AGENCY AND DISEMPOWERMENT IN AN EAP/EFL CONTEXT: VIGNETTES FROM A VILLAGE HIGH SCHOOL IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

This article presents the observations and generalizations I made in the research I conducted in a Philippine village high school three years ago. Framing this discussion are the limitations of the research acknowledging my position as a neophyte ethnographer and my positionality as a participant observer, i.e., someone who grew up in the research site, who immerses herself in the activities of the observed community and continually reflects on her subjectivities as a researcher in such position, and who encourages other research participants to collaborate in the data collection and interpretation. This article is segmented into three parts: (1) the context of study, (2) the observations I made as a participant-observer, and (3) the analysis of recurrent patterns that presented themselves significant for analysis. Such patterns were on three areas: a) the limited agency of students, teachers, and administrators; b) the silencing of critical voices; and c) the paradoxical role of English as socio-economic equalizer and stratifier of students in Philippine context where English, the language of a colonizing power, remains as the medium of instruction in a post-colonial era.

Introduction

This paper describes some of the results of the research I conducted in a Philippine village high school three years ago. The earlier portion of this study—consisting of the rationale of the research, the research questions, and a statement on my positionality as an

autoethnographer – is documented in the article "The I in Interpretive Research: Positionality in Qualitative Studies" (*Silliman Journal*, 45 1 2004, pp. 29-43). A second article entitled, "Schooling as Investment: The Need for a poststructuralist perspective in educational research in the Philippines" (*Silliman Journal*, 46 1 2005, pp. 14-29), discusses the theoretical framework of the study. This present article is divided into three segments: 1) the context of study which describes the research site; 2) my experiences as an autoethnographer negotiating entry into the field of study; and 3) the observations I made as a participant-observer. Because of limited space, only a sampling of the vignettes I recorded are presented here. For brevity, conversational fillers and redundancies in the interviews have been deleted.

The Context

In the mid 90s, the district Congress representative announced the availability of provincial funds to open schools in rural areas in selected regions in the country. Seeing this as an opportunity for the *Municipality of Kaugmaon*[1] to make education accessible to students in remote villages, the municipal (town) government officials suggested that the local leadership at *Paglaum* village draft a resolution justifying the need to open a high school in the area to accommodate students from four neighboring barangays (villages). This was deemed necessary because students from these villages attend high school at the *Kaugmaon Municipal High School* located in the town center about 5-10 kilometers from *Barangay Paglaum*. For many elementary school graduates in these villages who come from economically disadvantaged families, attending high school at the municipal center is a challenge – many families could not afford transportation expenses.

An extension school that would cater to the "*mga tagabukid*" (people from the hinterlands) who could not

afford to send their children to attend the Municipal High School was therefore considered as a viable alternative. In fact, two other extension schools have been operating for several years (*Kaugmaon Municipal High School* principal, Interview, Feb 23, 2003). This move also meant decongesting the *Kaugmaon Municipal High School* which serves high school students from twelve villages. Such a small campus, it can barely accommodate the student population, estimated at 1,888. Because *Paglaum* is the center of four neighboring villages, three of which are mountainous, the resolution submitted by *Paglaum* village officials to open an extension or a satellite of the municipal high school was therefore passed (Figure 1).

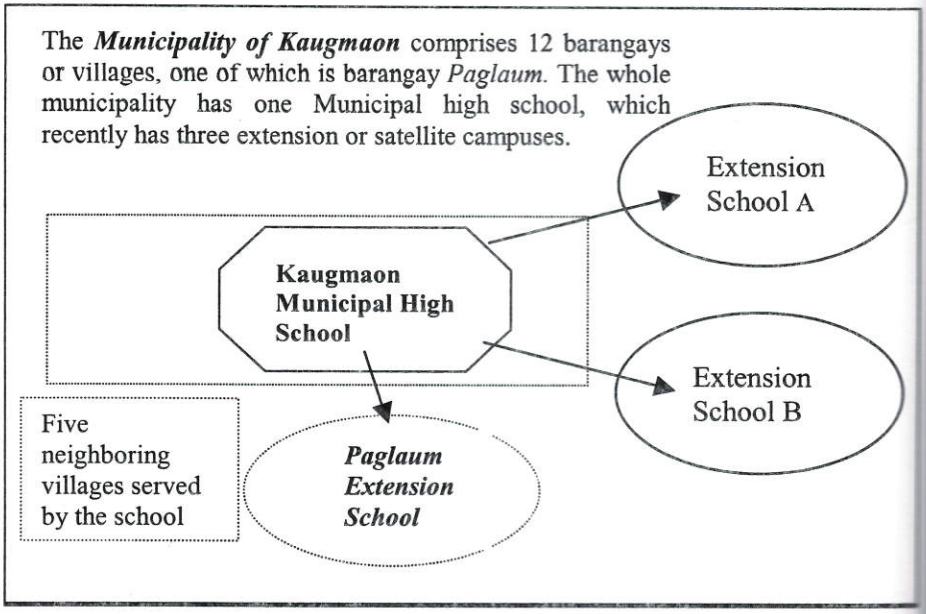

Fig. 1. The context of study

Also, a nationally acclaimed educator, philanthropist, and resident of the area, *Dr. Matinabangon*, has committed substantial donations for the extension high school. However, the extension high school in *Barangay Paglaum* had to be housed in the village elementary school compound because the designated land for the extension school is occupied by squatter residents and evicting them poses problems for both local and provincial governments. Despite *Dr. Matinabangon's* mediation, the provincial government did not have the funds for the relocation of the residents to a neighboring lot. At present, the *Paglaum Extension School* uses classrooms at the village elementary school campus, also donated by *Dr. Matinabangon*.

The school has four regular, full-time teachers, one of whom was just relocated from another school, and seven volunteer teachers. The regular teachers are paid about P8,000 or about $US200 per month, plus benefits (clothing allowance, Christmas bonus, 13th month pay, and productivity bonus), with money sourced from provincial government funds. All the regular teachers have been receiving their productivity bonus based on self, peer, and principal evaluation. Volunteer teachers are, however, paid an honorarium of only P3,000 [about US$55] a month, of which P2,000 comes from the provincial government funds and P1,000 from local (municipal) funds. Such volunteer teachers or teacher aides (a misnomer since most of the volunteers are teaching full time) comprise the majority of the teaching staff. They are hired by the provincial government and assigned to the municipality on an annual contract. Most of the volunteer teachers have passed the national civil service eligibility examination and are graduates of colleges of education. A few do not have education degrees but completed bachelor courses in a particular discipline. For instance, a BS Chemistry graduate teaches Chemistry and General Science.

