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Texts and Contexts for Cultural and Linguistic Hybridity in the Diaspora
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Abstract

The perspectives of immigrant youth are important to be aware of because they can reveal the powerful role society has in framing and forming the range of possibilities available to them. Culturally speaking, immigrant youth often face mismatches between home and school values, but they sometimes encounter intra-cultural struggles as well. This article reviews literature about immigrant cultural adaptation and then illustrates concepts of cultural third space (Bhabha, 1994) using three texts produced by Somali adolescent boys. The texts offer examples of Somali adolescent perspectives and a window into their perspectives, language use, and identities which take shape at school, at home, and in other public spaces. A discussion of each text is given which connects to questions and implications for educators.

Introduction

Immigration has produced countless cultural contact zones throughout the world between people who sometimes know very little about each other. Movement across political and geographic borders creates opportunities to explore the meaning of culture, difference, and identity – all brought into relief by means of comparison as well as conflict. Large diaspora communities become established but are continually infused by relatives who follow family members already settled. This worldwide movement creates intimate as well as public zones of cultural and linguistic contact within and between immigrant communities as well as with the dominant culture. Within this web of cultures and languages, identities or affiliations are imposed and chosen. For example, a boy who claims a Somali ethnic and Muslim identity may have the experience of being stereotyped or mistaken for some other ethnicity at school or in his neighborhood. Perhaps he experiences being lumped with other East Africans or with African Americans. On the other hand, in his home life, the importance of his ethnic identity may fluctuate in his day-to-day life. For instance, his choices about whether and how to “be Somali,” “be Muslim,” or use his linguistic resources are often very personal and situated. Unfortunately, the ways a person can enact minoritized identities at school may be limited by culturally biased curricula or pedagogies which narrow rather than widen modes of expression or contestation (Lee, 2005; Ngo, in press; Olsen, 1998; Traoré & Lukens, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999).

A common assumption is that to be successful in a new country, immigrant groups must quickly relinquish the old ways and make lifestyle, linguistic, and attitudinal changes in the direction of the dominant society. Adjusting to a new culture is obviously more complex than this, involving a process that may last years if not decades and which is not necessarily inevitable. Assumptions of unidirectional adaptation
processes have been challenged in previous research involving Somalis (e.g., Berns McGown, 1999; McMichael, 2002). It is useful for educators, as well as all members of society, to understand that adaptation to a new society and outward behaviors may fluctuate toward or away from the dominant society and that they may have meanings that are not apparent to casual observers. It is also important to work with youth to make spaces in school for youth to represent new identities shaped by various cultural influences. Youth often create new ways of being through great acts of agency, as well as develop feelings of ambivalence in their efforts to adapt to their worlds in and out of school. In other words, it is important to see the process of adaptation as both individual and collective as well as mediated by society’s institutions, prior migratory trends, and dominant culture and sub-cultures, including youth culture (Hall & Jefferson, 1998 [1975]). It is timely and relevant to explore the youth perspectives within Somali communities in the diaspora and in the US, given the rise of new Americans who are from African and Muslim nations. And while the discussion in this article centers on three texts produced by Somali male adolescents, the texts offer insights into the complexity and mutability of their culture. In addition, the texts and their analysis serve as an example of interpreting or understanding culture and cultural adaptation which may be useful in understanding youth from other ethnicities. The perspectives across cultures surely change, but educators can transfer new ways of understanding culture to their experiences with youth of many different cultures.

**Review of Literature**

The field of sociology is helpful in understanding and questioning immigrant adaptation. One explanation of the variety of tensions and ultimate outcomes of immigration and adaptation processes comes from Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou’s (1993) *Modes of Incorporation Typology*. These researchers argue that it matters whether immigrants come to the United States under a governmental policy (e.g., asylum seekers versus unauthorized migrants), whether they are welcomed by the dominant society (e.g., “race” of immigrant is the same as those in the dominant society), and whether their co-ethnic community can offer resources to newcomers. To exemplify the application of this typology to the Somali community, the focus in this article, one can argue that Somalis are advantaged in Minnesota by the fact that they have largely come to the United States as refugees or asylum seekers under government policies and are, now, part of a large co-ethnic community. However, they experience prejudiced societal reception in U.S. society because they are phenotypically black and much of U.S. society is fundamentally racist (Ladson-Billings & Tate, IV, 2006). Although Portes and Zhou’s typology does not account for visible religious minorities such as Muslim women who wear a hijab (veil), the hijab would presumably trigger another type of negative societal reception in some contexts (Bigelow, 2006, 2007).

