michael]

Like getting a driver's license, you're partially American. You're almost fully American. You get a permit to symbolize that you're American; you're American. It would be actions, but it's also a trait if you were born in the United States, because that's what you're born with; you are American, and you don't need something to symbolize it. [Michael]

As Michael continued, a key artifact of American identity is some type of credential which provided insider status, membership and power. Gabriel also mentioned the need for some sort of credentialing document.

Documents make you American and how many years you have lived here. [Gabriel]

In describing what constitutes American identity, both Gabriel and Michael emphasized the importance of documents. These cultural artifacts were seen by them as representative of possession of identity. Along with documents, students also described food as an artifact of both American and ‘other’ identity.

Researcher: When you think of the American culture, what do you think of?


Star: It's different by the culture that they eat. What they eat and maybe they don’t eat what we eat here. They could bring stuff to school that they like to eat. It's what they're from there so they don't usually eat the stuff that are here maybe.

Carolina and Star both illustrated how food became an artifact of membership and othering in relation to American identity. Across the study food was is regularly a topic of
discussion at lunch time. Rowan, who brings her lunch from home, often has jicama. Many of the students who self-identify as Latino or Hispanic were quick to identify this is a common ‘Mexican food’. Anna, when discussing Thanksgiving break, said that she loves Thanksgiving because her family makes tamales; they don’t usually eat turkey. To Anna, the making of tamales during thanksgiving is participation in American traditions. The food, which is often seen as an artifact of Latino (and specifically Mexican culture and identity), is part of American identity for her as it intersects with an American holiday. To Anna, tamales and Thanksgiving weren’t in juxtaposition with each other but were simply an intertwined aspect of her identity.

In one of the interviews, Anna went on to explain the function clothing plays in distinguishing membership to the imagined community of American.

> When we talk about Native Americans, they look different from the people in America. They don't wear whole shirt or pants. They wear, in some pictures that we saw or illustrations; they wore skirts with feathers on their heads. It's different than Americans because they wear ... We dress in pants for men. It was different. [Anna]

Along with clothing, there is an implied assumption about modernity being an American characteristic. The distinction that students made also occurs during class when they were reading texts about colonial America. In one reading group, students noted that American colonists would wore moccasins, but the use of this clothing at no time put the colonists identity in question. That is, the clothing for these colonists did not change their identity; students still saw these individuals as white colonists from Europe. Not only was colonization of land occurring, white European settlers had the power to colonize and appropriate cultural artifacts and symbols for their own use. For example, the students in Ms. Washington’s class viewed the figured worlds of American as often populated through privilege. Students saw differences and made distinctions of membership as it pertained to imagined community of American.
However, for them the ‘other’ appeared constructed through the unknown and through the representations, images, and significantly curricular content provided to students. The deployment of cultural symbols, tools and artifacts into figured worlds of identity are dually constructed through lived experience (the constructivist) and the socio-historic (culturalist) lenses. For these students, the use of symbols, artifacts and tools which, when authored, used and enacted, constructed meaning for identity function to enact conceptions of American and other.

*Defining Cultural Tools*

Along with the deployment of cultural symbols and artifacts into and onto the figured worlds of American identity, students also describe the tools which functioned to enact American identity through use. The most prevalent tool that students employed was language. Significantly, they recognized the power of language and its use as a means of authoring multiple national identities. Erika, for example, explained that her conception of national identity and American identity are intertwined with language. She explains this through an example of her mother, grandmother and aunt.

> My mom, she was from Germany, so she speaks a little Spanish but not much. My grandma and my aunt kind of speak a little Spanish, but not that much. I really don't know what to call them, American or not. [Erika]

For Erika, like many students, language is both a representation/symbol of identity and also a cultural tool with which individuals author identity. She repeated this fact numerous times, including during the focus group sessions. A distinction Erika and others made was that languages other than English are clear markers of ‘other’ identities, and only when other qualities are present can they be part of American identities. For Erika, being from Germany and
speaking Spanish, were held together in contrast to an American identity, so much so that she questioned her own mother’s American identity. Erika also noted during our conversations that the reason her mother was from Germany is because her grandmother and grandfather were in the U.S. Army, and even this membership legacy doesn’t outweigh the influence of language in Erika’s construction of American identity.

In identifications with language, the construction of the ‘other’ is much more salient to identity than the definitive construction of American. Students recognize that authoring was a complex relationship between multiple factors, but ‘othering’ can occurred through a few very distinct factors. Anna illustrates how language was a cultural tool for authoring national identity while discussing how someone becomes American during one of the interviews with her.

They would have to learn the language first, because if their language was different from ours, they would have to learn the language first because that would help them read books that are here, not books that were over there in the other place. [Anna]

In this statement Anna located herself within the boundaries of the imagined community of American, while locating others without language proficiency outside. Anna, a self-identified Hispanic female, also characterizes people who may not be American or may be ‘becoming’ American as ‘others’. Through the description of people using language to ‘become’ American, she asserted “they would have to learn the language first because that would help them read books that are here, not books that were over there in the other place.” This description positioned the ‘other place’ of non-Americans as something Anna was not familiar with. She explains difference in terms of physical and imagined space. A student who does not know the language is not only from ‘the other place’, that person is from ‘over there’.
The use of language as a cultural tool that authors identity means that it has power through enaction and deployment. Bobby explained this impact of English language on the ability to author ‘American identity’.

Some people might not be able to speak English as well as us. Now, again, I keep going back to Britain because they speak the same language, they just have an accent. Like Hispanics sometimes they don't know Spani- ... I mean English as well as us, and so sometimes they're having trouble, and you're like, you know that they might not be English because you're having trouble learning it. [Bobby]

The impact of language is clearly a factor in how students see themselves and classmates. The use of language, along with being a tool for authoring American identity, is also a marker of other identities in the construction of subject positions.

**Subject Position**

Positional identities are described by Holland et al. (1998) as a sense of relative social position in relation to others inscribed through power, status, and privilege in a negotiation of one’s self as entitled or disqualified from identities. Southern Elementary school is located in North Carolina, an “emerging gateway state” (Anrig & Wang, 2006; Singer, 2004) for immigrants. This local socio-historic context provides the backdrop for how students’ identities also become subjects to social position. Students in Ms. Washington’s class regularly positioned each other and experienced being positioned by others. Luke, Emma and Star exemplified some ways in which they position classmates.

I can tell Gabriel and Tom are part Hispanic. I don’t know if they were born in America or they grew up in Mexico and then moved here, but I can tell from personal experience, by sitting near them and sometimes pairing up with them in PE. They do speak Spanish to each other.

Hearing them [classmates] talk what I can tell is in Spanish, because I don’t think we have any French classmates, mainly part Hispanic, but from telling they can
speak good Spanish or good Mexican, I can tell if their parents are Mexican or … yeah. [Luke]

Emma: I think some people are more. Half and half Latin. Maybe I could be half Latin, half American.

Researcher: Are there other people who are not? That are just 100% American?

Emma: Maybe like Emilly or Brittany or Taylor. Taylor, yes.

Researcher: What about those people makes them different than the other people?

Emma: Anything different because some people don't know our language [Spanish]. The English don't know our language. They don't understand what we're saying sometimes.

Some people are from Mexico, like Randy and Tom and them. Usually the people in our classroom are American. They are from here. It's a little bit different but not that much. [Star]

Both Luke and Emma positioned classmates based on their own construction, understanding and perception of national identity. Tom, Gabriel and other classmates were peers whose identity Luke and Star positioned as a part of the socio-historic context. In Ms. Washington’s classroom language was seen as both a tool and a symbol of national identity. Luke used language to position classmates relationally to himself and others as members who did or did not meet the criteria of being American. Star did not utilize any specific cultural symbols, artifacts or tools to delineate identity difference, but she clearly stated that Randy and Tom and “them” did not meet the criteria of American identity. Star and Luke negotiate themselves as entitled to American identity, while disqualifying some of their peers. Emma also positioned classmates in relation to American identity and the ‘other’. She named ‘Latin’ and ‘American’
identities as distinctly separate. This construction of positional identities exposed the borders that students construct between identities. To Emma classmates cannot be 100% ‘Latin’ and 100% ‘American’. This difference is complex and rationalized differently by students depending on their social and subject positions, but it forms the basis for the construction of ‘other’. In his interview, Gabriel, talked about the conversation he had had with his father about what he should “call himself”.

I asked my dad what would I call myself, and he said Latin American because of his and my mom side are Latino [Gabriel]

This exchange provided a glimpse into the complex nature of identity being positioned through social relations. Gabriel explained through stories that he considers himself American and that his mother and father are both from Mexico, but they hold very different subject positions. Gabriel describes the time that he, his brother and his father were playing soccer at a local park, and a stranger asked if Gabriel’s father spoke English and reacted with surprise when he said “Yes.” He juxtaposes this story while explaining that his mother doesn’t really speak English, even though everybody assumes she does. Gabriel’s father (like Gabriel) is olive skinned and speaks both English and Spanish. Gabriel’s mother is, in his words, “very white and does not speak much English.” What Gabriel articulates is that while students construct subject positions relative to each other, subject positions of students are also constructed through the socio-historic context around them.

Gabriel was not the only student to articulate the influence that being viewed by others has on a person being granted access to American identity. Reminiscent of Gabriel’s explanation, Brittany discussed how people are often judged from the outside, by what others perceive them to be within the context of group categorizations.
Researcher: Okay, so is there anything specific that you would do or anything that you would change, have to change, about yourself for you to consider yourself not American or, maybe, for other people to consider yourself not American?

Brittany: Well, I could get a tan.

Researcher: Okay.

Brittany: Because people often view others from the outside and they're on the inside. So if I change the way I look, they would, maybe, not hang out with me anymore because I changed the way I look. I could change the way I ... Or change who I hang out with and be my own person and hang out with people that are kind of different from everyone else.

Brittany articulated a crude, yet all too real, experience for many students of color in Ms. Washington’s class. Skin color was often one of the most influential markers of subject position. When skin color and population groupings are combined - as Brittany alludes to categorizations often lead positional identities to reflect assumptions of membership to imagined collective identities. In simple language Brittany had described one dynamic in the social construction of the ‘other’, that which is not like me and is different.

Southern Elementary School, as an institution, also had an active role in constructing difference and distinctions of the ‘other’, in creating the context for students to author and socially position their identities. The school’s morning announcements repeatedly make special announcements and references for Latin@ students and families. Among examples were special references to celebrate Independence Day for several Central American countries and reminded students of the school’s Latino night, which was organized by the school’s English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers.
The proliferation of cultural artifacts and symbols associated with ‘Latino’ identity seemed to have a dual function at the school. On one hand, they produced and reproduced markers of difference between students who are seen as American and students who are seen as ‘other’. This worked to essentialize ‘Latino’ identity, culture, symbols, representation and artifacts in the reinscription of ‘Latino’ as ‘other’ in relation to American. On the other hand the inclusion of cultural events that students identified as closely related to cultural legacies of their family and home life provided what Alba (2005) conceptualized as the ‘blurring’ of boundaries and borders of difference. The students in Ms. Washington’s class who identified as Hispanic regularly stated that their school is more American than their home, because their home culture was not presented in school. Anna and Carolina provided examples.

Sometimes you feel less American because maybe you eat different foods or you speak a different language in your house more or with your friends. Sometimes if they speak Spanish maybe you want to speak Spanish with them, too. You can change if you're ... like... Sometimes you feel part of the, part of American because you don't always talk English or you eat only different foods that aren't American. [Anna]

At home, I don't really feel like an American, because at school they give us different foods and talk a different language, and in my house my mom makes Mexican food. [Anna]

Well I think, sometimes I think of it [curriculum] as, like not representing my history, but sometimes I think of it as, yeah it's representing my history, because sometimes, like when I feel more Hispanic, I feel like it's not representing it, because it's not based like, what happened, around where my family's from, and sometimes I feel like that. Sometimes I feel like it does represent me because sometimes if, it depends on if I feel American or if I feel Hispanic. [Carolina]

The different interpretations of these announcements might depend on student positionality and subject position. White students often see these representations as cultural
characteristics with their classmates holding Hispanic students as different, while Hispanic students see this celebration of culture and the inclusion of many of the cultural legacies and heritages they experience at home. Once again subject position identities are inscribed through power, status, and privilege and in negotiation with what identities one’s self is entitled to or disqualified from.

For Emma, Luke, Gabriel and all the students in Ms. Washington’s class, there was power in the ability to classify, categorize, position, provide membership, access and disqualify peers from identity membership. There was also great power in the ability to control, change and mediate cultural representations, that are symbols, tools and artifacts of identity, defining boundaries and borders between peers. In Ms. Washington’s class this is no different; students positioned peers in relative social arrangements through fields of power and privilege. American identity, when assigned to themselves and seen as authored identity, is multiplied with many inclusive, broad definitions that incorporate a range of symbols, tools and artifacts. The ways in which students author identity weren’t always the same as the ways in which students position peers. When American identity was a tool of categorization in general, others’ identities became subject to relative social positions, and the inclusive, broad construction of American collapsed, becoming rigid, defined and exclusive. For Gabriel American identity is not a mutually exclusive endeavor, but rather a mutually constructed one. Answering the question “Can you be Hispanic and American?”, Gabriel answered thus,

Yeah it depends of what the person thinks of themselves. And it depends on how they feel about their parents, and if they feel strongly towards Mexico or America….Most of the time I feel the same, but sometime my dad always talks about his childhood and what they did when he was little, and since he is Mexican and both [American].
When I learn a little bit more or do something, it makes me think of both [American and Latino], a little of social studies, and when my mom teaches me about grandparents. [Gabriel]

Gabriel sees himself as American, Mexican, Latino and “Latino Americano” as he put it. To Gabriel these identities are not in opposition with each other, but he is all of them all the time, not fractionally as described above by Emma.

Authoring Identity

Authoring of identities is the process by which individuals put into practice the cultural symbols, artifacts, and tools that activated the socio-historic legacies of figured worlds. Students in Ms. Washington’s class constructed American identity around several cultural symbols, artifacts and tools. Most notably in previous sections they described skin color, language, institutional credentials, traditions and food as some of the ways they understand the construction of American identity. The authoring of American identity was a complex process in which students both practiced identity through enacting symbols, artifacts and tools of the figured worlds of American, but also negotiated what is NOT American, what is the ‘other’. It should be noted from the outset of this section on authoring of identity, that all students when asked directly, identified themselves as American. Students who self-identified as Hispanic, however, often also identified with hybrid American identities as a product of the socio-historical context of both subject position and authoring. Continuing from the framework of identity-in-practice theory authoring of identity occurred through three main ways for these students: (1) the use of cultural tools, (2) possession of cultural symbols, and (3) access to socio-historic cultural legacies.
Use of Cultural Tools

Students in Ms. Washington’s class regularly identified ways in which they and others author themselves as American. An element that was consistently described was the use of language. Language, however, took on many different meanings when the construction of the ‘other’ changed. Some students regularly turned to the use of ‘English’ as a way in which students could be, or become, American and more ‘American.

Zoey explains how language affects her construction of her own identity and the way it affects her authoring of American identity.

Researcher: Okay. Do you think that people who aren't American can become American?

Zoey: Yeah. Only if they learn lots of Spanish. No. If they’re Spanish, and they learn lots of English, and then when they mostly just talk English, they're going to consider themselves as American.

Zoey articulated the role that English plays in a person’s ability to author American and cross borders of membership from ‘other’/outsider to member/possessor/insider. This use of language also applied to how Zoey sees herself and her identity.