Despite working on honorarium basis, volunteer teachers render their services mainly to gain the teaching experience necessary for employment as regular teachers in the public schools. Volunteer teachers may be granted regular full time status based on availability of "items" as determined by the Department of Education. Unfortunately, owing to the limited positions or available "items" for regular teachers, many of the volunteer teachers remain in such a position for several years. The second possibility for volunteer teachers to be assigned regular full time status is if a position within the locality is vacated (Telephone interview, volunteer teacher, December 2002). In *Paglaum*, many of the volunteer teachers have been teaching full-time for three to five years. During this time, they hold hopes that their honorarium will be increased and that when new teaching positions are made available, they will be hired because of their experience teaching in the public schools.

To determine who among the volunteer teachers are granted regular status, the local division office conducts a ranking system of all applicants based on interviews, their scholastic achievement, writing skills, and their vision as teachers as reflected in their essay, demonstration teaching, and results of a psychological examination. However, at the time I conducted the telephone interview on February 23, 2003, the principal expressed doubts that a regular fulltime appointment of volunteer teacher was possible because the Department of Education Secretary then had just announced that no new positions were to be made available. At the time of the study, *Paglaum Extension School* had 394 students. With 4 regular full time teachers, the teacher-student ratio was 1: 98. Considering the presence of 7 volunteer teachers, the ratio was 1:36.

The Study: Process and Progress

In an attempt to use *triangulation*[2] in this research, I employed *multiple methods of data collection* namely, a) personal and telephone interviews; b) participant observation, i.e., teaching English classes, and keeping detailed field notes on my experiences and interpretations of the data; and c) videotaping a few class sessions. I also used *multiple sources of* information, which included: a) students and alumna; b) regular and volunteer teachers including one former teacher aide; c) the school principal; and d) a *barangay* official.

For six weeks from July 8 to August 17, 2002, I volunteered as teacher assistant at *Paglaum Extension School.* My objective was to collect data by assisting the English teacher in facilitating classroom activities. However, when I visited the school principal to inquire which teacher I would be assisting, I was requested instead to teach all the English classes. Although classes officially started in mid June, an English teacher was yet to be assigned to the school in July. This was because local elections were to be held in August of that year and the local election ban on hiring by government officials was in place several weeks before and after the scheduled election. As a result, no new teachers were assigned to *Paglaum Extension School* leaving the students without English classes for over a month. I volunteered to teach third and fourth year classes, and requested permission to observe the students in their Science and Math classes as well.

> Despite the fact that I had considered myself an "insider," I realized that in many respects I was far removed from the realities that students faced at *Paglaum Extension School.* Although I graduated from a village elementary school and municipal high school and had experienced marginalization and silencing in academic settings, I had the opportunity to work with "oldtimers" or individuals familiar with the secondary Discourses needed for one to gain entry into a community. These

> oldtimers provided scaffolding for my initiation into schooling as a community of practice (Gee, 1996, p. 139).

James Gee describes Discourses as the "socially accepted association[s] among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts', of feeling, believing, valuing, acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role (p. 131). Gee makes distinctions between two kinds of Discourses—Primary and Secondary Discourses. Primary Discourses, as described by Gee, refer to the Discourses people are born into while secondary Discourses refer to the "Discourses in institutions outside of the family such as schools and are learned by engaging in their practices" (Gee, 1987, in Zamel & Spack, 1998, p. 56). Gee further posits that "discourses are mastered through apprenticeship, not through learning." It is this context that "oldtimers" are needed to provided scaffolding in the process of the learners' apprenticeship into the secondary Discourses (Gee, 1996, p. 139).

At the time of my study, I was a teacher-researcher from a university in the United States. I completed my undergraduate education in a prestigious university in the Philippines and have been teaching in a private school. Thus, I was, in many aspects, an outsider:

> I did not know what to expect when I entered the school site. Although I was born and raised in a *barangay* (village), completed my secondary education in a municipal high school, and had learned about the opening of an "extension high school" in our village, I have never observed any of the classes before nor visited any of the classrooms. The six-year old extension high school, having no campus of its own, was housed in the

village elementary school compound. It consists of three "temporary classrooms", one new concrete classroom, and three rooms "borrowed" from the Elementary School building.

Walking into the campus, I saw students peering from the iron rails that served as classroom walls. When I stepped into the third year classroom, the students stood up and greeted me with enthusiasm. They had been informed about my coming to school as a volunteer English teacher. I told the students to take their seats so we could get to know each other. About twenty students remained standing. *Wala mi bangko ma'am!* (We have no seats, ma'am!), they protested. I froze, not knowing what to say. I looked around. About 90 students were packed in the room, only one fluorescent tube was working, and majority of the students were drenched with perspiration. "It's a tough life, ma'am, because whoever comes to class first gets to have the seats. But those of us from the mountains are disadvantaged [compared to the students living close to the school]. At six a.m., some of us are already walking down the hills to get here. But when we arrive in school, most of the seats have already been taken, so we have to remain standing during the class."

Field Notes, July 9, 2002

Within that first week, I went to the principal's office, located at the main campus, which was about five kilometers from *Paglaum Extension School*, to explain the need for chairs. She immediately showed me some "extra" seats at the main campus that could be transported to the extension school. The principal remarked that although the teachers were informed about these extra chairs, no one came to pick them up. It was obvious that since *Paglaum Extension School* is about five kilometers from the main campus, it would

cost money to transport the chairs there. On the same day, she requested the office of the municipal mayor to provide transportation so that when I returned to the class the next day, the new chairs were already delivered. Nevertheless, since all but six students were seated, I also ended up approaching the *barangay* captain to request him to donate a bench for the rest of the students. On Friday of that week, all the students were seated. One more major hurdle remained – the students did not have books for their English classes since the opening of classes because it was the teacher's responsibility to collect them from the municipal high school and distribute them to the students. And since there was no teacher assigned in the school then, the books remained at the principal's office.

So making the trip to the Principal's office the next day, I found several unopened boxes of new English books for fourth year students there. Since there were none for third year students, I was referred to another English teacher so I could borrow some "extra" books for the students at *Paglaum*. When I finally managed to distribute the books to the students, the student-book ratio of 2:1 was a source of great surprise for the entire class. According to the students, books were often so scarce they had to spend most of the class time copying long texts from the board.

My role as participant observer went beyond assisting students in their classes and teaching them English everyday, five days a week. At the same time, I listened to their concerns; assisted a student who needed to write a speech in English as the school representative in a social function; discussed possibilities for scholarships with them; served as their spokesperson on their concerns about malpractice in school, bringing these issues to the attention of the village captain. I even brought in an amplifier system so that all 90 students could hear me as I read some of their essays written in English to show to the class that

they can write effectively in English when they are provided the time and the means to do so.

With the principal, I shared the students' concerns while also clarifying my role as researcher. I also conducted a phone interview with her regarding her interpretation and explanation of data I had collected from both teachers and students during the interviews. Even though I withdrew from the site after six weeks of teaching, I continued for about seven months to communicate with three of the participants through e-mail and telephone conversations.

