

Alexis Smith
Dr. Kate Centellas
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Research Question and Methods

Introduction and Research Question

The United Nations defines indigeneity as “inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of related to people [who] have retained social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live.” Using this definition, educational researcher Christopher Emdin categorizes urban youth as “neoindigenous,” students who, in spite of attempts of erasure, persist. This process erasure, Emdin argues, is not literal; rather, it is the covert socialization away from cultural heritages and subaltern English vernaculars or non-English languages. I agree with Emdin: the term neoindigenous can, as Benedict Anderson describes, help situate students within an imagined community that transcends time and place, joining together students; however, Emdin’s application of the term neoindigenous is misguided in two regards. First, I argue that Emdin’s sole focus on the urban student of color is wrong. While rural schools are more white than their urban counterparts, there is still substantial diversity in rural schools, especially in areas of the South. Additionally, about 44% of the United States’ English language learning students live in rural communities. The application of neoindigenous to students of color living rural areas may actually connect to the experiences of indigenous peoples more, as indigenous populations, even with increasing urbanization, are still more likely to live in low-resourced, rural areas. Second, Emdin compares the educational experience of youth of color, “neoindigenous,” to the indigenous peoples in North America, drawing parallels between modern schools and assimilation schools, like the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. His comparison is not only misguided but dangerous and shows Emdin’s unfamiliarity with indigenous studies. There are *some* similarities (linguistical expectations, teacher

demographics, etcetera); however, and with the extension of the term to include rural students, youth of color are not being forcibly removed from their communities. Instead, “neoindigenous” student experiences may parallel those of South American indigenous communities, specifically those in the Bolivian Andes. These indigenous students historically have not faced overt forced assimilation (compared to North American Indians) but have instead faced socialization techniques similar to those found in the United States’ educational system.

Drawing inspiration from Emdin, my thesis will continue to analyze the experiences of neoindigenous students in the U.S. Unlike most previous work done on students of color, however, I will engage in comparative research directed toward rural schooling in Mississippi and Bolivia. Essentially, how do the experiences of high school neoindigenous students in rural Mississippi mimic those of high school indigenous students of rural highlands Bolivia? I have chosen to purposefully use the term neoindigenous and have committed myself to defending it. My definition of neoindigenous students only remains similar to Emdin’s, as I choose to extend it to include rural students. Instead of only categorizing neoindigenous students as students in urban settings, I argue the definition represents students of color in rural areas, like Mississippi, just as well. I elect to use Mississippi and Bolivia as my areas of comparative study. Just as Mississippi has the largest percentage of black population in the United States (with growing populations of Latinx peoples), Bolivia has the largest population of indigenous peoples in the world. The two countries are also very poor and rural compared to their counterparts. With that, resources are be very limited, including infrastructure, healthcare, and most important to this thesis, education. Additionally, there are great racially

based disparities in both Mississippi and Bolivia-- disparities that affect access to the aforementioned resources.

Literature Review

To frame my research question, I will use critical pedagogy as my foundational theory, using Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as my main source to draw from. Critical pedagogy is an educational philosophy originally developed by Freire. The pedagogical approach rejects the idea that education can be apolitical or neutral; instead, critical pedagogy argues against a "banking model of education," or the idea that students are empty containers that educators must fill with knowledge, as this model reinforces passive thinking, which reinforces oppression by creating citizens that do not engage in ownership over their thought processes. Critical pedagogy demands that students must be active in the learning process, allowing them to cultivate critical consciousness, or the achievement of an in-depth understanding of the world, which allows for the perception of social and political contradictions. Critical consciousness allows for the realization of one's own oppression. Ideally, critical pedagogy works to break the cycle of passive citizenship, allowing for students to understand and internalize the ways in which they have been oppressed or have worked to oppress. In turn, these students will become active citizens in their nation-states or in the larger global stage.

While Emdin's theory of neoindigeneity and Freire's critical pedagogy will function as my foundational theoretical framework in which my research question is situated, I will also utilize James Wertsch's *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research critique*, James Paul Gee's *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, and Aurolyn Luykx's *The citizen factory: Schooling and cultural production in Bolivia*. Each of these texts are central to theories

surrounding identity and citizenship development in students and schools as systems for state socialization. Using these texts, I will develop my theoretical framework of social dominance theory, or the ways power legitimize [and delegitimize] dominant forms of principles of communication. The final text I will utilize as a foundation of my theoretical framework is Benedict Anderson's *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Anderson theorizes that nations are socially constructed communities, imagined by people who feel they are part of the specific group. These communities become imagined by the territorialisation of religious faiths, the decline of kinship, the interactions of capitalism and print, conceptions of time, and the development of state-languages. I will be utilizing Anderson's theory to solidify the role state educational institutions play in creating the nation-state, especially through emphasis of state-languages through curriculums.

Research Design

I will be using qualitative analysis as my primary research methodology. My qualitative data will include student interviews, discourse and pedagogical analysis, and historical analysis. Although my research done in Mississippi could be more robust (including participant observation and development ethnographic techniques), due to geographic limitations, I will be employing the same research methodology for both Mississippi and Bolivia; however, I will be utilizing ethnographic works like, "Progress in a Metal Flagpole" in Andrew Canessa's *Intimate Indigeneity*, to minimize the effects of my geographic location in my qualitative work.

I will utilize discourse and pedagogical analysis. This method will primarily include analysis of bilingual education programs. (These programs are not necessarily, as an example, high school Spanish programs. The programs I am most interested are English language

learning programs in the United States and Spanish programs in Bolivia). I will additionally be examining state social studies objectives: What histories are taught extensively? What vernacular or language is enforced through teaching objectives? Beyond school curriculums, I will also analyze the ways in which education for marginalized people groups is presented in both Mississippi and Bolivia. I will rely on primary sources from Mississippi's Department of Education and Bolivia's *Ministerio de Educación*, newspaper reporting on education within both places of study, and speeches given by government figures surrounding education. These sources will include teleSUR tv videos like, "Gobierno boliviano impulsa la educación bilingüe y teórico-práctica," and reporting from sources similar to the Hechinger Report like, "How one Mississippi community copes with the influx of Hispanic students."

I will use historical analysis from the early-to-mid twentieth century to the present-day, first, to contextualize and, second, to track changes in education policy and more: Have changes in education policy impacted the educational experiences of neindigenous students in Mississippi or indigenous students in Bolivia? This will be especially important to understand the Bolivian education system after the election of Evo Morales.

Limitations

The main limitation of my thesis is availability of primary documents. Many documents regarding Bolivian education policy, from newspapers to actual legislative documents, are difficult or impossible to find on the internet and may only be available through Bolivia's national archives. To remedy this, I will rely heavily on the multitude of very well researched and written books on Bolivian education reform, and as I studied abroad in Bolivia, I will utilize my connection with *Fundación Flavio Machicado Viscarra*, an independent Bolivian archive. Inaccessibility of some Bolivian primary documents does not

negate the importance or possibility of this research project; in fact, at least these documents *exist*. Mississippi documents are also unavailable. Their unavailability is because they do not exist. I will use this absence of data in my analysis, and I will also call school districts and the Mississippi Department of Education to receive as much information I can on the curriculums and educational laws pertinent to my research.