I mostly feel more American because I barely talk what I'm supposed to talk. My mom always tells me to speak Spanish, but since I've gotten used to it, and I talk horrible in Spanish. I talk mostly English so people would understand me. [Zoey]

She described that there is a dual process in authoring, first in the use of tools to author, and second, in the socio-historic subject positioning of tools across identities. English and Spanish in this context represent identity and are able to be put into practice and controlled. For Holland et al. (1998) this process of controlling, manipulating and putting symbols and tools into practice is a process of semiotic mediation.
Tom, Emily and Anna echoed the use of language to author differing identities.

At home I speak Spanish, because my parents are from Mexico. When I come here [school], I speak English. I think it matters a little bit, because I mostly speak Spanish. I'm better at Spanish than English, so it might have something to do with that… [Tom]

I think you can be American and Latino, because if you were originally born somewhere where they speak Spanish or Latin, then you might consider yourself Latino. If you move to America, and you start living in America, you would also consider yourself American. [Emilly]

Sometimes you feel less American because maybe you eat different foods, or you speak a different language in your house more or with your friends. Sometimes if they speak Spanish, maybe you want to speak Spanish with them, too. You can change if you're … like…Sometimes you feel part of American because you don't always talk English, or you eat only different foods that aren't American. [Anna]

Tom, Emilly and Anna illustrated the way that speaking Spanish and English function to author identities of membership in a nation-state and membership in imagined communities of these nation-states, as well as their socio-historic legacies, even when a person relocates. Tom explained that the connection between Mexico and his parents is a function of their language. He also made allusion to the use of English at school, which Hispanic students identified as a trait and as a place they felt more American than home. Emilly too clarified the relationship between language (Spanish) and identity (Latino). While she also stated that someone can be American and Latino, she doesn’t ascribe Spanish language to American identity. Anna also poses that Spanish is symbolically not representative of American within the figured worlds of American identity. In addition Zoey explicated the process of self-authoring and the use of semiotic mediation to control and deploy tools to practice identities.
Zoey: Sometimes your parents have to do it, which is annoying, and then sometimes the children, like we...I change a lot. I change within. My mom, she usually doesn't choose for me. I just choose for myself. It's like, I went to the Latino Festival, because I was with my sister, and she went there to, so I had to follow where they went, but it was lots of fun. I felt super dizzy after I went there.

Researcher: You said that you sometimes change within. Tell me about that.

Zoey: I change within. It depends on the places where I am. If I'm at somewhere where they only speak English, I would speak English there, but if we go somewhere after that, somewhere where they speak Spanish. I would go directly to speak Spanish, so they can understand me, because it's not about me letting them understand what I'm saying.

Zoey mentioned the way in which language, Spanish and English, functioned as a tool for authoring her identity. She identified specific uses for these languages and the way in which language can position students as insiders and members or outsiders and ‘other’. Zoey illustrates how she made a conscious decision to use language with peers to become a member of different groups of people. The use of language to traverse borders and boundaries of difference exemplifies the role of cultural tools in authoring identity.

Beyond language, students mentioned during observations that they felt knowledge of cultural history was another tool which affected their American identity. Many of the Hispanic students, including Tom, Carolina, Randy, Emma, Zoey and Gabriel mentioned that they weren’t familiar with a lot of the US History that they were learning in social studies. They believed this lack of knowledge positioned them as outsiders to American identity and that the more they learned the more they would be able to identify with American cultural legacies and utilize cultural legacies as a tool for authoring. Carolina, Kelsey and Gabriel’s statements are illustrative.
Well maybe it does because when we're learning about the American Revolution or stuff like that, I haven't learned that, because like, I'm not, like, normal to that, because I really don't understand it that well. Like when we were beginning to start, like one day about what the American Revolution was, but my sister sort of talked a little about it to me, and I understand a bit more, so I guess it does affect because sometime I feel like I don't know what they're talking about, and I feel like I don't know about it and stuff like that. [Carolina]

Language represents a unique factor in the cultural production of American identity in that it can be a tool for authoring identity or seen a symbol of identity. The complexity of language allows it to be seen differently, and sometimes in contradiction, as a symbol and tool simultaneously.

I disagree with languages, because I know we have Spanish speakers here. And they sometimes they can't speak English because they just moved from Mexico or Spain or other another Spanish speaking country. But we can still classify them as Americans, so language doesn't matter in my case. [Kelsey]

I think that a little racist [to think language indicates national identity], because some people see someone that is or isn’t, and they say stuff bad to people because of the language they speak. [Gabriel]

Some students in Ms. Washington’s class made accommodations for language as a symbol of American identity as in the case of Kelsey. Others saw language being used to determine identity as racist, because it makes assumptions to exclude individuals, as in the example provided by Gabriel. Students saw the use of cultural symbols, artifacts and tools as influential on the ability to author American identity, but this often varied across them and in relation to how they positioned themselves relative to peers. A constant in the construction of American identity was the construction and reification of the ‘other’. Students often did not specifically identify an American singularity, but rather identified American through constant
comparative relational explanation incorporating cultural symbols, artifacts, tools, legacies and peer subject positions.

*Enacting Cultural Symbols*

The use of cultural symbols in authoring identity occurred both through semiotic mediation and through the changing of activities and practice to embody symbols. Students often described their use of cultural symbols and authoring as their making choices to be something or changing voice themselves. Star provides an example of how symbols and their acquisition were mediated through the use of the use of other symbols.

Makes me feel more American because I'm with my family, and they're from America. It makes me think that maybe I'm from America, because my family is too, and like you said, the pledge of allegiance, we say our own pledge, and we do the Fourth of July, like all our traditions like Christmas and Halloween. [Star]

She described the function of cultural traditions both as symbols of the figured worlds of American and as a way to enact American identity. Star relied on holidays and the pledge as examples of things that, through enaction, provided her membership to American identity. In addition to specific symbols she also identifies the importance of family and the socio-historic cultural legacies which family and subject position provide. Star goes on to explain how someone could become American:

They could be taught like us. They could talk like us. They can do things like us, go to our school and wear the same clothes as us. [Star]

I feel American when, like I guess, when I say the pledge of allegiance, because it's saying, like you pledge, like you're going to do this and that. [Carolina]
Star specifically mentioned cultural symbols and artifacts as a means by which a person who is seen as not American can become American and gain membership to the imagined community. Star referenced “doing things”, “clothes”, “talk like us” and the role of school and teaching as important in becoming American. Carolina also described the importance of symbolic activities, such as the pledge, in the authoring of American identity.

In Ms. Washington’s class students regularly made reference to food, holidays, clothing, languages and beliefs as things that people do which symbolize their American identity. Students further identified differences between these symbols to clearly differentiate between the ‘other’ and themselves. But with these symbols, while seen as modes of classification when explicitly discussed, students often saw authoring as ‘just who they are’.

Kelsey explained this with an example of how she authors different identities.

I don't think I act differently, I just act like who I am. I might do things differently because I'm with a different group. If I'm with the boys, I'm probably not going to talk about what I would the past couple of days, like fashion things and probably going to go out there and play sports, but if I talk to Brittany, we're going to talk about things. It's going to be differently, but I can change myself so I can do the things a little differently, but then at the same time, it's not different from how I really am.

Furthermore, Zoey provided an example of how she saw her identity change and how her relationship to authoring of identities changed across contexts.

Zoey: Yes. Like when I go to stuff that requires Spanish stuff, I forget about my American religion and go to my Mexican one, and I go do stuff the American won’t technically do. Like last time I went to the Day of the Dead festival, and my god sister dressed up as one of those girls that are like maids but they're not, they just make good. Then her brother and Dad dressed up as old, crazy men. Dancing around the stage. We mostly don’t do that. We don’t
drink. We would eat hot chocolate with bread, Mexican bread, and we won't usually do anything. Eat tamales also; they're good.

Researcher: Is there a time where you feel totally American. For that example, you said you forget your American side. Is there a time when you forget your Mexican side?

Zoey: Yes, like when I'm at school, I forget about it and talk mostly English, because I don't want to make people that speak English feel bad that I only talk Spanish. That's why I mostly speak English, so they can understand what I'm saying.

Researcher: Who determines if a person is American or not?

Zoey: Sometimes your parents have to do it, which is annoying, and then sometimes the children, like we...I change a lot. I change within. My mom, she usually doesn't choose for me. I just choose for myself. It's like I went to the Latino Festival because I was with my sister, and she went there to, so I had to follow where they went….

Researcher: You said that you sometimes change within. Tell me about that.

Zoey: I change within. It depends on the places where I am. If I'm at somewhere where they only speak English, I would speak English there, but if we go somewhere after that, somewhere where they speak Spanish. I would go directly to speak Spanish so they can understand me, because it's not about me letting them understand what I'm saying.

Zoey’s example illuminated how socio-historic context, subject position and cultural legacies can interact and how students came to situate and negotiate themselves and their authoring practices.

The ability to activate and deploy cultural symbols sometimes depended on socio-historic subject position and one’s ability to have access to membership in reified cultural legacies. This seemed to be especially true for many of the students in Ms. Washington’s class, as all students were born in the US, but some maintained linkages multiple national identities. Students regularly identified that American identity or identity as an ‘other’ to American, relied on the access they have through family, cultural legacies and socio-cultural histories that comprise the figured worlds of American.
Cultural Legacies

The use of cultural legacies occurred and reoccurred for Ms. Washington’s students in their ability to author identities. Students regularly identified membership to a certain group that held a socio-historic cultural legacy as providing themselves and other members access to that identity. Students of color and white students regularly made references to parents, heritage and socio-historic understandings of identities and differences between themselves and peers. When asked about American identity and the role of curriculum, Tom provided a glimpse into how students came to understand the role of cultural legacies in their ability to author American identity.

Well, because most people came from England and Europe, so they were white. They didn't come from Mexico or other places where Hispanic lives. [Tom]

Tom explained rather matter of factly that American identity has a cultural legacy based in England and Europe and in being White. The distinction he made provides an example of one of the many ways in which cultural symbols of a figured world construct borders to distinguish who is American and who is other. Carolina also articulated the role of cultural legacies, but specifically through parents and ‘heritage’ in authoring of identity.

I think it doesn't matter if you're part of two heritages, because it depends on who your parents are. If your parents are from Mexico, and you were born here, you would consider yourself half Mexican and half American. Like Taylor said, it’s in your blood. Nothing can change that. [Carolina]

For Carolina, the access to multiple heritages allowed for multiple authorial stances in the production of her identity. She described the way cultural legacies provided power and legitimacy in the production and authoring of identity. As mentioned in several of the examples
in this chapter, students regularly positioned themselves through negotiation of cultural symbols and the symbols of the figured worlds of American. The cultural legacies which work to reproduce reified figured worlds is another example of how power proliferates the cultural production and understanding of figured worlds through the construction of identity in what Bakhtin named *heteroglossia* (Holland et al., 1998).

Through *heteroglossia* individual students experience many possible cultural legacies, symbols, tools and artifacts within a cultural world, but some of these held superordinate status over others. The reproduction and fixing of cultural products formed meanings within figured worlds of American, and identity then constrained the cultural forms which subjects are able to use to author American identity. In this sense *heteroglossia* worked to reproduce and reinscribe power through the dominant cultural forms and norms often produced through socio-historic cultural legacies. Kelsey provided an example of the intersection of American identity, cultural legacies and *heteroglossia*.

Kelsey: Native American's, they were here before anybody else was here. They were the first people here, I believe. I'm not quite sure about that. I haven't really explored in history. And I think they're called Native Americans just because ... They used to be called "Indians" because they used to think it was India. But now it is like, they used to be here because they were native to here. That's why many people are "Native" Americans.

But African Americans, they are ... Their ancestors, they all, they came from Africa. And they were brought here, probably as slaves. And then they had, there was the children; there was two parents; they had a baby. And then that ... They had a baby and then after this became the United States of America, it would be considered an American because it was born here.

Researcher: Okay. So those two groups that we just named, Native American and African American. They, you think they are American?

Kelsey: Yes.
Researcher: Okay. So what would be the difference if I said, you know, like you said, you're just American. You don't have something in front of your name. Or do you? So what's the difference between those groups and you?

Kelsey: Well, we were ... Most of the people here, a lot of them, I can't say most of them because I don't know the percentage, came from England, came from Europe. Because they were ... We had immigrants, we had people coming to the colonies, and when they fought. And I think the reason why we don't have one in front of us is because we were like, one of the groups of people who originally came to the colonies. So people just think of themselves as Americans. They don't feel like they need to put anything in front of their names. That's what they class themselves.

For these students the power of cultural legacies was both in the ability to author identity, but also within a hierarchy of identities the concept that identity could, or could not be lost. Billy and Eric provided examples of this during interviews when asked if there was a way to become “not American”.

I don't think there would because even if I went to other countries and lived there the rest of my life, I think I would still have the American side of me. Not personality. In the back of my mind just to say, the talking that way or wearing that clothes. I don't think there is a way because some people might say you might become something new, but you will still have being an American in the back of your mind. [Billy]

No. I am not saying this in a negative way, but, it really never happened to me, because it depends on your heritage. If you come from Europe, or you come from Asia, you would feel different than those people, like if you come from South America. It just depends on your heritage. Since I was already born in America, I just always feel like I was a part of it. When I moved to somewhere else, and I stay there for a really long time, I'm like, am I more this, or am I more of American? It depends on where I am in the world. [Eric]

The ability to maintain American identity or be made an ‘other’ is ingrained in the fields of power which populate the figured world, the socio-historic context and the cultural legacies of
American identity. For many students of color, American identity wasn’t something they could never lose, it was something that they authored sometimes and didn’t author others. The experience of shifting identities for students was often a result of barriers to authoring.

_Barriers to Authoring_

While students very often maintained that they were in control of who they wanted to be, and their identity was something that was determined by their actions, they also described barriers they experienced in authoring of identity. Students explained that sometimes there were external constraints that positioned them as different, as the other or made authoring American identity difficult. Zoey commented in one of the focus group sessions that sometimes who are you matters, and sometimes it doesn’t.

In some cases it does matter. In other cases, it doesn't. Because in the places it does matter, it's really like you're going somewhere. Sometimes people don't accept other people because of their heritage. In other places, they do. That's why it's important and not important at the same time. [Zoey]

Zoey described the ways in which context and subject position can have an influence on students in relation to identity. Carolina also provided an example of how socio-historic subject positions and the categorizations of cultural legacies along the borders of imagined communities affects how she saw her authoring of American identity.

Well, I feel like I'm not American whenever, like say, Christmas eve, or New Year’s eve, whenever we're going, like by family I guess, because we're like all Hispanic, so I don't feel like I'm American. [Carolina]

For Carolina, the classification of Hispanic as ‘other’ in the socio-historic relation to American identity played a powerful role in the way she authored herself and perceived her ability to
author herself. Further, David provided another example of the ways in which parents, heritage and American identity intersect.

Researcher: Is there ever a time that you feel more or less American?

David: Sometimes I don't really feel less, but sometimes there's politics, sometimes some of the choices that my parents disagree with, so that would be another time when I would feel slightly less.

For many students home represented a place where the ability to author American identity was constrained. Some students also mentioned ways in which Southern Elementary School was the site of barriers. Curriculum for some students was seen as a barrier to authoring American identity. For example, lack of knowledge of American history was seen as a deficit for some students in their authoring ability. Carolina again offered an example of how learning about the American Revolution was difficult, because she had no prior knowledge.