From these multiple sources of information and multiple methods of data collection, four topics emerged from the data: 1) ways in which authoritative discourses, such as the commonly accepted notion that one's "intelligence" is measured by one's proficiency in English; 2) ways in which disciplinary technology, such as labeling a group of students as "taga-bukid" (people from the mountains), silence and marginalize students and teachers; 3) the extent of agency that students, teachers, and administration exercised as well as the strategies they use to address unequal power relations; and 4) factors internal and external to the school that limited the agency of students, teachers, and administration and contributed to the marginalization and silencing of some participants.

Tagabukid: On peripheral participation, apprenticeship, and marginalization

As earlier noted, *Paglaum Extension School* was established to provide students from remote rural communities access to inexpensive high school education. Since many families could not afford to send their children to the municipal high school because of transportation expenses, the school was essentially "transported" to the localities. The economically disadvantaged profile of the population in this area is

reflected in the Philippine National Statistics data on the region where *Barangay Paglaum* is situated: the poverty incidence in the area is 53.6% in 1997 and 57.5% in 2000 in the context where the rural areas in the whole country has a poverty incidence of 50.7% in 1997 and 54% in 2000. This figure is based on the poverty threshold per family of P8,250 (about US$165) per month in 1997 and P10,287 (about US $205) per month in 2000 (http://www.dirp.pids.gov.ph).

Recognizing the economic and educational needs of *Paglaum Extension School,* the provincial government, through the initiative of the Congressman, allotted funds for the opening of the extension school. Yet, ironically, the establishment of "extension" school has also unwittingly positioned the school in a marginalized stance. Participants of the study—students, teachers, and the administration—collectively perceived the school, a network of individuals from nearby mountainous communities, as the school for the "*taga-bukid*" and "*only* an extension school."

According to one teacher, students as well as some teachers do not invest as much as they should in schooling because they perceive the school as "*only* an extension school" or "*just* an extension school." Unlike those who attend the municipal high school or any of the schools in the city, students at *Paglaum* do not exhibit practices that the community normally associates with schooling. They do not have to get up early in the morning, wait for public transportation, and spend on academic-related expenses such as transportation and financial contributions. The school does not have a library, a guidance counselor, or an in-house principal or administrator since the principal holds office at the main campus, i.e., at the *Kaugmaon High School* located at the town center, about five kilometers from village *Paglaum.* The same teacher noted:

> Their [the students'] perception of themselves is relative to their perception of the kind of learning they can get from some other school. Actually, they will say that they are studying in this barrio high school...so, it is a "*ra*" [this is only a barrio high school] which is... the statement "ra", *Paglaum* "ra". [*Paglaum* is ONLY a village school]. They think that they can only get a minimum or inferior quality education because this is a local school, and of course they know that the facilities available are very minimal. So, students usually say that the teachers may be less interested to really give them the best education. They also think that they don't have to really do or try their best because this is just a barrio high school and the teachers make them pass anyway (Personal interview, former volunteer teacher, August 15, 2002).

The same sentiment was repeatedly mentioned by the students during the interviews. The students felt that the teachers did not care about their schooling. *Malantip*, one of the students stated:

> *...Ang ilaha, kon unsay nakat-unan sa estudyante, dili nila pun-an. Kon unsay inyong nakat-unan, mao ra na. Libro namo diri, kulang gyud. Mabitin gyud mi dirig mga libro ma'am... Dili pareha nimo ma'am nga naningkamot nga maku-an gyud mi ug libro. Mao ra na. Kanang lingkuranan, mao ra na kay ang ubang maestra diri dili na man pod sila magku-an kon unsay kahimtang sa ilang estudyante, lisod ba o wala, ang ilaha, matudlu-an lang nila. Mao ray ilaha gyud.*
>
> (To them, whatever we learn, that's it. They do not add to our knowledge. Our books here, they're really insufficient. [But they did not do anything about it], unlike you, who strive to obtain the books. Also, the chairs, some teachers are not concerned at all as to the condition of the students - whether they're in difficult

> circumstances or have nothing [to sit on]. To them, as long as they are teaching, that is it.) [*Malantip*, 4th year student, personal interview, August 2002]

In an interview, the principal admitted that lack of books had been a perennial problem in public schools, particularly those in rural communities. However, with the recently enacted "one book per child program" of the Secretary of Education, this scenario, according to her, is "quickly changing." The principal's concern, however, was whether the books sent to the schools were actually distributed to the students. According to the principal:

> ...the memo clearly states that all books must be taken out of the stock rooms and distributed to students. But some teachers do not do so because they know they will be responsible for replacing the book if a student drops out of school without returning the book or loses it. (Telephone interview, February 23, 2003)

Considering that a majority of the teachers in the school were volunteer teachers who were receiving a meager honorarium of P2,600 - P3000 (about $50) a month, having to pay for several lost books at the end of the school year was a risk these teachers simply could not afford to take. So, even if there were available books in the stock rooms, they did not use all of them. Instead, the teachers asked students to copy long passages from the few books made available to a select group of students—those the teachers deemed able to pay for the cost of lost books.

The students, however, believed that this [copying long passages from books] was a "waste of time." *Dili mi motu-on. Dili. Kay naa may copy-hon nga tag-as kaayo.* [We don't study. We don't because the texts that we need to copy are too long]. Since the text in the subjects students consider important is in English, students felt

the need for discussion or teacher's explanation. However, the students claimed that when they asked for explanation, some of their teachers either ignored or reprimanded them for not paying attention. The students complained that instead of acknowledging students' questions on relatively complex concepts, some teachers put the blame on the students. According to *Kalooy*, one of the student-respondents:

> *Sa pulo kabuok maestra diri, morag tulo ray maarang-arang. Kay pananglitan kuno, kon mo-discuss sila, nya mo-explain sila, nya get ¼ . Mo-question mi, mangisog. Bahala na mo diha kay wala naminaw. Problema ra nas wala naminaw.*
>
> (Of the ten teachers here, it looks like only three are ok. Because for instance, when they discuss, then they explain. Then, they right away tell us to get ¼ sheet of paper for a test... If we ask questions, they get angry. They say: it is up to you to listen. It is your problem if you were not listening.) [Personal interview, Kalooy, school alumna, August 17, 2002]

In a study on drop-outs, Stevenson, & Ellsworth (1993) observed a similar behavior: "Virtually all dropouts... criticized the school and identified specific personnel and policies... such as attitude exhibited by teachers.... A frequent criticism... was a seeming lack of caring among teachers, administrators, and counselors" (p. 264). Teachers' lack of proficiency in the medium of instruction—English—was also pointed out by some students. A few recalled asking a teacher what an English concept meant, but could only remember the teacher providing an erroneous explanation. "*Far out kaayo iyang example, ma'am.*" (The example was out of context, ma'am). When one of the students explained the concept, the teacher admitted the mistake. That many teachers even of subjects taught in English are

not proficient in the language has already been identified in several studies. In fact, the Philippine Education Commission Report (1991) emphasized such concern among Filipino teachers. The chapter "The teacher: At the heart of the problem" states:

> ... the teacher is the single most important factor in education. Her or his far-reaching influence as the agent of constructive change in society is beyond question, (p. 24). [Yet], the 1987 study conducted by the Institute for Science and Mathematics Education showed that the English understanding of a sample of elementary school teachers was equivalent to only Grade 7 (p. 12).

