

UNINVITED GUESTS: THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH AND ESL TEACHERS'  
BELIEFS, ROLES, AND PEDAGOGIES ON THE IDENTITIES  
OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Bogum Yoon, Ph. D.  
University at Buffalo, State University of New York, 2004

Abstract

Grounded in positioning theory and culturally relevant pedagogy, this collective case study explored English and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers teaching middle grades English language learners (ELLs). The purpose of this study was to examine the teachers' views of their roles with regard to middle grades ELLs, and the impact of their beliefs and teaching approaches on the students' identities. The key findings of my study are threefold. *First*, the teachers' views of their roles in a broad or narrow manner were relevant to their positioning of themselves. The teachers, who positioned themselves as teachers for general education students, did not view their roles of meeting their ELLs' cultural or social needs. However, the teachers, who positioned themselves as teachers for ELLs, viewed their roles to meet their ELLs' diverse needs and played an active role to assist the students. *Second*, according to the teachers' different approaches, the English language learners' identities were shaped through actions that positioned them as powerful, strong students or as powerless, poor students. The ELLs' feeling at home or feeling unwelcome depended on how the teachers approached these students. When the teachers' teaching pedagogy was multicultural and globalized by celebrating the ELLs' cultural differences, the students felt more at home. However, when the teachers focused on a subject matter and did not show special interest and attention to the students, the ELLs felt like uninvited guests in the mainstream classrooms. *Finally*, hidden power relations in mainstream contexts that appeared to be highly interactive and student-centered inadvertently positioned the ELLs as isolated. When American monoculturalism was particularly promoted in the classroom and the teachers did not get involved in eliciting their ELLs' interaction with their mainstream peers, the mainstream students resisted more in positioning the ELLs as their learning partners. By feeling powerless, the ELLs socially affiliated in classes with either other ELLs or students who were perceived by the teacher and students as problematic or struggling students. The findings suggest the significance of the teachers' roles in positioning ELLs as a legitimate group in American schools. This study aims to help American teachers and educators reflect on their roles and pedagogies to better understand middle grades ELLs in the United States.