Researcher: Do you think that your identity affects how you do in school?

Carolina: Well, maybe it does because when we're learning about the American Revolution or stuff like that, I haven't learned that, because like, I'm not, like, normal to that, because I really don't understand it that well. Like when we were beginning to start, like one day about what the American Revolution was, but my sister sort of talked a little about it to me, and I understand a bit more, so I guess it does affect because sometime I feel like I don't know what they're talking about, and I feel like I don't know about it and stuff like that.

Also at school, Joey provided an example of how peer grouping during recess and socio-historic subject positions intersect in authoring of his American identity. He explained during
recess one day that soccer was a ‘Hispanic’ sport and Americans play football normally. Joey also explained this interaction in an interview.

        Sometimes I feel less American when I am playing soccer, because sometimes you look at people, and they are just passing the ball to different people except for you and not most of the people that are playing. They are just playing with all Hispanics. Just passing it to each other. They’re not even trying to pass it to someone who is really open, like passing the ball to them. [Joey]

For Joey, playing the ‘Hispanic’ sport, with all ‘Hispanic’ peers positioned him as ‘less’ American in his terms, but also as an ‘outsider’ within a construct of “Hispanic” identity. Joey’s description shows the way in which activities, in this case soccer, take on the characteristics of assigned symbols of identity within particular figured worlds. In this circumstance playing soccer with “Hispanics” makes one “less American.”

        For all the students in Ms. Washington’s class, the process of authoring and the constraints experienced were similar, but there were elements that were unique and personal. Students’ relationships to the figured worlds of American identity were experienced through heteroglossia, myriad relational identities, cultural symbols, artifacts and tools. As Ms. Washington’s students authored themselves, they did so by relying on the existing figured worlds of American identity, but they also did so through new understandings of the way that current contexts, socio-historical cultural legacies and intimate identities intersect. While much of the discourse circulated around reinscription of dominant forms of American identity and the reproduction of the existing American figured worlds, students worked to create more inclusive, flexible understandings. Students, through interaction, through semiotic mediation and through putting American identity in practice, worked to actively construct and make figured worlds of meaning, identity and understanding.
Making-Worlds

The way in which Ms. Washington’s students inscribed and reinscribed the figured worlds of American identity, and the means in which difference is used to contrast the ‘other’, have been outlined in the previous three sections of this chapter. The students in Ms. Washington’s class worked both within and across multiple figured worlds and worked daily to construct and reconstruct the ways in which figured worlds constituted meaning for their identities.

For all of the students, American identity represented something that they possessed. For some, mostly the Hispanic students, American identity was part of a fractured hybridity upon which they categorized their understanding of their own identity. Further, they reconciled their understandings of American identity with personal characteristics which did not fit within the American figured world. All students recognized that their identity could be constructed and reconstructed through imagined possibilities. They could describe the ways in which identity could be authored and changed as well as how subject position and socio-historical context could work to shape identities. In the ways that students both constructed American identity and the ways in which they constructed possibilities for imagined identities, students were able to articulate and imagine new possibilities for their construction of American identity using the signs and symbols from tools, artifacts and cultural legacies which populate the figured worlds of American identity.

While students often took authorial stances which pushed the boundaries and borders of American identity, the construction of figured worlds occurred both in and across local and global spaces. The re-figuring of meaning around identity represented both the pushing of barriers, boundaries and borders, and also the expansion of inclusion. Ms. Washington’s
students’ identities were at the heart of this problematic construction of difference, the figured worlds of American, and the ways in which they are able to author identity and construct their own figured worlds.

Within ‘making worlds’ the issue and importance of language was a reoccurring theme. Language not only represented a symbol and tool, was used to determine subject position, was used to author identity, and when enacted it became a cultural symbol of American figured worlds. Language further provided linkages and access to cultural legacies of imagined communities and was a key element socio-historical element of how students constructed, used and experience the many figured worlds of American identity. The uses, perceptions and experiences student’s had revolving around language played a key role in the ways students experienced and understood the boundaries of American identity and what/who could be categorized as different, as other.

Limitations of Identity in Practice

Incorporating the four previous elements of identity-in-practice framework put forth by Holland et al. (1998) provides a useful way to interpret how identity manifests itself in both the imaginary and in the everyday practices which people put into motion. Identity-in-practice illustrates the ways in which figured worlds function to construct meanings associated with identity and the ways in which symbols, artifacts and tools are sutured together through semiotic mediation. However, the theory does not provide an effective understanding of the limitations between identity-in-practice and the ways in which identities evolve and emerge in young children who seemingly possess many more ‘as-if’ realms of possibilities than their adult counterparts.
As seen with students who hold hybrid identities, multiple identities, transnational, bi-cultural and multicultural identities, understanding identity as authored and interpreted through a figured world provides categorizations for elements that blend, merge and emerge together and function dialogically, not singularly. These elements of identity also proved to be more relational than figured. This means that students identities are constructed, experience and enacted in more relational spaces, relationships, and figured worlds of American than a singular American figured world. Students regularly created identities more based on relational comparisons and then squared their comparisons with their definition and understanding of how they define American identity, rather than defining American identity and then determining subject position and authoring from the figured worlds of American.

In retrospect, the identity-in-practice framework and it use to interpret students’ identities, understanding of identities and construction of identities, put round, oblong and multifaceted fifth graders into square holes. Students described and expressed themselves and their identity through many varied terms and understandings of meanings. The identity-in-practice framework allows for a construction of identity for the students through adult language and academic jargon and the concept of identity as a cultural production. The identity-in-practice framework does not provide students’ their own voices for their experiences and understandings of American identity.

Chapter Five aims to provide an alternative, but not necessarily contrasting, interpretation of the data than provided in Chapter Four through identity-in-practice. It utilizes the grounded theory framework presented in Chapter Three. Through the use of a grounded theory approach, Chapter Five works to illustrate this phenomenon more closely to how students viewed and
described their experiences, and how phenomenon presented itself during data collection as opposed to putting ‘round, oblong and multifaceted fifth graders into square holes’.

This framework provides a way to interpret the data and understand the ways in which student identities are place and space based and emerge from structuring and arranging of physical, social and symbolic space – which together form an essence of place. Students described the ways in which spatiality, real and imagined, functioned to shape their understandings of similarity, difference and American identity. Further, this analysis also works to provide possible ways of understanding and filling some of the gaps found in and with an identity-in-practice framework. For example, this grounded theory of spatiality helps to explain how students come to occupy many different, varied and even hybrid identities concurrently and how structures and arrangements of space functions to shape the emergence and practice of identity.
V: Redes, Space and Identity

As mentioned in Chapter III, *Redes*, as articulated by Arturo Escobar (2008), can best be understood as ‘structures’ or ‘arrangements’ of place. The term *redes* also conveys that relations, structures and arrangements are always in movement. These structures, or arrangements, are shaped by use and user, always being made and repaired for function and use. The concept of *redes* also works in describing how *space* comes to shape students’ identities of similarity and difference, as well as American identity. As Lefebvre (1974/1992) maintained, social relationships only have social existence to the extent that they have spatial existence (p. 129). The *redes* of *space* in this study shape the function of *physical, social and symbolic space* for use and by user, within which students form and reform identities. These *spaces* work to shape and arrange one another and together come to constitute *place*.

*Redes* for the students in this study provided linkages to *spaces* which functioned to shape identity, but access to identity also depended on the ability to use, or leverage, these linkages to *spaces*. *Redes* in this study refer to the arrangements in *physical, social, and symbolic space* that are shaped for and by use and are central to the identity of the students.

This chapter aims to construct an interpretation of observations, interviews, focus groups and analyses of classroom artifacts that relies on student voice and utilizes a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). Students regularly identified the influence that *space* had on the construction of similarity and difference and of national identity. This chapter utilizes the concept of *redes* not necessarily as a means of examination or construction, as identity-in-
practice was used, but as a means of description in which place and space are intrinsically linked to identity (Escobar, 2008).

**Physical Space, Similarity and Difference**

Students regularly identified the importance and role of physical space and the time within physical space in articulating how they come to understand sameness and difference in regards to who they and others are. Physical space for students is seen through physically meaningful locations like school, neighborhood, country, classroom, within class table and academic groupings. The constructions, arrangements and structures of physical space impacts and often dictates the way in which they access and shape identity, especially in relation to students. When asked how she decided who to list as similar and different in her survey, Taylor explained.

Erika, she used to live in my neighborhood. So, I have more of a connection to her; we can talk about our neighborhood. Then Jenny, I've known maybe a little less because she wasn't in our class last year. She was in third grade, and Rowan, she use to sit at the table. Twice last year, and she's kind of quiet. I can kind of relate to her, because I used to be quiet. [Taylor]

Taylor noted that among the people who are similar to her, the reason for their similarity is because of linkages she has to them outside of school, from her classroom and from groupings within her classroom. The ways in which physical space is organized, structured and arranged in Taylor’s world has been in important factor in shaping identities of similarity and difference with peers. For the students in Ms. Washington’s class, the ways in which space is organized, structured, and arranged, create and control the *redes* upon which identities of similarity and difference are shaped.
Classroom.

The physical space of the classroom was a powerful factor for many of the students when expressing who was similar and who was different. Erika, who was mentioned by Taylor as similar, also talked about how students who have shared her class are more similar to her.

Taylor and them, I just picked them because they are most similar to me because I've been with Taylor for two years. Yeah, that's why I picked her. [Erika]

Ms. Washington’s class has mostly been together for one full school year, and as indicated previously the year of this study represented the beginning of the second full year they would have been together. Eric and Jenny are the only students who were not in Ms. Washington’s class in fourth grade; they entered at the beginning of fifth grade. The looping of students from fourth to fifth grade provided structure that extended students’ time together and functioned to shape their interactions with peers.

The shared physical space over time for students represented an important aspect of identity development in relation to peers. The judgment of similarity and difference is often structured, arranged and shaped in regard to physical space, specifically the classroom space and time within classroom space. Luke, Billy, Anna and Gabriel also expressed the importance of redes of physical space when describing the people they listed as most similar on their surveys.

David’s been my best friend since kindergarten since I didn't go to preschool here. Bobby, he's been here since kindergarten. Michael entered at, I think, fourth grade. Kelsey came in at, I think, third grade. Jonathan came in at second grade, I think. [Luke]
Knew Bobby in Kindergarten. David was my friend since second grade. Joey was my friend last year. Jonathan I have known since pre K because we played baseball together. [Billy]

It was Emma, Erika, and Carolina were in my class, for third grade, fourth, and fifth….I don't know. It's just I knew Erika; I mean Emma and Carolina first. Then I became friends because I was already friends with Emma, Erika and Carolina, then I became friends with Rowan. [Anna]

David’s second [on similar list] because he has been in my class for 3 years. [Gabriel]

The arrangements of who is and is not in the same class/classroom shape the redes of physical space for students. Changing the physical groupings, arrangements and structures of the redes of physical and social space allows for new possibilities, and changes potentially that are made in the arrangements and organizations of identities. In this instance students’ identity becomes a function of the physical space of who is, and is not, a classroom member through sustained interactions with a specific group of peers. The classroom space, for these students, functions to shape how they see, categorize and determine similarity and difference.

**Groupings.**

The physical space of the classroom represents one, of multiple layers, of how students identity functions through redes. Not only does the classroom represent a ways in which space has been arranged as a redes, redes exists simultaneously to shape identity within the arrangement and structure of student grouping. In this case specifically, the way in which students identify as similar and different is a function of multiple groupings. Luke explained this when describing the intersection of groupings and peer similarity.
I know that David is at my table group. He's in my math group. He's in my reading group. He's in ... That's kind of the three main groups that I can think of. Bobby, he's in the math group. He's in the reading group. He's not at my table anymore. Michael, he's in the reading group. He recently entered the math group, and he's not at my table. Kelsey, she's in the math group. She's in the reading group, and she's not at my table. Joseph, he's at my table but is not in any of my other groups; so it seems that all of these people they're in one of my groups; of course, this was plenty of months ago, so Joseph wasn't at my table then. [Luke]

The redes of physical space within the classroom works to shape the ways in which students use, arrange and structure identities. Luke explained that groupings occur in many ways within the classroom, determining who has access to what physical space. Moreover, students who are most similar to him share physical space in their groupings, and this space becomes a resource in determining similarity. Rowan explained this when she described that the people she lists as most similar are in many of the same groups as she is.

I think that because Carolina and Anna, they go to my ... more Carolina, she goes to my reading group. I like reading a lot. Then Anna, she's also in my math group, so then every time it's a partner work, we always ask each other if we want to be partners and yeah, um most of these people, only Emilly. I put Emilly as number one, because she's not like the most different. I think these are more different than Emilly [pointing at Brittany, Kelsey, Zoey and Star on “different” section of survey] because I also hang out a lot with Emilly. She's in my math group and my reading group, so I actually think I can maybe be partners with Emilly. I think Emilly could go up to more similar. [Rowan]

Rowan went on to make a distinction between Emilly and the other classmates who are on the most different list. In her words, Emilly, could be seen as more similar. The justification for this is that she hangs out with Emilly, Emilly is in her math and reading group, and she could become partners with Emily when students are working in partner groups. Rowan’s distinction between Emilly and the other students show the contrast in how grouping shapes students’ identity and understanding of peer identities of similarity and difference.
Further, during one of many conversations during recess, Emma and Brittany explained that class arrangements (table groupings, small groups vs. whole groups, working in partners, stations, rotations) are a major factor in determining their friends and who they see as similar and different. A vignette which illustrates the importance of *redes* in classroom space is taken from a daily observation of students participating in math stations.

*Math stations today are set up for students to work in partners. Student are able to choose their partners from a specified group of about five to six students who rotate through math station together. These grouping are determined by Ms. Washington, but the partner groupings at particular stations are not. When students move to partner stations, Gabriel and Tom are in a math groups together and immediately pair up. During this same math rotation Jerry and Joey move to work with each other. Michael and Emilly are in the same math group and pair up as well. Randy and Zoey are also working together.*

Math stations are activities in which students are grouped by the teacher into three groups. They rotate through three math stations doing the assigned activity at each station with the other group members. Sometimes these activities are collaborative; sometimes they are individualized.

The importance of this vignette and these students’ pairings is that student’s familiarity, their sharing space of groups, stations, and partnerships is played out, and the interaction, time of interactions, depth of interactions all influence how students see each other, categorize each other and make distinctions among themselves. Gabriel and Tom interacted outside of this grouping. They described each other as friends and listed each other as most similar on the survey they filled out. The Michael and Emilly pair, as well as the Rowan and Anna pair, also
listed each other as most similar. Randy and Zoey listed each other as different on the social map survey, but they share physical and social space outside of school through riding the bus together, living in the same neighborhood and identifying as friends.

Outside of School.

The redes of physical space formed outside of school and classroom also functions to shape how students made distinctions between similar and different peers. Zoey articulated the ways in which space outside of school functioned to shape how she views Randy and Emma. Recalling the vignette of math stations with Zoey, I asked her about working with Randy (because she listed Randy as different on her survey), and how class groupings shape or did not shape her relationships with peers.

Researcher: I noticed that in math it seems like you work with Randy every single day.

Zoey: Yes. We used to live in the same neighborhood, so we're used to each other.

Researcher: Do you think those groups, how they're made, make it hard to get to know other people?

Zoey: No, because if you talk to them a lot, you really know how they are. Like me and Emma, we talk most of the time but not all the time, but I know how she is because her mom owns the salon near my house. She goes to Subway, and I go to Subway.