Perhaps, because of these limitations and several other factors, many teachers at *Paglaum Extension School* subscribe to what Freire (1972) calls the "banking model of education" (in Watson-Gegeo, & Welchman-Gegeo, p. 69). The majority of the participants described schooling as copying chapters or units from the teacher's book, followed by a brief discussion usually in the local dialect, and then a test. One teacher, however, reasoned that copying is inevitable because of the lack or absence of books. Others reiterated what the principal stated in the interview—teachers could not afford to pay the cost of lost or missing books. Another teacher stressed that much of the class activity involves copying from the book because students like to be "spoonfed":

> *Dili pod. Gusto nila spoon-feeding ilang gusto ba...Sige ra kag sulti, sulat sulat. Mao ra. Maski pag moingon kang mag-test ta ugma, zero pod gani gihapon. Dili god na motu-on.. Kanang study habits nila, wala sila ana.*
>
> (No, all the students want is spoon feeding, They want the teacher to keep on lecturing, and they keep on

writing. Even if you inform them that they will have a test the next day, they still get zero. They do not study. They don't have good study habits). [Personal interview, regular teacher, July 2003]

Majority of the students interviewed, however, appreciated teachers who used interactive classroom strategies. They also pointed out that most of those who employed interesting strategies were volunteer teachers. In an interview, the said teachers who attempted to use innovative teaching strategies or initiated reforms such as the establishment of resource room or makeshift library claimed that they do not get peer support for such initiatives. One volunteer teacher expressed his disappointment during the interview:

> Actually, this is not supposed to be a problem; this is supposed to be a blessing but the regular teachers are taking it the wrong way because teacher aides/volunteer teachers like me, in the past, try to teach the best way we could: we provide visual aids, we teach conscientiously, we provide materials of course, at our own expense. We had film showing; we bring our own audio material [such as] cassette recorder. Mao lagi na, kataw-an mis mga regular ingnon nga "O, tingalig taga-an mo ug medal nga bagol," meaning nga i-mock mi ba. Morag moingon nga naningkamot mog maayo uy. Trabaho ra mog igo-igo sa inyong honorarium nga baling gamaya.. [But what was the response? The regular teachers laughed at us and said: Oh, you might get a medal made of coconut shell for that. We felt mocked. It seems like they're telling us to work commensurate to the meager honorarium that we were receiving.] (Personal interview, former volunteer teacher. August 15, 2002).

The same dynamics was observed by Watson-Gegeo, & Welchman-Gegeo (1995) in their study of language and power in the Solomon islands. They noted that "teachers who see beyond the exam-based vision of teaching become demoralized by their own poor training and the lack of institutional support, so that their creativity is suppressed...." (p. 69).

Yet, it is worth noting that even within this context, students do advance their agency to ensure that effective school programs are maintained and corrupt practices are exposed. For example, students at *Paglaum Extension School* initiated a signature campaign against a teacher who had allegedly embezzled student funds. On one occasion, they offered suggestions how best they might be prepared for college, such as allotting time for computer classes; in another they commended teachers who employed interactive activities in their classes. They even created counter discourses considered unconventional and radical by local authorities—vandalizing the classroom by painting a message for a teacher who was allegedly involved in unfair computation of students' grades (Personal interview, student participant, July 2002).

However, their attempts have been continually suppressed by authoritative discourses. Three instances repeatedly mentioned by students during the interview exemplify such reality. Such relate to the grading system, observed corrupt practices by a teacher, and apprenticeship into college and the ability to use English for academic purposes.

English as medium of instruction: Equalizer or stratifier?

Like most schools in the Philippines, the satellite school at *Paglaum* uses English as the medium of instruction in core courses, such as Science and Mathematics. However, although the Philippines has the reputation as a country where English is used a

second language, in many rural villages such as *Paglaum*, English may not even be considered as such: many of the students are not exposed to literacy and media resources in English. Furthermore, many of them reported having difficulty finding individuals who can provide scaffolding in their apprenticeship into the Secondary Discourses used in school. One participant lamented that he had difficulty with assignments in English and other classes taught in English because he lacked the vocabulary to understand and express his thoughts in English. His family was unable to assist him because his parents and neighbors had low educational attainment. Moreover, because of financial constraints, his family could not afford a dictionary, so he had to go to neighbors' houses to borrow one. Not surprisingly, all the participants in this study were unanimous in pointing out the importance of acquiring proficiency in English for both the school and the work place. In fact, the ability to communicate in English is regarded of such value that teachers and students alike equate it with intelligence. As this student-respondent pointed out:

> *Bugo-bugo ko kay menos man god ko sa English. Lugos ko kabalog grammar. Kanang ubang mga words, dili pod nako masabtan kay walay Dictionary sa amo mohulam god kog dictionary sa among mga silingan… kay ang English man god baling importanteha kaayo bisag asa ka, mo-langyaw kag laing lugar, English man god. Mo-apply kag trabaho, maayog Tagalog nang i-kuan, English man goy I-kuan nimo god.*
>
> (I am quite dumb because my English is not good. I have problems with grammar. I don't understand some of the words and because we do not have a dictionary at home, I have to borrow from neighbors because English is very important wherever you may go. If you go to other places to apply for a job, good English is required of you. It would have been good if we could use Tagalog,

but if we want better jobs, it is English that is required.) [Personal interview, August 2002].

Several Philippine educators have also expressed concern over the effects of students' difficulty in communicating in English for academic purposes on their self-esteem and sense of identity. In her report to the Congressional Oversight Committee on Education, Acuña (1994) pointed out that the insistence on the use of English as medium of instruction place students from poor, rural communities who have very limited access to the language of power at a disadvantage. She further argues that "when children are unable to speak the language of the school, we have perpetuated what colonizers for years failed to teach us—love what is not ours and reject our own.... Public education is meant as a socialization agency where children are prepared for life." Unless schooling is relevant to their own lives, they will not fully invest in it (Acuña, 1994, pp. 106-106). However, influential educators in the country such as Andrew Gonzalez(1999) emphasized that considering present economic realities, English is still the language of aspiration and social mobility... The need for English for utilitarian purposes [therefore] demands differentiation of society, degrees of competence, and topics (or registers). In other words, in Philippine society in the twenty-first century, who needs English? To what degree of competence? In what domains? For which topics (or registers?) up to what proportion of society's members? (p. 68)

Given such views, secondary Discourses used in the academia should be identified and explicitly taught. The students themselves have identified aspects of their lives that require the use of English. Such could be the focus of programs aimed at addressing the concern of students who are not familiar with secondary Discourses in schools.

