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Citizenship in Interaction: A Comparative Case Study of Civic and Linguistic Experiences in Multicultural Schools in Costa Rica and the United States

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

Division of Educational Studies

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Abstract

Citizenship in Interaction: A Comparative Case Study of Civic and Linguistic Experiences in Multicultural Schools in Costa Rica and the United States

In their everyday interactions at school, students in multicultural classrooms build civic and linguistic knowledge and skills to participate in increasingly diverse societies. Recognizing the role of schooling to shape children and youth’s abilities for active participation in multicultural societies, nations around the world have worked to acknowledge students’ diverse backgrounds in education policy and curriculum. In the Americas, Anglo-American multiculturalism and Latin American *interculturalidad* are two of the models of diversity that permeate efforts to address difference and promote national cohesion. Alongside these models of diversity, each country’s particular history contributes to the creation of unique narratives about who is considered a citizen and about the characteristics of an “ideal” citizen.

By comparatively looking at two top migrant destination countries in the Americas—the United States illustrating multiculturalism and Costa Rica illustrating interculturalidad—I set out to explore how these distinct models of diversity, and the statal narratives that accompany them, promote different civic and linguistic outlooks and abilities in students. Using critical sociocultural theory and the framework of statal narratives, I examined classroom dynamics embedded in larger cultural narratives in one multicultural fourth grade classroom in each country. Through document analysis, ethnographic observations, interviews, and focus groups, I explored the ways in which students’ constructions of language and citizenship appropriated, contested, or perpetuated each country’s approach to difference.

Findings indicated that the children’s understandings of citizenship and language aligned with statal narratives that encouraged nation-centered approaches and promoted ideologies of linguistic deficit. Children’s constructions of citizenship were located along a citizenship continuum and their practices of citizenship varied across structured, guided, and monitored school spaces. I also identified linguistic ideologies that systematically excluded and compartmentalized the repertoires of students from different linguistic backgrounds. In all of these contexts, teachers and children also found opportunities to interrogate and resist dominant narratives and used strategies and resources to construct citizenship and language in interaction with each other.

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“A journey begins before the travellers depart.”

Charmaz, 2011, p. 1

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“I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.”

bell hooks, 1994, p. 12

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