Zoey appeared to be saying that the classroom groupings didn’t work to shape the functions of identity. However, as she explained, physical space outside of school equally represented common areas that she shares with Randy and Emma. For Zoey the groupings of the classroom space are easily traversed when the redes in her life outside of school shape and provided linkages and access to and with peers. Part of what shaped Zoey’s identity and
understanding of peers is the connections that she had with students both inside and outside of school. These connections, which are dictated by how *spaces* come to be shaped, function to shape understanding and construction of identity.

The sharing of neighborhoods, buses, homes, places of work and places visited frequently shaped, organized, and arranged the *redes* of her physical space and shaped how her identity functions within that space. Jenny and Taylor also listed each other as similar and often utilized lunch time to talk to each other about things common to their neighborhood. Rowan and Anna often hung out on weekends, but they don’t live in the same neighborhood. Randy and Zoey are not only in the same math group, but they ride the bus together, and they live in the same neighborhood.

The *redes* of physical space, both in and outside of school, functions to structure, arrange and shape identity for and by use and users. The previous vignettes in this section clearly illustrate how *redes* function for and by use. For many students, classroom spaces functioned to shape, arrange and structure identities of similarity and different. In turn identities also shaped, arranged and structured the physical space. Thus, identities are functioning to produce and reproduce physical space within the classroom.

**Physical Space and American Identity**

Students didn’t solely come to understand identities of similarity and difference through physical space, but also their conceptions of American identity played out across and between physical space. In this study students regularly explained the importance of *physical space* in the arranging and functioning of national identity; the locations they occupied also shape their understanding and relation to national identity. Students regularly identified country, school and
home as *physical spaces* which function to shape, arrange and structure American and other national identities in their lives.

*National Identity and Country.*

Students recognized the importance of physical, geographic location as one of the most important aspects of American identity. Kelsey, Luke and Randy expressed this notion in their interviews, that an influencing factor in national and American identity is being present in the physical space of a country.

I think what makes a person American is if they live in American, the United States. [Kelsey]

I guess to me being American just means living in America. [Luke]

They need to live in the United States [Randy]

Being physically in the geographic boundaries of a nation-state for these students is one structure that provides the *redes* of national identity. Students saw the *symbolic space* of an imagined community of the nation-state partially through the attribution of membership through *physical space*. Emily explained this in her first interview.

Emily: If they live in America. I think that makes you an American. It doesn’t matter if their heritage is Spanish, Italian … If they live in America, I consider them as American.

Researcher: Okay. How do you know if somebody’s American if you don’t know them personally? I know we talked a lot about the people who are less similar or different from you, some of them you know really well, and some you don’t know really well. If you don’t know somebody, how do you know if they’re American?
Emilly: They’re from America, and I’m in America right now. But I’ve been to Canada before, and I consider all the people I met there Canadian because they live in Canada.

Researcher: Okay. Is there a way for somebody who’s not American to become American?

Emilly: Move to America.

Researcher: Move to America, okay. Then I’m going to ask you the opposite question. Is there a way for a person who is American to become not American?

Emilly: Maybe because we might move to another country.

Emilly noted that *physical space* and the location one is occupying can function to shape the *redes of symbolic space*, the space in which representations, figured worlds, imagined communities and stereotypes exist.

What students statements strongly indicated is that they physical space of a nation is never distinct from social and symbolic space. Highlighting the importance of *physical space* in relation to country, *symbolic* and *social space* for these students is not meant to ignore many of critiques (Anzaldua, 1987; Escobar, 2008; McFarlane, 2007; Soja, 1989; Soja, 1996) of the reproduction of power that is (re)constructed through maintenance of modern nation-state. These critiques are important in that *redes* are shaped by users, and the ability to shape the *redes* of *physical, social* or *symbolic space* is in itself an act of power. When talking about identity, these elementary students expressed the importance of interactions of space, *physical, social* and *symbolic*, and how these *spaces* function through arrangements, structures and use, to shape identities and understandings of peers. For these students what were often constructed as symbolic boundaries and memberships to imagined communities were often traversed through
prolonged access and engagement in physical and social space. Tom explained this when he talked about his conceptions of American identity broadly and then in relation to his classmates.

Tom: Well, I think a person that makes them American is that they were born there, and that that's where they were raised. I think that's where they lived for their whole life, so I think that's what makes Americans.

Researcher: Okay. Is there anything else that can ... Characteristics or traits of an American other than just being born in the United States or born in America?

Tom: Sometimes Americans are white, most of the time, but some Hispanic people also are born here because Hispanic people come move here.

Researcher: Okay.

Tom: Because I was born here.

Researcher: Okay. How do you know the difference between someone who is American and someone who is not American? How can you tell, if you can at all?

Tom: Well ... Well, that's where you could infer sometimes, because if you an Hispanic, you don't really think he's born in the United States. You think he was born somewhere else. Maybe in Mexico or somewhere else.

Researcher: Okay. Do you think that applies to the people you listed on here also? Do you think some of them are more American than others?

Tom: Well, basically, they're all Americans.

Researcher: Okay.

Tom: Because we were all born here.
Tom made the distinction between his symbolic understanding of American identity in the abstract, made up of cultural symbols and representations such as race, and his familiarity with his classmates in the concrete. Despite the fact that his class had White, Black and Hispanic students, he didn’t rely on the racialized representations of American identity as he illustrated. The importance of space, *physically, socially, and symbolically*, is highlighted by the shift in how he described American identity based on the relationships and familiarity Tom has with his classmates as specific individuals, not as reified identity. For Tom and other students, national identity wasn’t solely shaped by the *redes* of symbolic space of cultural representations and imagined communities, but was a combination of *physical, social and symbolic spaces*. Interestingly, students often articulated national identity, specifically American identity, based on the *redes of symbolic space*. However, *redes of physical and social space* can functioned to traverse the *redes of symbolic space* and within that space the symbolic construction of national identity. The *redes of social and symbolic space* will be explored later in the chapter.

*National Identity as School and Home.*

School also represents a distinct place in which students are occupying physical arrangements. This is not to say that *social and symbolic space*, arrangements, structures, and *redes* do no intersect, or work within, or work in conjunction with school as a physical space; they certainly do. Rather, the focus here is on the importance of school and how students describe it as a *physical space* which functions to shape identity. The function of school space, as it shapes identity, was experienced differently based on the *redes of school* for the students in relation to outside of school. Similar to the *redes* referred to earlier with classroom and within class groupings, the function of the *redes of school* was not always experienced equally or functioned equally as explained by Carolina, Michael and Star.
I think maybe at home that I would feel more American because at school you're locked in here…. You would need something to get out, so I think I would feel less American because we're forced to be here. [Michael]

When I'm at school, I still have that piece, but I feel a little bit more American. [Carolina]

Makes me feel like 50% other and 50% American because I’m around other people; some are from Mexico, and some are from other places. [Star]

The students see the place of school in relation to other places and physical spaces, other structures as well as the redes of social and symbolic space. For Star school represented a space of intersection with peers of ‘difference’, and this ‘difference’ shapes the arrangement of the space for her. Michael views school, its structure and arrangement, in relation to home and the structures and arrangements outside of school. Other students related American identity to the redes of school, the users of identity in school and the way students saw the use of identity in school. For Carolina and many other students of color in the class, school was a place of being more American. Carolina mentioned that when she was with family, she was able to be bilingual; school was a place in which she usually had to speak English. Zoey also explained how language intersected both school and home.

Researcher: Is there a time where you feel totally American? For that example, you said you forget your American side. Is there a time when you forget your Mexican side?

Zoey: Yes, like when I'm at school, I forget about it and talk mostly English because I don’t want to make people that speak English feel bad that I only talk Spanish. That's why I mostly speak English, so they can understand what I'm saying.
All of these students exemplify how identity and how their positions in relation to identities are shaped through the physical, social and symbolic arrangements, structures, and redes of the places that they inhabit. Anna explained how symbolic and social spaces are mapped onto physical space thereby shaping meaning making and identity. When explaining the differences between home and school, Anna described how food and language represent aspects of identity and are distinctly positioned as part of places, both real and imagined.

At home, I don't really feel like an American, because at school they give us different foods and talk a different language, and in my house my mom makes Mexican food…. We don't talk English in the house. [Anna]

The physical spaces of school and home intersect with the social space of peers and family and the symbolic space of cultural representation in language use and subject position membership to imagined communities based on cultural symbols, such as Spanish belonging to a ‘Mexican’ identity and English belonging to American identity. School and home represent very real locations, but also provide access to imagined communities and the cultural representations and position students in shaping, functioning, production and reproduction of American identity.

Social Space, Similarity and Difference

Social space for the students in this study is described through the personal relationships students do and do not have with others both in and outside of the classroom. These relationships structure the redes and function to create social spaces in shaping identity. Students describe the redes of social spaces as revolving around peers, friends and family. The social spaces consist of peer networks, structures and arrangements which students construct and use. Student regularly constructed social groupings based on their notions of similarity and difference. Many students of color saw social spaces as shaping and influencing their national identity. The social
spaces of friends and familiarity with peers functioned largely to shape identities of similarity and difference, while family had a greater influence in functioning to shape the national identity of these elementary students.

Friends.

The recognition of social space is especially important in understanding how these elementary students understand identity in relation to peers. Many students indicated that time and sustained interactions between peers were how they made categorizations of similarity and difference. Students often used ‘friend’ and ‘friendship’ to describe the social relationships they had with students they classified as similar to them. Students they saw as different were conversely not seen as ‘friends’. Luke explained how people he picked as similar do not share all the characteristics that he would use to label himself, but they are similar because they are his ‘friends’.

Yeah. I guess they don't fit all of the descriptions, but I picked them because they're my friends, and usually friends have a lot of things in common, and that's why they're friends. I guess that's why I put them. [Luke]

When Luke described students that he listed as different, a fuller picture emerged of how social space and ‘friendship’ is shaped.

I'm not really close friends with any of these people [on different list]. Of course, I like and respect them, but we just don't come across paths, and we don't usually talk and do regular friend stuff like go over to people's houses or play games together or stuff like that. [Luke]

As Luke described the intersection of social and physical space, he noted the interactions he had with classmates outside of school, as well as mentioning that classmates who are different
from him “just don’t come across paths”. Just as physical space can shape students’ social and symbolic space, social space can also affect other spaces. Bobby explained that at lunch and recess he chose to create groupings based on who his ‘friends’ are.

At lunch I just sit with my friends. Again, mostly with Billy, David, Luke, Michael and Randy. Because they're my friends, and at recess I play with whoever really who wants to play outside with me or play this thing I'm doing. I'll join in sometimes, and if it’s sports, I'll join in, but if it was them, and they're not doing..., if they weren't doing sports, then I guess I wouldn't. So it's sports. [Bobby]

For both Luke and Bobby, social space is integrated with physical space both in the creation of groupings and the creation of social boundaries and barriers. Bobby and Luke described ‘play’ as something that shapes friendship and also shapes the redes of social space. Erika elaborated this further in how ‘friendship’ functions to create structures, arrangements that create social space and shape identities of similarity and difference.

Usually, you interact with Carolina because she usually tells me to come play with her and stuff like that. I've been with her for three years, so I know to play with her for most of all because she's my best friend. [Erika]

Students function within the redes of social space through use and as users. The redes of social space is arranged by students and used in the shaping of identity. Students saw themselves through such social arrangements and take part in constructing them. Beyond ‘friendship’ students also made distinctions with regard to social space between students they know well and students they don’t know well. Familiarity with peers provided another structure with which students shape identity.

Familiarity.
Randy, Gabriel, Bobby, Emma and Taylor are in a group working on a game. They have to divide into a group of two and a group of 3. Randy, Gabriel and Bobby create a group of 3 boys, and Emma and Taylor create a group of 2 girls. When asked why they decided to construct their groups this way - the students indicated that they had felt as if they knew the students they were grouped with better than the students they decided not to group with.

This vignette with Randy, Gabriel, Bobby, Emma and Taylor highlights the ways in which the redes of familiarity function and create the social along with physical spaces, which shape students’ understandings of identity and similarity and difference. When describing students as most similar and most different, Billy explained that some of the students he listed as different may have some of the same character traits that he has, but he doesn’t know them as well as the people he listed as most similar, and this familiarity between peers shapes his understanding of similarity and difference.

Some of my character traits apply to most different too. It’s mostly that I don’t know them good, and because I don’t know them good, we probably aren’t similar. [Billy]

Along with friendship, students repeatedly mentioned that familiarity, ‘knowing’ or ‘not knowing’ peers, shaped who they saw as ‘similar’ and ‘different’. In this sense students constructed identities shaped from the function of familiarity. Similar the organization, structure and arrangement of physical space, social space functions to provide access and linkages that shape identity through both use and user. Here are three examples.

I know them better than the people I think that are a little bit different than me. [Emilly]
They're some of those things, but they're also different from me, and because I listed them under "most different" is because I've been around them, but I don't really know much about them. [Star]

Actually it's because I know them [girls] much better. The boys I actually don't hang out with. [Emma]

Students highlighted how the *redes* of *social space* functions to shape and construct the ‘other’ in relation to peers. For these students the unknown is different and has become the ‘other’ when creating identities of similarity and difference and in constructing *social space*. While ‘familiarity’ may seem very similar to ‘friendship’ in the way students describe its function, ‘familiarity’ functions more broadly as Billy pointed out previously. The development of familiarity, or knowledge and knowing of peers, does not imply that individuals must all have similar interests, hobbies, or favorites. Instead familiarity acknowledges the traversing barriers and boundaries arranged in *social space* but also functions to reconstruct the *redes* of the *social space*.

**Social Space and American Identity**

*Physical space* in relation to national identity often relates to the creation of boundaries, borders, barriers and gateways, both real and imagined. In addition *spaces* and *places* with family, peers, school and classroom function as *redes* of *social space* in shaping how students construct, enact and perceive their identities in relation to national identity.

*Family.*
Anna and Carolina explained how family as a social space, creates access to cultural legacies for students and how redes of this social space shapes understanding of identity.

If you're born here and say your family from another place, you can be bilingual. Your family, when you're born, they teach you the language they speak. Then when you enter the school you have to speak English. [Carolina]

Like since my mom's from Mexico, that doesn't mean that I'm not Mexican too because I was born here, but I'm Mexican too because I'm part of my mom’s family. It doesn't matter if you're American or not, but you're still part of where your parents were born. [Anna]

Anna and Carolina spoke of a connection, a linkage, a structure that existed as a social connection that they maintain through the physical and social space of family. Students were able to utilize the familial space to access cultural resource legacies to enact identity. Family represented not only a physical place, but also a social and symbolic place. Gabriel explained that the social space he has with his family gives him access to both Spanish heritage and its identity and to American heritage and its identity.