Similarly, in a study on language, identity, and socioeconomic development, Sibayan (1984) found that about 47.3% of the respondents, i.e., a sampling of Filipino government and private agency employees who live in Metro Manila, think that the use of English as medium of instruction has made Filipinos "a greater people"; seven out of 10 respondents say that "English has contributed to our economic progress," and "8 out of 10 (81%) believe that it had made us internationally known" (p.15). The study also reveals that "seventy-seven percent of the respondents consider the schools as the place where they learnt most of their skills "in English], with only 8% indicating the home as the source of learning (p.47). Moreover, "many government and education officials favor English as the medium of instruction. English is seen as a language necessary to gain high status in government and society and to develop better ... communication skills for both local and global use. It is widely accepted that students can gain scientific and technological knowledge through English." For example, Fidel V. Ramos, former president of the Philippines said:

> Since we have that comparative advantage in English, by all means let us maintain the advantage so that we can be more competitive in business and production and perhaps in education in this part of the globe. (Language policy for education in the Philippines, p. 7)

In this study most of the students interviewed expressed the desire to leave the Philippines and earn US dollars to improve the socio-economic status of their families. In a context where most of the family's daily income is US$3 a day, gaining employment in countries like Hongkong, Japan, the Middle East, or the United States offers financial security. This requires proficiency in English.

As data from this study show, the role of *Paglaum Extension School* as the setting for initiating students to schooling as a secondary Discourse cannot be underestimated. Because many of the students come from homes where parents are either too busy surviving or have too little academic background to assist them with their assignments, their primary Discourses differ greatly from the secondary Discourses in school. Thus, in the hope that literacy will eventually provide their children with better job opportunities, parents rely on the school as the institution that provides apprenticeship for students and on teachers as the "old timers" who will provide the much-needed assistance for such apprenticeship into the academia.

Yet, the school does not have established programs to prepare students for legitimate participation in schooling. School Discourses such as the use of English as medium of communication in major subjects, critical thinking, conducting library research, note-taking, and answering essay examinations in English, and using computers differ greatly from students' home discourses. *Paglaum Extension School* has no coherent program to address these needs. Although most of the students interviewed articulated clear professional goals, they could not concretely describe their plans on how to get there. They do have imagined communities, but they do not have the knowledge and experience that would facilitate their apprenticeship into such communities. *Malantip,* the top student of fourth year class states:

> *Plano ta nako ma'am, sa-una mo-kuan ta kog korso nga four years gani ma'am, pero kay pobre lagi mi, nya naa pa koy mga manghod nga gasunod nako, nya ug mo-eskwela ko, naglibog lagi kog unsay akong ku-an kay ang akong mama niana sya nga ganahan silang makahuman kog college. Bisag ako, moku-an kuno kog scholarship, ma'am, para maka-menos ko. Nya niingon ko nga dugay*

mohuman akong pag-eskwela, nya mo-board pa. Akong plano, mo-eskwela kog four years nga kurso. Unsaon? Naglibog pod ko kay akong ku-an, nalibog kog unsay akong unahon ug ku-an.

(I plan to finish a four-year course, but we are poor, and I still have several younger siblings to support. If I go to college, I am confused. I do not know what to do because my mother wants me to complete a college degree. I want the same for myself, try to find some scholarship, ma'am, so that I can support myself. But I think four years is a long time. It takes time to finish a degree, then take the board exams. I plan to complete a four-year course, but how? I am confused. I am so confused as to what to do first.) [Personal interview, Malantip, August 2002]

When asked if the school provided information about scholarships or how to apply for them, both teachers and students admitted that no such program exists. Students repeatedly mentioned during the interviews that they were not confident about being admitted to college because of poor scholastic preparation. The students were aware not only of their teachers' inadequacies but their lack of concern as well, problems compounded by the lack of school resources. A former volunteer teacher also confirmed the absence of a coherent program that provides information on scholarship or grant application procedures:

I heard that there is such program in the main campus but not in this local school. So, basically, they only get scholarships if they belong to the top five of the graduating class. If you ask the average and above average if they know how to get scholarships or how to avail of this working student privileges, I don't think they know it. There has been no effort on the part of the teachers, me included

> (laughs), to at least update students on how they can go about it. [Personal interview, August 2002]

Although the school principal also acknowledged the absence of such a program at the extension school, she pointed out that a similar activity is conducted by representatives from neighboring schools who visit high schools to advertise their programs. She stressed that although the school does not have an in-house career orientation program, representatives from different colleges and universities in the city and a major urban city in the neighboring islands talk to graduating seniors every year to present the different programs offered in their respective universities and colleges. According to her, "extension schools have available scholarships not even made available to students in the main campus. But the reason that students were not able to avail of these scholarships was that they did not meet the grade requirements. In the past, even honor students were not qualified because they had grades below 80 in some of their classes in their lower years" [Telephone interview, February 2003]. However, the top students and some teachers at *Paglaum Extension School* consistently explained that students do not meet grade requirements for scholarships primarily because the school has instituted a ceiling or limit on grades for students at the satellite schools.

The silencing of critical voices

One of the specific instances of how both overt and covert attempts at silencing oppositional voices among the student population operate at the extension school is illustrated by the experiences of *Silayan*, one of the bright students in this school.

Silayan graduated at the top of her class in the past school year. The living room of her family's bamboo shack was decorated with medals and certificates she won in several village and municipal competitions.

During her graduation, *Dr. Matinabangon* awarded her a cash price for tuition fees in the city's community college. *Dr. Matinabangon* also committed himself to finance her tuition expenses until her graduation and had invited her to pay him a visit so they could discuss the matter. A year later, *Silayan* was still out of school and during this time had worked temporarily as a shop assistant in a neighboring island. Despite the opportunity made available to her, she was not able to gain entry into college. Instead, the money *Dr. Matinabangon* gave her was used by her family to buy bamboo chairs for their living room. Notwitstanding her desire to complete a college degree so she could get a better job and help support her family, she had not contacted *Dr. Matinabangon* about the scholarship he had promised because she was embarrassed to show him her grades. Although she was the top student of the class, her general average was only 83, much lower than the minimum requirement for scholarships in community colleges and universities, which is 85.

In an interview, *Silayan* voiced her disenfranchisement regarding her getting a low grade, insisting that she deserved a much higher grade than what she got. It is known that there is a school policy prohibiting teachers from giving "high" grades to students at the satellite schools. According to her, she was so discouraged and lost interest in her studies when she learned about the policy from one of her teachers. Although she had initially considered raising the concern with school authorities, her attempts were foiled by several factors:

> *Na-discouraged ko. Gasabot mi sa akong kauban ba nga gahuna-huna sya nga dili sya deserving sa iyang grade. Gasabot mi nga mo-ku-an mi sa principal. Nya naa man poy gaiingon among classmate nga ayaw na lang kay samok na pod. Samok na kaayo kay kita na poy makaingon nga mag-away na pod sila. Ako na man poy madaot nya. Mosamot na pod.*

> (I was discouraged. Another student who also thought he deserved a much better grade convinced me to discuss the matter with the principal. But some of our classmates advised us not to do it because it would only cause more trouble. They fear that we might cause more conflicts among our teachers. Then, we will be at the losing end. It would only worsen the situation.)

Silayan explained that she and her classmates did not articulate their objections because they knew that when some of their teachers got offended, they would either publicly humiliate the student who raised objections or fail the entire class. She and her classmates knew the case of a student who was not able to graduate because she complained about a teacher's behavior to local authorities. As a result, she had to take summer classes, which means additional expense for the family (Personal interview, August 15, 2002.)

The fact that the grading policy positions students at a disadvantage was also confirmed by a regular teacher. According to this teacher, the students were informed at the start of the school year that none of them will graduate with honors because of their low grades in the preceding years. This teacher has observed that as a result of this practice, the students are discouraged and lose their motivation to study.

As *Silayan's* case illustrates, it appears that serious speech acts—that teachers are the authority in schools and such authority cannot be questioned—not only inhibit students from "complaining" about their grades but mute all their attempts at asserting their agency. As many students in this school were only too familiar, questioning such authority could only lead to failure in class or inability to finish high school the soonest time possible. Meanwhile, failing high school would mean that students must take summer classes in a private or public school elsewhere since no summer classes are offered at *Paglaum Extension School.* For the

economically-disadvantaged families of these students, this means additional expense for tuition fees and transportation—money they simply did not have. Thus, the economic dimension of failing in school conspires with the oppressive powers of the school authorities to disenfranchise students from giving voice to legitimate concerns. Knowing only too well that compliance and accommodation would most likely benefit them while resistance and opposition would further place them in a disadvantaged position, students willfully resort to silence as a strategic defense, in the end making themselves unwitting participants in their own oppression. A fourth year student stated:

> *Kon mo-reklamo ka [kabahin sa grado], mo-ingon nya na sila nga "ngano, diskompyado ka sa imong grado?" Ingon ana, daghan nag estorya, dayon, mag-lain, lainan man ko kay dumtan nya ko anang maestraha kay ingon ana nga ku-an kaayo ko diskompyado ko sa akong grado... wala na lang ko maglangas."*
>
> (If you complain [about your grade], they would question you. So, you have complaints about your grade? Something like that. It's disheartening because they take it personally and the teacher becomes bitter towards you because you complained about your grade. So, I did not voice my complaints.)

The same observation was expressed by a former volunteer teacher. She claimed that "even with the organization of the student government, students cannot dismiss the fear that these teachers can actually pull their grades down. They just want to finish high school. They just want to pass this stage. So they just talk to other people about it, but generally they are afraid." (Personal interview, August 17, 2002).

This fear and resignation are demonstrated not only in the way students address their concern about

the grading system but also in their reaction to the alleged corruption of one of the teachers. It was reported that the teacher had collected 10 pesos from every student ostensibly to buy a basketball, which did not materialize. Although the students initiated a signature campaign which they submitted to their head teacher – the "unofficial" coordinator of the teaching staff – the students were never informed whether the letter was indeed forwarded to the principal. When they did not get any response from the administration, the students, including some officers of the student government, did not bother to pursue the complaint. Although this might be explained by the distance of the principal's office to the extension school, the main reason that kept students from pursuing their complaint was primarily their fear of the consequences of opposition or negotiation, as the following student interview attested:

> *Ni-reklamo mi ana ni Ma'am Maayo, pero wala man nadayon. Ambot nila. Kami god tanan ato namirma nga matangtang nang maestroha kay wala man mi nakita ba. Kadto pong fluorescent diha sa pikas room. Wala pod mi nakita pod. Hangtod karon gani, wala gani mi nakita pod. Kon paamutan mi, mo-amot gihapon ko, para kon wala gihapon daghan na ming ika-kuan nga wala god mi nakita aron matangtang nang maestroha. Walay klaro nang maestroha gani. Daghan na ganing ni – reklamo, nisulat sa principal... wala dagway nadayon. Ambot lamang, first year man to... kay ni-reklamo anang amot-amot, wala man na-dayon. Mahadlok dagway sila... basig mahadlok kay hagbungon ba. Bisan ako, mahadlok kong mahagbong kay mahagbong kag usa ka subject nimo, kapoy na kaayog balik ba. Dili na lamang ko masaba.*
>
> (We complained about it to Ma'am Maayo, but the complaint was not pursued. I don't know why. All of us signed the letter because we wanted the teacher

> out because he had been collecting money and we did not see anything out of it. That includes the contribution for the fluorescent tube for the other room. We also did not see that... until now. As for me, if he asks us to contribute again, I would contribute again, and then, if nothing materializes again, we have more bases to expel that teacher. That teacher is no good. We even complained against him. We wrote a letter to the principal but it was not forwarded. I have no idea what happened. I was only a first year student then. We complained because he had asked us to contribute money several times.. Maybe, [our complaint] was not pursued because they were probably scared of the teacher. They fear that he might fail us. Yes, they fear failure... I would, too. I am afraid that the teacher might give me a failing grade for the course because it is tiresome to repeat the same class. So, I'd rather keep quiet.) [Personal interview, Maligdong, 3rd year student].

Davidson (1996) observed the same "conflicting projection of identity" in her study of minority students in the United States. It appears that students with critical voices are "at once determined to challenge and infiltrate, yet resigned to... marginalization ...." (p. 65).

When I inquired about this letter in one of our interviews, the principal expressed no knowledge of it. However, according to her, she had already addressed the issue on student financial contributions by calling the faculty to a meeting and reminding them of the need to comply with DEC (Department of Education and Culture) memorandum, which prohibits teachers from collecting financial contribution from students without the approval of the parents. At this meeting, the principal warned the teachers that such memo would be strictly enforced. However, because, as she claimed, she did not receive any formal, written

complaint regarding the alleged corrupt practice, she could not take any action against the teacher.