I started searching a little bit on my mom’s and dad’s history, and I found out that my dad’s last name is one of the names from a city in Spain. And the fact that I speak Spanish most of the time gives me ties to the colonization of Spain. So I identify with Spanish heritage also, not just American heritage. [Gabriel]

For Gabriel and other students, social redes constructed through familial relationships provided links which traverse not only physical space and function to shape identities of these students. Families and relatives function in structuring and using social space. Students saw themselves relative to both the user of this social space, and also through the functioning of the use of social space which shapes identity. When asked about the impact of family on identity, Rowan, Star and Zoey described how they viewed familial relationships as shaping identity.
I consider myself Hispanic and American, because I was born here, but from my parents have a very different religion. I stick with that religion most of the time, because it is in my family. [Rowan]

Mmm… sometimes when I hang out with my grandma, we have celebrations like Hispanic celebrations, then I feel more Hispanic. I’ve never really felt more American. [Rowan]

It could maybe because it's ... Well, a lot of things are your family, where they're from. Where you are from it ... No, where your family's from it goes around with you because you're their kid and it's ... You could be from here but doesn't mean that you don't talk like us that much. [Star]

Say I came from, I was born here, but my parents were from Mexico….So if you're Hispanic, and your child is born here, you're technically going to be American, but you're still Hispanic. Part of you is Hispanic. [Zoey]

Zoey and Star drew connections between parents, children and identity. Rowan described how family and family activities specifically centered on familial cultural heritage are important in shaping how she feels in relation to an American identity. Rowan noted that family and certain familial traditions shape a more ‘Hispanic’ sense of identity, while there are no parallel aspects of this space that make her feel more American. Zoey, Star and Rowan all reiterated the thoughts of Anna, Carolina and Gabriel. The redes of social space structure the linkages to culture for students. In the case of family, these students saw family members as a bridge or connection that often traverses geographic boundaries in order to construct commonalities with peers across time and space.

The connections and redes of family intersect with national identity and the symbolic boundaries of imagined communities that span borders and physical place. Space and redes are
not singularly linked or singularly determined. There are connections between the physical, social and symbolic that students interact with, arrange, and use to shape identity.

**Peers.**

Understanding redes as arrangements and structures helps to explain the experiences of students’ changes between space/place, identity and the complex ways in which their identities becomes shaped and used. Along with family, students articulated the ways in which peers also factored into shaping national identity. They described ‘American’ or lack of ‘American’ identity in relation to their peers and peer groupings. Specifically, students recalled times and situations in which they felt more or less American. Kelsey and Erika shared examples of how peers shaped their national identity.

Probably feel more American when I'm playing with my friends, because my friends are American, and I'm American, and then ... [Kelsey]

Sometimes I feel like not American, because people talk to me in Spanish....Carolina, especially Carolina. I kind of figure out what she is saying to me, about how she is saying it. [Erika]

Within these examples are layers of meaning and representation which structure redes socially and symbolically. Kelsey’s explanation of feeling more American is in relation to peers’ American identity. However, loaded into Kelsey’s friends’ identities are the symbolic representations and definitions of what is and is not American. Erika also illustrated how language functions to structure American identity, in this case, the identity of being less American. While language creates a symbolic representation of identity and functions to structure symbolic space, through peers it also functions significantly to structure the redes of
social spaces. Joeys explained the relationship between peers, familiarity and a sense of American identity.

Like if you are surrounded by people who speak the language and know what you're talking about. When you are having conversations with them, they know what you are talking about. That makes you feel more American than if you are surrounded by people that you don't know, you've never seen before, you've never spoken the language; that makes you feel less American. [Joey]

Joey described this scenario in broad terms, but he captured an understanding of the familiar and the ‘other’. To Joey the familiar was what represents American, while the unfamiliar, whether through language or some other aspect of social space, represented the ‘other’. Joey’s explanations were specifically focused on peers and social space. Joey focuses on how social recognition of self and ‘other’ mark the redes which shape both use and user of social space and identity.

Sometimes I feel less American when I am playing soccer because sometimes you look at people, and they are just passing the ball to different people except for you and not most of the people that are playing. They are just playing with all Hispanics. Just passing it to each other. [Joey]

As Joey explained in his example of how peers function to shape his sense of national identity, he also illustrated a way in which he functions to shape national identity of others. Joey described ‘Hispanic’ as a marker that would make one feel less American. Just as Anna, Carolina, Zoey, Rowan, Gabriel and Emma had done, Joey described ‘American’ and ‘Hispanic’ identities as parts of a whole. Students illustrated how being more of one makes you less of another. Positioning these identities as mutually exclusive, rather than complementary, shows
that how the *redes* of *symbolic space*, turned to next, is structured through imagined communities, cultural representations and stereotypes.

Overall students described the ways in which *social space* functions to shape identity through friends, familiarity and family. They indicated that *social spaces* often provide access to networks, identity resources, and understandings of similarity and difference as well as understandings of national identity. Peers and peer groupings function to shape identity for students both in similarity and difference, but also with regards to national identity.

**Symbolic Space, Similarity and Difference**

Mapped onto and interlaced throughout both *physical* and *social space*, *symbolic space* functions by shaping meaning and cultural representations, and it creates the boundaries and borders of imagined communities in what Lefebvre (1977) terms as a *space of representation*. *Symbolic space* functions for Ms. Washington’s students through shaping conceptualizations of identities around discursively constructed symbols. The *redes of symbolic space* is structured and inhabited through the use of these symbols and representations. Students described how identities of similarity and difference with peers were shaped around *redes* of personalities, interests and curriculum, while American identity was shaped with skin color/race, language, imagined community membership and curriculum.

**Interests/Personalities.**

Ms. Washington’s students regularly made reference to interests and personalities as functioning to shape similarity and difference with peers. Students’ use of interest and personalities as a classification tool characterizes both themselves and peers according to representations of
difference. Bobby provided an example by describing peers he had listed as similar on his survey.

I don't think that really does, because like Gabriel, I like soccer, like him and Tom. They're just different because of their personalities, but I have the same interests. Randy is the same, not because of interest but the same personality. He does have somewhat the same interest, so that's why I picked him as fifth because he does have the same personality as me, but he has a different, a little different interest. [Bobby]

As Bobby described what shapes whether he views peers as similar or different through representations, he noted that personalities were a key difference between himself, Gabriel and Tom. Bobby went on to explain that while Randy shares a similar personality, he doesn’t have all the same interests. As a result Randy is still seen as similar, but not as similar as people who share the same interests and personality as Bobby. For Ms. Washington’s students the conceived nature of representations allowed for the meaning to be formed, held, shaped, used, produced and reproduced in imagined space. Not only are interests and personality symbols of similarity and difference for Ms. Washington’s students, they are also embedded within structures of what matters which work to fix meaning. Jenny illustrated how interest, specifically books, shaped the way she conceived of similarity between herself and Kelsey.

I thought that Kelsey was most similar to me. We're both outgoing, and we both have the same interests and stuff, like we both love books. Just a few days ago we were talking about books that we've read, because we've both read pretty much the same books even though we've never been in the same class until now. We're just really similar. [Jenny]

Similarly, Randy and Zoey described peers as similar based on interests and personalities representing fictive commonalities.
Sometimes we like the same things….Because they play soccer and football. [Randy]

Well I know that Carolina is super funny, and she has a good attitude. I have good attitude too. Then Rowan, she's nice; she's funny; and she always has a positive attitude just like me. Anna, she's always calm and gentle and like me. Then Penelope, she's funny; she's tall; she has a positive attitude. Then Star because she's funny; she has a good attitude; and she likes learning just like me. [Zoey]

Student’s reliance on interests and personalities as symbols of similarity and difference is importance in that the construction, production, reproduction and maintenance of these symbols. Meanings evoked by students in reference to representations of interests and personalities function to shape identities of the self and ‘other’. Through the use of symbols, students evoked meaning and acted to produce, use, and reproduce the redes of symbolic space which itself functions to shape identity and assign identity to the user of symbolic space.

Curriculum.

The activities that students are engaging in at the time and place through their groupings allows for “constructed commonalities” as well as prolonged authentic engagement and remaking of redes. Students talk with each other about activities, work, problem solving, school, and class events, all within the context and structure of their groups. Curriculum also functions to shape symbols of meaning for students. For them curriculum has come to symbolize a part of their identity and how they see peers.

Carolina illustrated how curriculum groupings had come to symbolize difference and similarity to her.

Well, they can be a little bit different, like, different by their brains I guess, because some people are, would be, more ready for bigger words I guess, that
mean the same thing as other words but better, smaller, not as hard to say I think. [Carolina]

Carolina explained how curriculum symbolized identity in relation to difference among students. This also functioned to reinscribe symbolic curricular meaning. Students’ identities function within the redes of symbolic space. The following observational vignette illustrates how curriculum shapes identities of similarity and difference in relation to the self and ‘other’ through use and user.

*Michael and Billy are working and talking about the computer activity they are assigned as part of a math activity. Jenny and Bobby are talking about a math extension activity that has only been assigned to about six students in the class. Both conversations are occurring at the tables occupied by other classmates, as all the students are sitting in their normal seating arrangements at their tables. Other students at other tables are not having conversations about the math extension activity because they have been assigned a different math activity, and the extension activity is only assigned to certain students. During these math activities Luke (who is at a different table than Bobby and Jenny) seeks out Bobby to ask for clarification on the math extension activity. Luke did not discuss the activity with any of his classmates sitting at his table; instead he stands up and walks directly to Bobby to ask his question.*

While all students are in the same classroom not 15 feet from each other, occupying the same physical space at the same tables they sit at daily (table groupings we know produces familiarity with peers) they experience a uniqueness of place because of the function of curriculum, as a redes, of symbolic space. The intersection of physical, social and symbolic
symbolic space in the classroom and students’ lives came to shape experiences of place and identity. Students acted and interacted through the structure of symbolic space in which they are arranged or structured in relation to groupings, curriculum and constructed commonalities. Erika and Emilly provided further examples of how curriculum can be seen as shaping identities of similarity and difference. Curriculum constructed commonalities for students both through its enacting as well as through what it symbolically represents.

Because how Penelope is always in my math group, so I picked her because we have the same, I guess, comprehension. We have the same math in common, because we've been working together in every math group. [Erika]

I thought about the people who liked the same things as me and which favorite subjects were really close to mine. Like Star, her favorite subject is math, but my second favorite subject is math, so I thought that was pretty cool. I just guessed their personalities were more like mine. [Emilly]

The redes of symbolic space functions, in this situation, to constrain one’s interactions and reify meaning through construction of symbolic difference. For the students working on various math activities, curriculum arranges how they and their peers relate to each other through the identification of their constructed commonalities which often drove their conversations and interactions. Recall that Michael and Emilly paired up when working on math. Michael and Emilly have been in the same math group for two years. Curriculum functions in shaping their identities; it both structures and arranges use and user in relation to curriculum as redes of symbolic space.

Symbolic Space and American Identity
Along with the shaping of identities of similarity and difference, *symbolic space* functions to shape students understanding of American identity. When students dissociate identity from the concrete and familiar of their surroundings, peers, schools, friends and families, they often rely on constructed symbols to shape their understanding of identity. For the students in Ms. Washington’s class, American identity, when talked about in the abstract, was often shaped through cultural traditions, race and language. For many students food, race, language, clothing, religion, holidays, and cultural traditions all marked the ways in which membership to Imagined Communities were organized, arranged and structured. Students explained identity in relation to the *redes* that shaped and formed membership and boundaries of imagined communities. National identity and American identity for students mapped onto *physical*, *social* and *symbolic spaces* that shaped the meaning of identity through both use and user.

*Cultural Traditions.*

Cultural traditions were a common reference students make to themselves in relation to national identity and American identity specifically. Cultural traditions were assigned meaning by students, as they had come to symbolize American or non-American identities. Students classified certain traditions while also enacted the conceptions of these traditions as symbols and representations of identity, further reproducing the *redes* which structure meaning in *symbolic space*. Anna, Michael and Star gave examples of how students used cultural traditions to create classifications of national identity.

What you celebrate, like maybe people ... Here [in the United States] people celebrate Valentine's Day, but if you're from another place, you can celebrate the Day ... Sometimes people here don't celebrate Day of the Dead, but when you’re part of Mexico, and you celebrate it, too. [Anna]
You can be parts of American. Being full American is you have to be truly American like American flags hanging over your house on July Fourth, setting off fireworks, Christmas, Halloween; American tradition to be American. You can be part American, but you also could be full. [Michael]

It's different by the culture that they eat. What they eat and maybe they don't eat what we eat here. They could bring stuff to school that they like to eat. It's what they're from there so they don't usually eat the stuff that are here maybe. [Star]

For both Michael and Anne holidays were representative of a symbolic difference between American traditions and traditions of other nations. Michael and Anna described common traditions that were assumed to be shared across space and time. In contrast, Star provided an example of how food is conceived as a cultural and national representation that shaped her understanding of national identity. Students also viewed themselves and their own national identity as part of the construction of imagined communities and positioned their membership based on the use of cultural traditions. Jenny and Star provided examples of how enacting traditions was seen to grant membership and inclusion to the imagined community of American identity.

Makes me feel more American because I'm with my family, and they're from America. It makes me think that maybe I'm from America because my family is too, and like you said, the pledge of allegiance, we say our own pledge, and we do the Fourth of July, like all our traditions like Christmas and Halloween. [Star]

Sometimes like when it's a holiday or something or like the 4th of July, I feel really American. Because my family they all dress up and stuff, and I feel American but then just normal days, if like, I don't really notice. [Jenny]
Zoey, Anna and Rowan also explained how enacting of traditions was seen to grant membership to an imagined community and identity, just not the American imagined community and American identity.

**Researcher:** Are there times at all where you feel like you're not American?

**Zoey:** Yes. Like when I go to stuff that requires Spanish stuff, I forget about my American religion and go to my Mexican one, and I go do stuff the American won’t technically do. Like last time I went to the Day of the Dead festival, and my god sister dressed up as one of those girls that are like maids, but they're not; they just make good. Then her brother and Dad dressed up as old, crazy men dancing around the stage. We mostly don’t do that. We don’t drink. We would eat hot chocolate with bread, Mexican bread, and we won't usually do anything. Eat tamales also, they’re good.

At home, I don't really feel like an American, because at school they give us different foods and talk a different language, and in my house my mom makes Mexican food. [Anna]

Yeah. Because Carolina, Penelope, Emma and Anna … since they’re all Hispanic, we have different beliefs that we believe in. We have different celebrations with our families, and then we have a lot of relation because we all typically talk in Spanish. We watch different shows, like Spanish ones, and then we have been talking about them. [Rowan]

For Zoey, Anna and Rowan, what established inclusion/exclusion, the boundaries and barriers of imagined communities, also functioned to shape identity and one’s sense of American identity.

Zoey, Anna and Rowan said they identified as American. The use of *symbolic space* and the structuring the *redes* of *symbolic space* functions to shape the identities of these students.

*Language and Skin Color.*
Skin color and language often functioned together as *redes* which shaped how students’

fist saw user and then user of identity. When describing themselves and their relation to

American identity, some students explained how skin color and language shaped their identities

and the boundaries of inclusion for American identity. These boundaries create discursive

barriers for some students and are also the *redes* upon which students’ base classification of self

and other. Erika and Carolina are friends; they play together at recess; and they have known each

other for multiple years. The following quotes are taken from independent interviews with both
girls.

I can know if they're American because if you speak Spanish, not like- I'm not

sure, but you speak Spanish. I don't really understand what you’re saying, so if

you speak American, you speak, I guess, English. I know if they're English or

Hispanic like how they talk. [Erika]

Yeah. Because me, Rowan and Penelope and Anna, we all talk Spanish. Erika is

the only one who doesn't. She still tried to talk with us. [Carolina]

Sometimes I try to get used to the kids, Carolina and Penelope, who speak

Spanish a lot. My mom and my aunt and my grandma they came from- Well, my

mom's from Germany, so they kind of speak a little Spanish up there. I kind of get

a little Spanish from my mom and my aunt and my grandma. Sometimes I ask

Carolina what words mean in Spanish. That's how I get used to saying words in

Spanish because Carolina says it a lot. [Erika]

Language in this scenario represents a key symbolic factor in differentiating and

conceiving of peers. Language is a symbol which possesses meaning associated with nation-

states. Erika even mentioned Spanish language in relation to Germany, further illustrating the

function of language in understanding American identity. Michael, Anna, Luke and Zoey also
provided rich descriptions of how language is used as a symbolic representation of both the American nation-state and the boundaries of inclusion for an American identity.

Michael: You would still be American. I would think language could be a possible factor, but it would be the first language you ever spoke, because you can have many, many languages, but what's the first one you ever spoke, because that depends….let's say you're in Spain. You'd speak Spanish, but if you were in Portugal, you'd speak Portuguese.

Researcher: If you were in America?

Michael: You'd speak English.

Because maybe sometimes people that weren't born here don't know how to speak English, or maybe they speak another language. Like in third grade this kid came, but he didn't know how to speak English, because he came from Mexico, but he was born here. [Anna]

I don’t know, maybe because I can tell Gabriel and Tom are part Hispanic. I don’t know if they were born in America or they grew up in Mexico and then moved here, but I can tell from personal experience, by sitting near them and sometimes pairing up with them in PE. They do speak Spanish to each other, and it's something I just haven’t caught on yet, because in my opinion, the Spanish teacher, she doesn’t teach Spanish well. I haven’t learned much from Spanish class….But back on topic, I think that from personal experience, like sitting near people and hearing them talk what I can tell is in Spanish, because I don’t think we have any French classmates, mainly part Hispanic, but from telling they can speak good Spanish or good Mexican, I can tell if their parents are Mexican or … yeah. [Luke]

Yeah. Only if they learn lots of Spanish. No. If they’re Spanish and they learn lots of English, and then when they mostly just talk English, they're going to consider themselves as American. [Zoey]
Jenny further explained how language and skin color intersected and functioned to shape identity and the *redes* of *symbolic space*. Jenny’s description of the importance of race and language in shaping American and national identity shows the nuance and detail that are created when *spaces* intersect, when they overlap and when they are layered upon one another.

Jenny: If you just looked at them you probably couldn't tell, but if they were White, you would probably assume, and if they were here, you would probably assume that they were American. If you're over in Spain, and you see a white person, you probably wouldn't be able to tell unless you hear them speak.

Researcher: Okay, so language.

Jenny: Yeah, but sometimes you can't tell like that.

Researcher: Okay. So it's complicated.

Jenny: Yeah. You could tell the difference if they have an English accent or Australian, but if they talk like this, they could still be from somewhere else.

Jenny illustrated how as location and context change, so does the appropriate language representation. To Jenny skin color and language intersected, and together they made for a more nuanced understanding of national identity and American identity than they do separately.

Along with the descriptions of language, students discussed skin color as a symbol and representation with which American and other national identities are shaped. Students used skin color as a way of both shaping and differentiating membership to an imagined community.

Researcher: In your mind, what makes a person American?

Rowan: Probably that they … maybe they have white skin…
Well, sometimes the color of their skin. Sometimes you can't really tell because they're Spanish and American or African-American, so I usually tell with their ... Maybe they hang out with a group and because foreigners might hang out by themselves ... [Brittany]

Sometimes Americans are White, most of the time, but some Hispanic people also are born here because Hispanic people come move here. [Tom]

While students connected American identity to skin color. However, by adding modifiers like “sometimes” and “maybe”, students also recognized that the way they conceived of American as a representation and symbol doesn’t always match what they know American to be through personal experience. Tom went on to explain the distinction between White and Hispanic and how skin color traverses time and space by linking sociohistories that shape American identity.

Well, because most people came from England and Europe, so they were White. They didn't come from Mexico or other places where Hispanic lives. [Tom]

The complexity students described in understandings also means that they do not see skin color or language as singularly important in shaping American identity. When the redes of students’ physical and social spaces were inclusive, they functioned to traverse the structures, boundaries and arrangements of symbolic space. This resulted in redes of symbolic space not being the determining factor in shaping of American identity and in students articulating a much more inclusive understanding of what an American identity is. David’s response to a question about this indicated that he agrees with some of his classmates that skin color and language make a person American, and indicated that he sees complexity in what shapes his understanding of American identity.

David: Well, I don't really think that your ethnicity really matters in the case of American, because there are so many other types of people
David stated that he didn’t think that skin color matters in American identity, but he continued to classify people by assumed differences, such as “people came from Africa, so African Americans.” Erika, the lone Black student in the classroom, talked about skin color in relation to her experiences with being labeled “African American”.

Maybe African American means just another word to say Black, but not say you're a Black African American. I mean Black American. Maybe African American is something they use to say Black, like I'm African American. That's what they call me, instead of saying she's a Black American. Maybe African American has something to do with Africa or something. [Erika]

Erika viewed a distinction between “Black” and “African American”. For Erika, “African American” is something “they” call “me”. The distinction Erika made is that Africa isn’t symbolic of herself, but it does function to shape the redes of symbolic space around skin color. Erika made clear that she views herself as a “Black American”, and that this classification positions her solely with membership within the symbolic space of American.

Gabriel provided another counter narrative about the role of language in shaping American identity. He explained that he thinks prejudice often played a role in the way people view American identity and that it functions to shape how they see American identity. Gabriel saw the conception between national identity and language as exclusive and limiting.

I think that a little racist [to think language indicates national identity], because some people see someone that is or isn’t, and they say stuff bad to people because of the language they speak. [Gabriel]
In his interview Gabriel was asked to look around and indicate who was American and who was not. He said that the white and black adults and students were American, and the olive skinned students who looked like him were Hispanic or Latino. He also noted that the way he viewed himself is often different than how other people viewed him, and he thought himself as American and Latino, but others might just see him as Latino. Gabriel understands the distinction that people make symbolically between American and Hispanic or Latino, but he didn’t see these two things as mutually exclusive. While other students have described themselves as half ‘American’ or half ‘Mexican’ or half ‘Latin’, Gabriel’s identity is 100% American and 100% Latino.

Other students also noted the complexity of how the redes of symbolic space functions to shape race and language as representative of national identity and imagined community membership.

You can tell if somebody is an American by, well, you can't, it's not just the, it can be the color of their skin. It doesn't always mean it's the color of their skin. Like if you say ... It would be kind of weird if you went up to somebody who looked like he was Hispanic and said, "Hola." That would be kind of like, threatening to them. Like threatening or mean to them. You wouldn't go up to somebody that would be from a different country and say something in the language that you think they speak. Trying to do that in different countries when you're there, because that is the main language that they speak. But if somebody is in your country, that, where you speak this language, it is really not good for you to do that. [Joey]

If you were born in America, and you speak English, that means you could most likely be an American. If you live in America, and you speak Spanish, that still means you can be an American. Language doesn't really matter. [Joey]
I disagree with languages, because I know we have Spanish speakers here. And they sometimes they can't speak English because they just moved from Mexico or Spain or other another Spanish speaking country. But we can still classify them as Americans, so language doesn't matter in my case. [Kelsey]

And, I don't know if appearance really matters because, like I said before, African Americans, we consider them Americans, and their skin is black. So, and like I used to think that Americans were usually white, because I didn't know any better. I was young. But now I know that Americans can have many different skins. It's not really a question of appearance. [Kelsey]

Skin color and language are seen in many ways and are mapped onto and interlaced throughout physical, social and symbolic space. Race and language are two representations that function in shaping meaning and cultural representations, thereby creating the boundaries and borders of American Identity both inclusively and exclusively for students.

Curriculum.

Curriculum also functions to shape how students see, experience and use the boundaries of imagined communities. In this sense curriculum constructs redes of symbolic space and reifies the representations of American versus other. Students in the focus group explained that what they learn in social studies affects their understanding of American identity.

Carolina: You keep on learning more about one culture and their history. Once you learn more about it, you start feeling more of what we are learning about.

Michael: I think it could, but it’s your choice….You can have more identity, your identity in “quotations”, with knowing your heritage and what happened back then. That would influence what you are now. You can be compared American if you don't like Britain, not necessarily, but you can.
Erika: I agree with Carolina that you can listen to more in history, learn more in history (and) you’ll look at yourself as this or that. If you learn more about the history of [specific things].

Curriculum in the instances mentioned by Carolina, Michael and Erika functions to structure, arrange, construct and shape identities. It works in constructing both users and use by defining the symbols, artifacts, icons, representations and boundaries of American identity for students. These symbolic spaces, through use and function, shape, arrange and structure social and physical spaces, the spaces students occupy, as well as the opportunities for identity. The physical, social and symbolic spaces arranged, organized and used by students are interconnected and shape how they interact and how they construct identities in relation to one another and to school. Curriculum, the groupings of students based on curriculum, and the construction of symbolic resources, are structures and arrangements which assign membership, similarity and difference through constructed commonalities. The construction of commonalities, attribution of symbolic representations to individuals and assigning of value to these representations through curriculum are acts of production and reproduction.

Shaping and reshaping the redes of symbolic space is not something all students share equally. Interviews took place in the middle of a social studies unit on the American Revolution and after the unit on Colonization. Some students voiced frustration with the curriculum content and expressed a desire for a more diverse and inclusive curriculum that more accurately reflected both themselves and the members of their classroom. Emma, for example, expressed her frustration with the lack of diversity in the curriculum of the American Revolution.

Emma: Its kind of….Excuse me…. Stupid.
It’s kind of dumb because its only White men and only White men … Like when is women, like women already came in and died as a soldiers, so we need freedom. Someone talk about us!

Yes, I would love it [to learn about more women], because women were more interesting than guys. Yeah, cause women weren’t just there and didn’t do anything. Sometimes they fix soldiers and stuff. I would love that because just learning about white men is dumb. Only white men are…. Ms. Washington’s like “Come meet me on the tile, lets talk about White men today” – are you serious?

Emma expressed her lack of power and representation in the curriculum. While she focused on the race of the historical figures in the curriculum, she only made reference to her gender when referring to a desire for the curriculum to be more inclusive of women. Michael also described the curriculum as narrow in comparison to both himself and to the school as a whole.

Researcher: Do you think that what you’re learning in social studies refers to everybody’s history in your class?


Researcher: Do you think different people have different histories?

Michael: Different people have different histories. It’s no, it’s kinda scientific fact. I think it has been proven though; everybody known is 50th cousins because of evolutionary tree. I am actually an atheist; I believe in evolution. Not to offend anybody, but I believe in evolution. If we’re all thinking of present, it doesn’t really represent our heritage because one, we were split. This is family tree, what happened there. It’s not us, but what’s the other people besides us?

Researcher: Would you like it any better or different, or do you think that what you learned in social studies should be more representative of your classroom instead of just this one aspect?

Michael: Classroom. Sure, we have Mexicans. We definitely have Latinos in our school. We know that. That’s our whole school aspect thing too. We have … I forgot how to say it, dang it. I don’t even know if we have any Native Americans I was about to say.
Researcher: Native Americans?

Michael: Like Native American heritage probably. I think I’m a little bit Cherokee Indian. I don’t know, but I have crazy history. That’s my perspective, I think I have history. I think they should include everybody, not just …

Researcher: The white male?

Michael: Yes, that’s rude. It’s being racist actually. If you ask me, it’s kinda being racist.

Michael noted several elements in describing his desire for a more inclusive curriculum. First, he equated Latinos with “Mexican” in describing whose history is not included in social studies. This exemplifies the symbolic distinction that shapes student identity and constructs the redes of symbolic space and American identity. Secondly, Michael went on to explain the need for more than just a singular perspective in history. He went so far as to calling the current curriculum “racist” for its lack of inclusion. Michael’s response to being asked about the social studies curriculum highlights the role dominant norms in the construction and implementation of curriculum.

Carolina, Tom, and Zoey explained what the construction of curricular barriers and boundaries means for learning about history that represents who they are. For Carolina, Tom and Zoey, learning about Hispanic or Spanish speaking history occurred through the social space of family, not at school. The layers of redes mapped onto physical, social and symbolic space shaped borders and boundaries of membership, inclusion, exclusion and fields of meaning.

Well at home, I learn about Hispanic people. My mom teaches me too, and right here we learn about White men, so I’d say it’s in balance. [Tom]

Sometimes, I mostly want to do Spanish speaking people, because that’s my origin, and my parents come from there. Most of the time I want to do that, but I
just go along with the class and roll along…. Like Cesar Chavez, he did amazing things. I really want to learn more about him. I want to watch some movies that they made of him, but I cannot because my Mom doesn't let me. [Zoey]

Well I think, sometimes I think of it as, like not representing my history, but sometimes I think of it as, yeah it's representing my history, because sometimes, like when I feel more Hispanic, I feel like it's not representing it, because it's not based like, what happened, around where my family's from, and sometimes I feel like that. Sometimes I feel like it does represent me, because sometimes, if it depends on if I feel American or if I feel Hispanic. [Carolina]

To these students, curriculum functioned both to shape identity, specifically American identity, and also functioned to shape practices of classification, exclusion and inclusion. Not only did students express a desire for more inclusive, diverse social studies content, they actively pursued this opportunity when give the opportunity to do so.

At the end of this social studies unit, the class created an American Revolution museum full of presentations, artifacts, research and descriptions of life and important details about specific topics. To determine the topics that were going to be highlighted in this living museum, students had a class discussion about what the most important topics to present would be. They first discussed topics at their tables and then had a class discussion about the topics they wanted to include. Many female students, including Jenny, Zoey, Rowan, Brittany, Carolina and Emma voiced the desire to include female and minority perspectives in the museum. Topics agreed upon for the museum were Key Figures, Perspectives in the American Revolution, Espionage, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, Battles, Colonial Life and Women's and Minority Views. Students then ranked their top three choices for which topic they wanted to do more
research about and present as part of the museum. As students signed up for topics, zero students signed up for Key Figures, which included George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams, while 12 of the 23 students in the class signed up for the “Roles and Perspectives of Women and Minorities”.

Students rejected the ‘Founding Fathers’, choosing instead to construct learning centered on their interests in historically marginalized populations. When I asked them about this as they worked on their projects, the most common answer was that they wanted to learn more about women and minorities because these groups were more interesting. Carolina described to me that she wanted to learn more about what “kid’s lives” were like, because she is a kid and was curious how they lived. Emma, who expressed her desire in earlier interviews for more female representation in the curriculum, was also a member of the group that worked on this part of the museum. When I asked her about researching alternative perspectives of the American Revolution, Emma described the project as “Awesome, because we can put women and stuff all over our poster.”

Students in this scenario consciously and actively engaged in restructuring of the museum, its spatial environment, its content and its context for their social studies curriculum.

While Ms. Washington’s classroom functioned through physical, social and symbolic space to shape identity, there was still always the possibility for agency and change to occur. Further, the spatiality students experience through everyday practices functioned to concretize students’ lived spaces and the identities. Throughout the time I spent in this classroom, students described how as space changed, so did their understandings of their peers. As mentioned in
Chapter III, Soja’s (1996) observation is pertinent, “The outcomes of socio-spatial differentiation, division, containment, and struggle are cumulatively concretized and conceptualized in spatial practices, in representations of space and in spaces of representation” (p. 87).