Bourne (2001) points out that in classroom settings, students respond to unequal power relations by using compliance, negotiation, or opposition. In the case of the *Paglaum extension School*, the students' attempts at negotiation or direct opposition were unsuccessful and rarely displayed or pursued, unlike those of the participants in related studies (see Willis, 1977). For example, the students discussed their complaints with their peers and with some of their teachers, but they did not submit any formal complaint to the administration. They accepted the alleged unfair administrative policy on grading as part of the school "*habitus*, or accepted 'common sense'" (Bourne, 2001, p. 108). As already mentioned, some of the teacher-respondents also confirmed the role of the school administration in setting the grades that should be given to the students regardless of their performance. According to one of the teachers, the principal issued letters of instruction requiring them to comply with this particular administrative policy. In the interview, she explained:

> They [the school administration] instituted a quota of 92%, which is unfair to the students, because some of them deserve a 95. I even kept the letter from the principal that states such a limitation. I had to abide by the 92% cut off. I remember what was in the communication. It mentioned that there are honor students at the main campus whose grades are only 80 something. It looks like she is comparing the kids here with students at the main campus. In other words, students at the main campus are at higher level, therefore students at the satellite schools should not be given grades higher than those at the main campus. That's the conclusion I arrived at.

[Personal interview, Mrs. Silingan, volunteer teacher, August 2002]

This practice lends support to Stevenson & Ellworth's (1993) observation. In their review on the literature on drop-outs and the silencing of critical voices in the school setting, the authors pointed out that:

> ...the phenomenon of dropping out is most prominently linked to dysfunctional aspects of drop-outs' personal lives and family circumstances. Most of the accounts present the possibility of individuals "ris[ing] above the circumstances, irrespective of how bad those circumstances are. However, the focus on their personal circumstances serves to deflect public attention away from questioning the role that school policies and practices might play in either failing to respond to or exacerbating the problems of youth in such dire conditions (p. 262). The tendency to label dropouts as incompetent in school because they possess characteristics identified as the products of deficient homes and cultural backgrounds means that their critiques are not recognized. Thus, the criticism of schools as sites of unequal opportunities is silenced. (p. 263)

When asked how she responded to the letter she received, the volunteer teacher said she simply abided by the principal's order. Although she felt that the policy marginalizes her students, she had no choice but to accede. In the context where teachers have no security of tenure and are "volunteering" so they would get better recommendation and better chances of getting a regular status, teachers too, like their students, have no choice but to opt for compliance and accommodation.

In an interview, the principal explained why she had to write the memo on grades:

> I was surprised to see that students from Paglaum Extension School were getting a grade of 89, 90, 93. One hundred percent of the students passed the class. The teacher was new, so I had to return the grades and inform her that they were too high... Sa main campus gani, ang grado, highest gani 88%, nya sila didto sa bukid taas kayo. Moingon nya sila nga "Ah, ang tagabukid, dagko kaayo ug grado." Morag dili katu-ohan. Nya i-komparar sa uban, maulaw ta, kay dili man pod sila maka-daog sa mga contests.
>
> (At the main campus the highest grade was 88%; yet those in the mountains gave really high grades. They might say "Oh, how come those from the mountains have high grades. The grades were too high. It seems unbelievable. And then, when you compare them with others, it is embarrassing because these students have not been winning in [inter-school] competitions.)

The principal justified her decision to set a ceiling for highest grades purportedly to protect students and the satellite school from embarrassment. Her belief was that it would be much better for students to have a low grade yet establish their excellent performance in inter-school competitions than for them to have high grades while showing dismal performance in such contests (Telephone interview, February 23, 2003). Although seemingly well intentioned, the principal's attitude limits students' possibilities of getting the minimum grades for scholarship application or entry to particular colleges. Compounding the difficulty for students is the widespread perception that the standard of the school resides in the students' grades, not in the quality of education it provides the students. Students have consistently mentioned in the interviews that the school has not sufficiently prepared them for college as demonstrated by the dearth of books and

other resources and facilities as well as by the incompetence of their teachers, whose lack of mastery of the subjects that they teach and ignorance of effective teaching strategies are matched only by their lack of concern for their students. Yet despite the persistence of these complaints and the legitimacy of students' concerns, no dialogue has been conducted to address such issues.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The perception that the students' identity as "*taga-bukid*" is synonymous with inferior academic standing and inability to speak or understand texts in English is closely linked with the endemic impoverishment in the countrysides and lack of education of many families in the hinterlands. The term "*taga-bukid*" (people from the hinterlands) is viewed as a deficit implying not only backwardness but also the lack of financial resources and social networks needed to support students' investment in schooling. From this perspective, the "*taga-bukid*" is seen as individuals most unlikely able to meet the academic standards of the school and who have no previous knowledge of secondary Discourses necessary to navigate successfully through high school. One of the volunteer teachers interviewed stated:

> To them, being in *Paglaum* is it. This is where they learn what high school is, and so they learn that high school is sitting and copying tons of pages from the book, maybe a short discussion, and then a test the next day. They have very little idea of what high school is beyond this campus. And look, we don't have a library, we have no computers, and some teachers couldn't care less if the students are present or absent because there are too many students cramped in one classroom. That is high school to them. [Personal interview, August 2002]

Students have difficulty accomplishing activities essential to schooling because many of them have no prior exposure to or knowledge of such practices. For example, one teacher interviewed stressed that students fail the examinations because they do not have good study habits and do not even know how to take effective notes. Yet, she admitted that teachers have also failed in teaching students how to take notes, answer essay examinations, or do library research – practices that are expected of them not only in high school but especially in college.

Students' attempts at advancing their agency are also constrained by serious speech acts and the *habitus*, the persistent belief that it is to the student's advantage not to question the position of teachers and administrators. To illustrate, a student arguing for the importance of computers not only in learning but in gaining access to future job prospects, tried to communicate these views to her teacher. Instead of being supportive of the idea, the teacher only discouraged this student, leaving her feeling helpless and dismayed.

Although students were aware that they deserved a better education than they were getting and have articulated these sentiments to the school authorities, they have remained largely unsuccessful in effecting change in the system primarily because they themselves considered it inappropriate to raise their complaints directly to the principal. They relied on some of their teachers to represent their voices to the administration, although such strategy had been mainly ineffective. Despite the students' attempts to project their agency, their efforts at advancing their agenda did not go beyond verbal protests because of a lack of adequate school programs and lack of competent personnel such as guidance counselors to give them advice. Peirce (1995) suggests that individuals have human agency and as such the positions that people

are situated in are "open to argument." She posits that one could resist marginalization and "set up counter discourses" to advance his/her agency and place him/her in a powerful stance (pp 15-16). However, in this context, the degree to which the participants—students, teachers, and school administrators—are able to advance their human agency is circumscribed by the circumstances in which they find themselves.

The interview with students also revealed their fears of ending up being either publicly insulted or failed in class when their complaint involves a teacher. To the students, this was a risk not worth taking. Although there is evidence that students have indeed tried to assert their agency, their disappointing experiences in expressing their opposition have only served to discouraged them. To them, opposition as a means of addressing power inequalities is an option that only leads to further marginalization, such as the possibility of failing a class or public humiliation. In the end, aware that opting for negotiation or opposition would only put them at the losing end, they take the line of least resistance—silence or compliance.