**Changes in Space/Identity.**

While students’ identities are often shaped through *redes* of space, there are also times when *space* and students function to change how *redes* are structured and identity is shaped. *Redes* are malleable through changing, shifting, fracturing, evolving, constructing and deconstructing boundaries and barriers within and across *spaces*. These changes can occur in brief periods of time. Students explained that as *space* changes, so did identities. Luke, who previously described how he chose who was similar and different based on within class groupings, named who he had known the longest and identified other arrangements of *physical*, *social* and *symbolic space* which functioned to shape his and peer identities.

I guess you said we have changed tables a lot, and people I’ve gotten to know them better. Before, I was at a table with David and Jonathan and Rowan and Anna. I would sit at a table with Bobby, Zoey, and Randy, and I really got to know Zoey, and I got to know Bobby better. I got to know Zoey; I actually started to know her, and I got to know Bobby better. [Luke]

The change in where Luke was sitting and who was sharing table space with him altered the *redes* of his physical space. The boundaries and barriers as experienced in *physical space* changed for Luke and therefore functioned to shape his view of peer identity in different ways with regards to Zoey, Randy and Bobby. Eric, who had only been in the class for this year and was not in the class in fourth grade, shared a similar story about the importance of the *redes* of *physical space* as structured through table groupings.
I mean, at my table, I've been watching Randy and how much he's really been interacting, and he hasn't been, like, he isn't just looking around when I'm talking to him. Yesterday when I came out of the office, and I came down to pack up my stuff, he told me that he really missed me because I was up in the office all day. I thought that was really kind, so I would now put Gabriel in most different and Randy in the most similar. [Eric]

Gabriel and Eric were at the same table to begin the school year. As the year progressed, the physical, social and symbolic redes of the classroom began to shape how Eric saw himself and his peers. He had more interactions he gained access to different spaces, and as a result the redes of the physical, social and symbolic space in the classroom also shifted, changed and functioned to shape identity. Through prolonged physical and social interaction Eric learned more about Gabriel’s personality and interests, and through a change in tables, he also learned more about Randy’s personality and interests. The shift in the redes of physical space allowed Eric to traverse what he had previously seen as lack of similarity between himself and Randy. Randy shifted from someone that Eric did not know well to someone he did.

The change in identities of similarity and difference were not just experienced by Eric. Gabriel expressed the same sentiments in that a change in how well he knew Eric altered how he viewed his similarity and difference.

I wouldn’t pick Eric anymore [as similar], because I have gotten to know him better. I thought he was more go with the flow, but now I know he gets mad when he doesn’t get what he wants….Now that I know Zoey a little more, I wouldn’t put her on the list [as similar I would put Brittany instead. Because she is more organized and is more “Do this.” [Gabriel]

Before ‘getting to know’ each other, Gabriel and Eric had very little information or knowledge on which to base their construction of peer identities. After prolonged interaction, and as a result of increased familiarity, their understanding of similarities and differences between one another
changed. The *redes of physical, social* and *symbolic space* changed functioning to shape identities differently.

Further changes occurred for Eric as he explained that his father banned him from playing soccer during recess for one month because Eric had hit another kid during a soccer game. In this situation the organization of Eric’s recess changed; the *physical* and *social space* of recess was altered. Eric no longer had access to the *physical space* of his friends on the soccer field. As a result he spent most of his recess time talking with Jerry and Michael on the playground. He also played four square with Jenny, Zoey, Emma and Brittany. Thus the interactions that he had during recess were dependent on the function of *physical* and *social space*.

Emilly also provided an example of how a change in math grouping rearranged how she saw her relationship to peers.

**Emilly:** Yes. Because right after we took our big math test, I was put in a group with number three. And number three [points to Emma’s name on list of ‘different’ students] she was ...

**Researcher:** Emma?

**Emilly:** Yeah. Emma was right next to me. Sorry, I wasn't sure if we were allowed ...

**Researcher:** You can say their names.

**Emilly:** Emma was right next to me, and we both finished at the same time, and we checked each other's answers, and I think it was pretty fun. So I think I've gotten to know her better with that.

Shifting of arrangements and structures of classroom student groupings changes the *space* and the *redes* of the *space*. The *space* then functions to shape identity as a result of its new

149
arrangement. Emily explained that curriculum shaped the physical space of groupings, which put her and Emma together to work. This proximity was central for Emilly in getting to “know” Emma better.

Carolina echoed how rearrangement of redes lead to rearrangement of identity in relation to peers.

Carolina: Like since there was only five [spots to list similar students], it was hard for me to pick, I would have moved Penelope over here.

Researcher: From different to similar? Okay, what happened there?

Carolina: Because like, since we weren't talking to each other much, but then we switched tables, and then I was the captain, and we were beside each other…. Yeah, because I haven't, like I haven't known Taylor or Sarah, like I didn't know them. I started knowing them last year, getting to know them, but I didn't know them so that's, because sometimes, like on the list they were here [pointing at “different” list], but then I noticed they were getting kinda like more, like similar.

Change in physical space can lead to changes in social spaces, as well as shifts and changes in symbolic spaces. The ways in which space changes is foundational to how students construct identities of ‘self’ and the ‘other’ and how students saw peers as similar and different. This isn’t to say that changes only occur through physical space. They can occur in social and symbolic spaces as well, which can lead to a change of redes in that space as well as others. Michael articulated this with how change in students’ interests work to shape and create the redes of the symbolic space of similarity and difference.
Its hard to explain. It would be if they change, let’s say one person started playing sports. I’m the kid who doesn’t play sports. They’d be more different….There could be people added or put on the most different lists and…Yeah, if I did something to change, let’s say I really got into sports. Some of the most different like Gabriel and Jonathan, they would go on the most similar because they both love sports. [Michael]

Michael first described his membership to an imagined community as the “kid who doesn’t play sports”. He identified himself in relation to the redes of symbolic space around kids who play sports and those who do not, with each belonging to some imagined, symbolic, representational archetype.

Emma provided exampled that a change in environment changed her relationship to American identity. She relied on the intersection of symbolic and social space in construction of American identity. Membership and access to the imagined community of American is constructed through social situations and through peers. Emma explained this when describing recess and her relationship to American identity.

Well, it can be a combination [of people and location], but sometimes it’s based on the people, because, like, we….Americans have to learn Spanish, not blurt it out, like they learned it and it’s how they think. But it would be amazing if they blurt it out. It’s based on people, because sometimes at recess, there are Latin people with me, but most of the time it’s mostly Jenny and Brittany, so… American. [Emma]

Emma articulated the importance of both physical and social space to membership of imagined communities when describing her family and her home in contrast to school.

In school I really feel American, but at home I feel like Latin… Well my brother is like speaking English, and I’m like speak Spanish, because you speak Spanish reversed, because he is speaking English a lot, so we have speak Spanish, and I
feel very Honduran, because my parents are from Honduras, so I feel very Latin at home. Here, sometimes I feel Latin like at recess or something, like on the bus I feel very Latin. This girl from some other class she was like speaking very funny in Spanish, but right now I feel very American. [Emma]

Emma constructs her identity through the *redes* of her *social space*. The *space* and people who made and made the *redes* of her *social space* provide linkages and access to identities for her to author. The arrangements for Emma included the use of language, as well as having a social linkage to Honduras through her parents. For Emma the *symbolic space* of belonging to an *imagined community* of ‘Latin’ or ‘American’ is constructed through the *social space* she inhabits. The *redes* that have been created are an intersection of *spaces*, not space singularly. The arrangement of *symbolic* and *social space* for Emma is in relation to membership to the *imagined community* constructed around the notion of ‘member’ and ‘other’. This is also evident in Emma’s description of the difference between Native Americans and American.

I think Americans are like us, just regular American, and Native Americans are like the Indians, I think. Like we saw on video with the ... Yeah, I think they're the Native Americans. [Emma]

Emma viewed herself as American in comparison to Native Americans by referring to “Americans are like us”. For Emma, the *redes* of *symbolic space* is constructed with regards to membership, cultural representation and imagined communities. This idea allows for her to position herself as American, but Native Americans as ‘other’. The flux between Emma’s description of herself as American and her description of herself as Latin, depended on *physical*, *social* and *symbolic space* and on the *redes* of that *space*. The ways in which *space, physical*,
social and symbolic, is structured, arranged, and shaped for and by use and user, is central to her identity.

For these students, the use of language, cultural traditions, food, skin color, curriculum, peer groupings, classroom space, family, school space, interest, personalities and myriad other unnamed factors of spatial arrangements and structures that contribute to function, interaction and construction of physical, social, and symbolic space. Students are both subjects of the structure of redes, and also people who work to reproduce and alter redes and identity through use of space. The arrangement and structure of spaces, such as school, peers and curriculum, function to shape, produce and reproduce ‘identities of similarity and difference, American identity and to shape engagement with peers and curriculum.

Spaces do no stand alone; they are layered upon each other by mapping, arranging, organizing, shaping and structuring the terrain of everyday life for these students. As students have described, the interactions between spaces, people and representations function to shape identity and vary across context and student. Students also expressed that they shaped identities of peers differently depending on how redes shapes access to spaces. Students who had access to physical and social space with peers did not rely solely on the redes of symbolic space to shape identities of similarity, difference and national identity. When students identified peers as similar, there was a common thread that they shared physical, social and sometimes but not always, symbolic space. When students viewed peers as different, it is almost always the case that they relied on symbolic space for shaping and understanding their own and peer identities. The role that social and physical space played is vitally important to shifting and changing the reliance on symbolic space, representations and stereotypes. Shifting the arrangement and structure of space also allowed for the restructuring of the redes of symbolic space.
Changes in the structuring and arranging of space, the redes of physical, social and symbolic spaces, for these elementary school students, function to reshape identities by traversing boundaries/barriers and constructions. The ability to alter space and therefore the function of space, the way in which space acts on and shapes identity through the use of space for the user of space is central to ways in which these student’s identities are formed. As pointed out by El-Haj (2007), the point of encouraging conversations and interactions across difference is not so much to persuade others to change their minds; rather change occurs because habits, practices and discourses change as we engage with others over time. What is evident from this study is that the results of interactions across difference, that the redes of physical, social and symbolic space changes, thereby creating more inclusive classroom practices for students, more inclusive schools, and more inclusive curriculum that helps structure students’ relationships to schooling and education.
VI: Discussion and Further Implications

This dissertation revolved around three research questions regarding identity, American identity and elementary age children: (1) How is a figured world of American played out in one classroom’s practices? (2) In what ways do 5th grade students identify sameness and difference with regard to who they and others are? (3) What is American identity and their relationship to it? In answering these questions - observations, interviews, survey results and classroom artifacts were analyzed and interpreted first utilizing an identity-in-practice framework, and second through a grounded theory approach. This chapter provides a summary of results, two forms of implications and a conclusion of findings.

Summary of Results

Initial results of this study emerged from the identity-in-practice framework as revealed in Chapter Four. From an identity-in-practice perspective students utilized cultural symbols, tools and artifacts such as language, skin color, institutional credentials, traditions, food and familial cultural legacies to construct American identity and their relationships to it. Students experienced both barriers from peers, curriculum and cultural symbols, in authoring identity, as well as regularly pushed against dominant notions of American, expanding spaces of hybridity and inclusion. Students also partially referred to these classifications when identifying sameness and difference, but not always in relation to American identity. In cases of sameness and difference students often relied on different criteria, whether those criteria comprised figured worlds or only relations of self and peers.
While *identity-in-practice* provides a framework to categorize the cultural production of identity these elements often proved to be more relational than figured. Students regularly created identities based on relational comparisons and then squared their comparisons with their definitions and understandings of how they define American identity. This was rather than defining American identity and then determining peers subject positions from the figured worlds. The *identity-in-practice* framework allows for a better understanding of how elementary age students see cultural construction and how these constructions are, or are not, applied. The *identity-in-practice* framework also offers researchers a structure for examining identity practices and production. However, it did not provide students with voices or student voices for their experiences and understanding of identity, similarity and difference.

In Chapter Five, this dissertation thus attempted to utilize and honor students voices in the construction of a theory of how redes of *spaces* within *place* function to shape similarity, difference, American Identity and the ‘other’ through a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory signified a shift from deductive to inductive in an approach to analysis of data. As outlined by Charmaz (2006), through grounded theory an understanding and conceptual framework emerges and is constructed from the data as opposed to utilizing a predetermined framework from literature. In construction of this emergent framework concepts were loosely borrowed from the writings of Escobar (2008), Levebvre (1974/1992), and Soja, (1996). In organizing this grounded theory *physical, social* and *symbolic space* emerged as reoccurring themes in students experiences, construction, and understanding of personal and peer similarity, difference and in American identity.

First, for the students in Ms. Washington’s class the physical organization of classrooms within the school, groupings within a classroom and spaces outside of school functioned to shape
how they saw peers as similar and different. Further, students explained that American and other national identities revolved around their relation to countries, and to school and home as physical spaces. Second, beyond the physical organization of students’ lives and world, social spaces of familiarity, friends, family and peers also operated to shape constructions, understandings and experiences. Lastly, symbolic spaces functioned to shape similarity, difference and American identity through interests/personality, curriculum, cultural traditions, language and skin color. The structure, organization, and arrangement, and the function and use the redes of students physical, social and symbolic spaces shaped their understandings, constructions and experiences. Importantly, when students did not share physical or social space with peers they often experienced and understood similarity, difference and ‘American’ identity through the redes of symbolic space. Redes, as mentioned in Chapter Three and Five represents structures and arrangements, and also the use of structures and arrangements.

Across the dissertation the use of this dual analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of how students experience, and construct, understand identity. Importantly, the second theoretical perspective of spaces resulted in an emergence of a unifying structure of place. While in Chapter Five space was emphasized over place, it is important in this concluding discussion to examine these components as a whole. In this sense of place, students saw their identity as integration of the organization, arrangement and structure of physical, social and symbolic space. Understanding this place-based conception of identity through the theory of redes provides an alternative to identity-in-practice in which to understand how identity functions. The use of redes of spaces in this sense provides a lens in understanding the ways in which identity emerges from not just from cultural production. There is a particularity of place that is key in how these students experienced their identities. Students locate their identities
within and across spaces and boundaries. These spaces are unique in that they exist locally and specifically within the lives of the students of Ms. Washington’s class. As they articulated, identity is a very real product of the structures and arrangements of their daily lives which are made and re-made through use. Notable, identity sometimes were held in the imagined, as-if world.

The results indicate that at its simplest, examining identity through an identity-in-practice theoretical framework provides a ways of examining how similarity, difference, American identity, and the other, exist as representations and how representation is put into practice and deployed in worlds. Further, the utilization of a redes framework offers a way of understanding some ways in which spaces function to shape the emergence of identity in that the uses of physical, social and symbolic spaces represent another way students express their experiences and understandings of identity. The deductive and emergent analytic frames used in this study, allow for complexity and to see how the same phenomenon can be interpreted in multiple, sometimes complementary, sometimes contrasting ways. Once notions of identity being constructed and are constructed in parallel are examined, the notion of identity being totally constructed in the self is complicated. There are multiple perspectives of how this occurs demonstrating both the impact of both agency and structure on identity. This study shows the complexity of materiality, mutually moving from concrete to abstract and abstract to concrete.

Additionally, this study provides several conceptual contributions to issues of identity research. First, this study has provided a better understanding of how identity is understood in the lives of 5th grade students as opposed to being constructed solely through the understandings of adults. The parallel construction of parts and wholes of identity are especially salient in the narratives of these students. Second, this study illustrates the importance and power of
curriculum in shaping how identity for selves and others come to be understood as representations of populations. Third, through every student identifying as American this study shows that understandings of children of immigrants are changing as populations become more settled and communities continue to change. This study works to push forward understandings of identities being place based and travelling. Further it provides evidence that many of the notions and assumptions surrounding identity do not reflect current populations that have changed and continue to change quickly. Fourth, the shift in theoretical and methodological lenses allows for complex, nuanced, and rich descriptions of phenomenon.