Human agency is limited to one's possibilities for legitimate participation. According to Foucault, "power does not determine others but rather structures the possible field of action, 'guiding the course of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome'" (Foucault, 1985, cited in Davidson, 1996, p. 5). The serious speech acts hegemonically perpetuated at *Paglaum Extension School* place students at a default position of compliance and resignation. With the absence or lack of "oldtimers" who could assist students in navigating through the academia and the secondary Discourses required of them, students' agency is at best clipped. Moreover, most of the students are teen-agers, who are continually testing the extent of their agency and their identity and have not yet constructed a self-image powerful enough

to counter social inequalities. As Stevenson, & Ellsworth (1993) suggest:

> Most adolescents, by virtue of their stage of development, do not possess a strong sense of identity, but rather are in the process of identity formation. Adolescence is typically a period of self-exploration, including experimenting with different roles and searching an identity that feels comfortable. Since the formation of an identity is in a state of flux, it is unlikely that any self-image will be sufficiently well-defined to counter a powerful and widely promulgated social image. (p. 268)

It is, however, noteworthy that school curricula in the Philippines often stipulate the importance of developing critical thinking skills among students. Philippine educators believe that apprenticeship in the academic discourse should involve the development of critical thinking skills. And yet, the opposite appears to be happening a the *Paglaum High School*. Indeed, a teacher pointed out that he could not confidently claim that the graduates at *Paglaum High School* are sufficiently prepared for college primarily because they are not trained to think critically:

> Even if they graduate in high school, they are not yet prepared for college. Aside from the scarcity of facilities, we can say that the major factor is teacher factor. Eventually, the students' perception about themselves started to infect (laughs) the minds of the teachers. So, the teachers also think we just come here, we do this, wait for the 15th and the 30th for our salary, we do this like simple office work. We sit there, ask the students to copy a whole bunch of text from the books. Then, that's it. Maybe discuss briefly and give long tests. So, students are more adept at copying... But critical thinking ability is the key to make their own

> logical decisions or thinking. I don't know. Actually, when I teach, I always encourage my students to make their own explanation, and I don't really care if their explanation is wrong. I just wanted to hear them talk and encourage them. (Personal interview, former volunteer teacher, August 2002)

Yet, ample evidence also shows that students' attempts at demonstrating critical thinking in class were often perceived as resistance or opposition and were dealt with cynicism if not harshness.

It is also worth noting that despite their attempts to articulate the power inequalities in the system and their awareness of the deliberate silencing of their voices with the use of serious speech acts, disciplinary technologies and, oftentimes, sheer intimidation, many of the students ultimately claim responsibility for the verbal abuse, threat of failure, and other silencing practices. In one of the interviews, a student-respondent held the class responsible for being noisy, and chided the student who voiced out her opposition for "not respecting their teachers." It will be remembered that *Silayan*, the student, who graduated at the top of her class, also claimed her "failure" to qualify for scholarships as a personal responsibility. While being critical of teacher inefficiency and ineffectiveness, this student also took the blame for her grades, citing her own poor investment into her studies. But her own parents, however, had a different view of her failure, pointing out that she had very little time left for studying because some of her teachers made her correct "tons of test papers." When asked if she filed a formal complaint about the situation or talked with the teachers about it, the mother of this student shook her head. She said she did not do it because it would only complicate matters.

In a study of white middle class drop-outs, Stevenson, & Ellsworth (1993) observed similar "self-silencing" practices employed by student-participants. They noted that "despite the criticisms the dropouts voiced out of their school, nearly all of them ultimately reclaimed for themselves the blame for dropping out" (p. 266). Because serious speech acts structure school as "intrinsically good and just," and "teachers as infallible authorities," students look to themselves as the major contributory factor to their failure. Stevenson, & Ellsworth conclude that

> ... as students resort to their own deficiencies to explain their school failure, they delegitimate their own school critiques and help maintain views of ... themselves, and not the schools, as the major concern and focus of intervention (p. 266).

That students and volunteer teachers need to resort to silence and compliance as strategies in finding their way through this academic context is ironic. However, when such strategy facilitates the much-needed entry to socio-economic mobility—such as a high school diploma for students and better chances at getting a full-time, regular status for teachers—compliance and silence offer the most viable options. Students see finishing high school as an investment worthy of many sacrifices, among them giving up personal agency, pride, or notions of justice. Because they need a high school diploma to work even as domestic helpers or get employed in a shop, a restaurant, or a construction company, they are prepared to endure everything, including the disenfranchisement of their right to speak up. They need the same diploma for entry to college. They need to complete high school as soon as they can, so they could earn money for the family and support their younger

siblings. And because they need a certification of good moral character from the school to qualify for employment and entry to any school, they have to make sure they remain in the good graces of their teachers. And since they view schooling as a potentially liberating enterprise, students find compliance rather than resisting a more effective strategy in attaining it. If opposition and resistance deter them from getting such requirements, they would prefer not to consider these as examples of marginalization or abuse.

Heller (1987) states that "it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of the self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains access to—or is denied access to—powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak" (cited in Peirce, 1995, p. 13). Paradoxical as it may seem, in the context of this school, a shared silence seems to be the language that enables students to get immediate reward from schooling—finishing high school as soon as possible. The consequence of such a culture is that students who constantly acquiesce to the purported benefits that silence and accommodation seem to offer learn only to be passive, docile, and subservient, incapable of thinking for themselves or making independent decisions. Needless to stress, this response, as Eckert (1989) so aptly describes, only furthers the students' experience of marginalization and sense of powerlessness, making them vulnerable to oppressive practices even beyond the borders of schooling. In other words, the students might embrace an identity of resignation and complacency because this is what they learn in school. Eckert argues that,

> ...the strategies that students develop to function in the school environment are part of the knowledge they take with them into further training or the workplace.... What the burnouts learn in school is how to be

> marginalized. They look forward to graduation, with the expectation that then they will escape the strictures and limitations of their high school roles. However, the strategies that they have acquired for learning within the institution, whether it be school or the workplace, will marginalize them elsewhere just as in high school. High school, therefore, is not simply a bad experience for these students – it teaches them lessons that threaten to limit them for the rest of their lives (p.181).

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Notes

[1]In the interest of confidentiality, the names of the municipalities, schools, and respondents in this study have been changed.

[2] For a thorough read on triangulation as a research procedure and ethnography and ethnographic representation, some valuable references include Tedlock, B. (2000), Erickson, F. (1986), Egan-

Robertson, A. & Willet, J. (1986), Davis, K. (1995), & Watson-Gegeo K., & Gegeo D. (1995). For researcher positionality, refer to Fine, M. (1994), and Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1990).

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