Implications for Practice

This study of America identity confirms many of the findings of pervious literature and also works to build on many others. For the students in Ms. Washington’s class and at Southern Elementary School a continuous curricular contestation for equity and inclusion is manifested. While the experiences of students of color can be described by some as ‘white-washing’ of identity (Olsen, 1996; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Suárez-Orozco, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999), there are also layers of complexity that revolve not only around curriculum, but how students see their interest, personalities, behaviors and actions through similarities and differences. Many of the students spoke of having strong familial identities which functioned to strengthen what they often termed Hispanic or Latino, but American identity was also present. They were interested in learning about American history because they identified as American and the desire for more learning and representation of Hispanic and Latino history in their curriculum.

This study and both frameworks have practical implications on multiple fronts. One of the most interesting implications occurs at the intersection of teacher education, classroom
pedagogies and culturally relevant/responsive pedagogies (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The general issue of inclusion becomes central as a result of this study. For example, the inclusion of representations of Hispanic/Latino students through the hosting of Latino night, the inclusion of Latino culture in the classroom’s Spanish language curriculum and the limited inclusion of multicultural perspectives in the curriculum provided a positive image for Hispanic students and students of color in Ms. Washington’s class. However, events such as these also functioned to define reified borders of national identity and constructed somewhat rigid understandings of cultural representations as opposed to flexible more inclusive understandings. The two frameworks and their results functioned to create inclusive or exclusive educational practices and spaces. This finding is similar to that of Alba (2005) from the initial literature and the concept of blurred and bright boundaries.

While culturally responsive/relevant pedagogies deal with curriculum generally, this study provides insight into specific curricular issues. First, it problematizes the types of representations, narratives and stereotypes that are present in social studies curriculum. Second, it shows the need for more inclusive curriculum, particularly with attention to the diversity in the classroom and school. Third, students articulation of difference in spaces between home and school, as well as feelings of outsider status in relation to school curriculum provides opportunity for culturally responsive/relevant pedagogies and funds of knowledge approaches to bridge and traverse this gap. Fourth, this study shows that it is important for teachers to attend to, and critically examine, the ways in which and for what purpose students are grouped circularly or grouped for specific curriculum activities in their classroom. Last, this study shows the need for social studies curriculum in elementary schools to be critically questioned and examined by teachers and students.
Beyond teaching practices, this dissertation contributes to teacher educators and the way in which pre-service teachers are prepared. One significant implication is that both teacher educators and preservice teachers need to utilize education research concretely and specifically to address needs of their classrooms. Further, this use of education research must interrogate both the constructions of the classroom and teaching practices of the classroom. Teacher educators must also engage in critique of education research and train preservice teachers to recognize the limitations of research and the potential for action research in their own classrooms. Training pre-service teachers to recognize the importance of the context and specificity of their classroom offers opportunities for teachers as researchers and for creating responsive teachers, classrooms and schools. Further, the impact of curriculum, schooling experiences and classroom pedagogy has on student identity must be explored by both teacher educators and pre-service teachers.

Implications for Research

This dissertation has implication for both identity research theory and research methodology. First, it has extended prior identity-in-practice research by moving towards use of all four elements of the framework – figured worlds, positionality, self-authoring and making worlds. In doing this, the study expands the ways in which identity-in-practice research can be understood and used as a deductive research methodology. While this study added to the understandings and applications of identity in practice, especially with elementary age students, it also indicates limitations. Moving from identity-in-practice to an understanding of identity through redes of space and place shows that 5th grade students identities can be both figured and concrete.
Second, the construction and use of a conceptual framework of spatiality examines the ways in which the *redes of physical, social, and symbolic spaces* function to shape identity and provide a theoretical unity of space for future research, specifically in schools, classrooms and the lives of students. Further, this complicates the theoretical understandings of how borders, spaces and identity are organized, structured, expanded and traversed, specifically in elementary classrooms. Moving away from solely a figured worlds understanding of identity, to one of materiality and spatiality expands the theoretical lenses. Significantly, understanding of the intersection of identity with spatial and border theories in education research (Anzaldúa, 2012; Gutierrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda, 1999; Soja, 1996; Soto, Cervantes-Soon, Villarreal & Campos, 2009).

Third, this study makes several methodological contributions to qualitative education research. Through bringing together two theoretical approaches and logics, this dissertation expands the understanding of ways in which researchers can approach interactions of literature and research practice. The use of both an inductive and deductive framework of analysis provides a useful methodological tool for allowing critical self-reflection of initial theory and methodology. This dissertation also provides researchers with an example of how research can be responsive to difficulties and experiences of disequilibrium during the research process. A key contribution is the way in which it provides multiple interpretations of data, allowing for parallel, sometimes complementary, sometimes contrasting, theoretical results.

**Conclusion**

Results from the three research questions taken together revolve around identities that are American and other. This dissertation points to the need for further research on the borders and boundaries of identity, identity membership and the formation of communities, both real and
imagined. While the students in Ms. Washington’s class often fit themselves into categorizations, they also viewed themselves and the identities of others as complex and nuanced with shifting boundaries of similarity, difference and evolving understandings of American identity. American identity has long been reified as synonymous with White (Baptista, 1983; Devos et al, 2010; Graham, 2005; Green, 2010; Olsen, 1996; Tyack, 2003), but students in Ms. Washington’s class, especially students of color, described American through less defined boundaries, more relationally and with nuanced explanation of difference, more than similarity. Students explained how a diverse array of people can be American, as opposed to solely people with a unity of similarities and a collective identity. These findings build on the work of Quintana, et al. (2010) that examined identity as a multitude of selves being acted on by competing outside forces.

Furthermore previous literature established that children often use race as a major distinction of difference and in the construction of American identity (Aboud, 1988; Devos, Gavin, & Quintana, 2010; El Haj, 2007; Green, 2010; Lambert & Klineberg, 1967; Rong & Brown, 2002; Urrieta, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999; Waters, 1994), the students in Ms. Washington’s class often saw and described race, but saw identity more through a lens of voluntary self-authoring of certain practices, as well as access to and participation in spaces.

Past research has demonstrated that, students often build stereotypes based on their limited understanding of category groups and stereotyped understandings of peers and groups (Ambady, Shih, Kim and Pittinsky, 2001). These stereotypes can implicitly lead their own behaviors which can have an impact on students’ social and academic experiences in school (Ambady et al., 2001). This study has implications for understanding of how space and cultural symbols function to build identities of difference and reified stereotypes and assumptions or
work to decompose boundaries and barriers of difference. Students understand difference and constructed boundaries of difference through access and participation in spaces. The examination of physical, social and symbolic spaces in schools, classrooms, groupings, and curriculum provide a concrete means of understanding how identities emerge and function in interaction for elementary students.

The complexity in which students in Ms. Washington’s class describe their identity and describe their membership to imagined communities highlights the evolving nature of national identity and the political role of nation-states, and complicates the influence of cultural, ethnic and national diasporas. Today the nature of shifting school populations and demographics is not a new phenomenon for American public schools. Migration and the movement of humans and populations is at its core a human phenomenon. Immigration however is strictly political, in which populations are classified, categorized and grouped based on both real and imagined borders and boundaries. Schools often become sites for the political classification and identification of American and non-American to play out. Further problematizing the entrenchment of this comparison is a critiques of the label ‘immigrant’ as many diaspora populations reject the notion of not belonging, which is often forced upon them in a host versus newcomer relationship (Villenas, 2007).

Ms. Washington’s class exemplifies this complex relationship between categorization, the nation-state, reified national identities, cultural and ethnic identity, schooling and the curriculum. Overall, this study offers interpretation and explanation of the ways in which 5th grade students identify (1) how figured worlds of American are played out in one classroom’s practices, (2) how sameness and difference are experienced, constructed and understood in regard to who they and others are, (3) what is American identity and their relationship to it.
There is certainly room for further studies into more specific aspects of identity in the elementary school and how it varies from much of the research on identity with adolescents and high school age students.

Further and most promising for research, teaching and education is that students show that change is possible. Students regularly added depth and complexity to their understanding of themselves and peers and the ways in which identity intersects with schooling and their classroom. Further, this study at least hopes to show that identities and contexts seem to always be in flux, always be in movement, and always be in conversation with complex and dynamic environments. Much of these environments are man-made, controlled and constructed. Revisiting El Haj (2007), and the exciting and possibly most important implication from this study is that in creating conversations and interactions amongst and across students, change can occur over time and space. This can result in more diverse, inclusive, and empowering future possibilities for schooling.
Appendix A

Student Survey

Your name: ______________________________________

Name you would like to be called for this study (You can change this later if you want):
______________________________________________

Below please list which of your classmates are most different from you and which are the most similar to you. **ONLY USE CLASSMATES FIRST NAMES.**

Most Similar:

1)  
2)  
3)  
4)  
5)  

Most Different:

1)  
2)  
3)  
4)  
5)  

166
Below, list in order five ways that you would label yourself. The first should be the label that you think most describes you or is most important to you and then the last should be the one that is less important to who you are.

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

______________________________________________

______________________________________________
Please check the box that most appropriately represents you:

☐ Hispanic
☐ White
☐ Black, African American
☐ American Indian
☐ Asian
☐ Pacific Islander
☐ other: _______________________________
Appendix B

Interview Protocol #1 (First Interview)

Person being interviewed:

Notes:

* Perspective – Is your perspective different because of who you are? (Relate to Social Studies)
* Why aren’t there representations of Hispanic people in your social studies texts and videos, etc?

1. Similar/Different
   a. How did you decide who to put as similar to you and who is different from you?
      i. How do you know?
      ii. Can someone who is similar to you and different from you change?
         1. How or what would they have to change to be similar to you?
   b. How do you choose where you sit at lunch? Recess?

2. Pledge of Allegiance
   a. Why is it played?
   b. What does it mean?
   c. I noticed that you do/don’t always say the pledge, tell me about that.

3. National Anthem [The song that is played on the morning announcement]
   a. Why is it played?
   b. What does it mean?
   c. I noticed that you do/don’t always say the pledge, tell me about that.

4. ‘American’
   a. What makes a person American?
   b. How do you know if someone is ‘American’?
   c. Do you consider yourself American?
      i. Is there a time you feel more or less American?
   d. Why do some people have a name in front of ‘American’ like ‘Native Americans’?
      i. Are there any people that don’t have a name in front of ‘American’?
      ii. Why?
   e. Can someone become ‘American’? Become Not American?
Appendix C

Interview Protocol – Second Interview

Person being interviewed:

Notes:

*  

1. Similar/Different
   a. What do your labels mean to you? Do people that are similar to you have the same labels?
      i. Have you always been the same?
      ii. Will you change?

2. Classroom Practices
   a. Tell me about how groups are made for different activities (groups for math, reading, AIG) in your class.
      i. What does this mean to you?
   b. Voice/Speaking Up/Out
      i. Partners/Whole Class
   c. Caring
   d. Collaboration/Teamwork

3. Captain/Leadership
   a. What makes a person a Captain? What makes a person a leader?
      i. Skills? Traits?
   b. How do you know if someone is a leader?
   c. Can anyone become a captain?
   d. What makes you a leader?
   e. Will you get voted captain? Why/Why not?
      i. Can you only be a captain if you are voted a captain?

4. ‘American’
   a. Who are some famous ‘Americans’ that you have learned about?
   b. Are there times when you are ‘American’ and times when you are not ‘American’?
   c. Who determines if a person is ‘American’?
   d. Why aren’t there representations of Hispanic people in your social studies texts and videos, etc?

5. Do you think your identity affects how you do in school?
   a. How so?
Appendix D

Focus Group Protocol

Persons being interviewed:

| Emilly, Taylor, Michael, Joey, Tom, Erika, Zoey, Carolina |

Notes:

* These students were selected because they represent a cross section of the classroom based on gender, race, ability level grouping. They also represent key informants from the previous two interview and based on observation and interviews these 8 students are less likely to have a single dominant personality that would control the direction of the conversation.

1. ‘American’ Identity
   a. A lot of people said that being a “Captain” or “Leader” is determined by both how you act, but also how other people view you. Is that true for being “American”?
   b. Some of you said that your race was important to you and some of you said it didn’t matter. Tell me about that.
      i. Are there times race is more important? Less important?
   c. Are American and Hispanic/Latino different? Or can they be the same thing?
      i. Can a person be both?
   d. What/Who has had the biggest influence on your identity as an ‘American’?
   e. Is being an American the same now as it was during the American Revolution?
   f. Who is the most American person in this group?

2. Social Studies
   a. Is an American the same as what you have learned in Social Studies?
   b. Does what you have learned in social studies affect what you think an “American” is?
## Appendix E

### Observations/Informal Conversations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Observation</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Leisure Time: Playground/Lunch | Interactions-  
  - Amount of social interaction  
  - Type of social interaction (inclusive/exclusive) | This observation is aimed at determining how students interact with one another outside of the structure of a classroom. How do they negotiate and navigate social interaction in which they control the groupings of students? How do non-classroom interactions make explicit or implicit statements of difference between students? How are students included, excluded or labeled through non-classroom interactions? These observations will lead to topics and questions for interviews. | R1, R3 |
| Classroom: Interactions w/ Peers |  
  - Do students make explicit statements of sameness/difference?  
  - Implicit structuring of sameness and difference  
  - Inclusion/elusive behaviors  
  - Positive and negative interactions  
  - References to race, ethnicity, nationality, cultural traits  
  - Labels used during discourse | How do classroom interactions make explicit or implicit statements of difference between students? How are students included, excluded or labeled through classroom work and interactions? In what ways are students using labels of race, ethnicity, national identity, language and other cultural traits? | R1, R3 |
| Curriculum |  
  - How social studies | How the concept of nation, America, and Americans is taught | R1, R3 |
| curriculum identify 'American' and 'Americans'? How are differences between 'American' and 'non-American' explicitly/implicitly identified. | and how students come to figure who is and who is not American. |
# Appendix F

## Codes and Code Hierarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th># of Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idolizing of Whiteness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Deficit Orientation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity (Participant View)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorblind Orientation</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change/Lack of Change</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Traditions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity in Practice</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figured Worlds</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Position</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification/Labeling</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagined Community</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Cultural Resources</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Identity References</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Latino&quot;</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;American&quot;</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Us/We</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They/Them</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining other/Self</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Authoring</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for Inclusion/Access</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Ability to Author</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constraints on Authoring</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Cultural Artifacts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Cultural Resources</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Cultural Legacies</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semiotic Mediation (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproduction of Meaning</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Meaning</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling Meaning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Cultural Tools</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Worlds</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semiotic Mediation (1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Meaning</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling Meaning</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproduction of Meaning</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redefining Identity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redefining Self</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Captain</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort/Trying</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Success</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Along</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice/Kind</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action of Place</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Home&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic Home</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagined Community</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Home</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Home</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Space</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Space</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recess</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Space</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Know Well&quot;</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Don't Know Well&quot;</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classmates</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic Space</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership to Imagined Community</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalities</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Representations</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Cultural</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources/Legacies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Resources</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Resources</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular Resources</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important in Classroom</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to You</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gendering</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin Color</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