Fortunately, the effects of the many systems of oppression that immigrants face may be mitigated by what Portes and Zhou (1993) call “segmented assimilation” (p. 82).
Segmented assimilation is the selective and partial adoption of the norms of the dominant society. Segmented assimilation is a concept which contests the assumption that there are only two choices in becoming “American”: integrate into the white middle class or opt for permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass. Segmented assimilation balances deliberate preservation of aspects of the home culture with rapid economic advancement due to embracing aspects of the new society. Portes and Zhou cite Gibson’s (1988) seminal research with Punjabi immigrant families to illustrate the rewards of segmented assimilation. In Gibson’s research, Punjabi parents embraced full proficiency in English, urged children to abide by school rules, ignored racist remarks, and avoided fights, while at the same time disparaging traits of the majority such as dating and leaving home at the age of 18. The community was cohesive, retaining pride in their ethnic heritage, and this served to insulate youth from outside discrimination. Using Portes and Zhou’s typology, the Punjabi immigrants were poor upon arrival, faced widespread discrimination, and had no governmental assistance, nor a well-established co-ethnic community. These facts would suggest the potential failure of the group to achieve economic stability, but, theoretically, Portes and Zhou would argue that segmented assimilation was a mechanism for them to overcome societal barriers to education and wealth.

This example of Punjabi segmented assimilation counters the call many youth hear to become “American” as quickly as possible. Immigrant youth are likely to receive this message from many sources - peers, teachers, and the media. However, as Portes and Zhou (1993) and others (e.g., Nagasawa, Qian & Wong, 2001; White & Glick, 2000; White & Kaufman, 1997) show, immediate and wholesale embrace of the dominant culture may have damaging results, particularly in terms of academic achievement. This claim may seem counter-intuitive to some readers because one might reason that the more quickly immigrant adolescents become “American,” the more able they will be to speak English, relate to other English speakers, and obtain access to mainstream institutions. However, if immigrant youth attempt to leave behind all of the home culture as quickly as possible, they may experience a widening gap between themselves and the adults in their lives, resulting in less access to family and community-wide social networks. Immigrant youth rely on adults from their own co-ethnic communities to be the primary sources of important information and support (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Portes, 1998; Wong Fillmore, 1991). For adolescents to leverage support from parents and other adults in the community, native language proficiency and investment in the co-ethnic community are usually beneficial, if not essential. This is not to say that immigrant adults are not adapting to the new society, but adolescents typically do so very quickly when immersed in the powerful social forces of mainstream schooling, which is so often a vehicle for promoting the status quo in a

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1 Social networks are synonymous to social capital which can be defined as “intangible social resources based on social relationships that one can draw upon to facilitate action and to achieve goals” (Coleman, 1990).
society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1973, 1977). Noticing the way youth trade, blend, and contest identities can tell as much about cultural adaptation as about the power systems in our own society.

Language use is a powerful enactment of this identity development. Researchers in immigrant and language education have known for decades that strong native language (L1) skills facilitate second language (L2) acquisition (e.g., Plante, 1977), foster academic success (e.g., Vorih & Rosier, 1978), and strengthen family ties (e.g., Collier, 1989; Wong Fillmore, 1991). The social benefits of L1 maintenance also include the potential for adolescents to keep close links to the adults in their lives. However, the L1-L2 dichotomy may not apply in many contexts of language use for immigrant adolescents. Rather, code-switching is used among multilinguals for many reasons, including fronting a particular identity.

Bhabha (1994) uses the terms hybridity and third space to describe the cultural space that is created by an individual. Rejecting the definition of cultural identity based on an understanding of a singular self or a self belonging simply to a people of a common history and ancestry, Hall particularly argues for a concept of identity based on the constant process of differentiation and the recognition of difference (Hall, 1989, 1990, 1996). Hall contends that identity is constructed through discourse and representation and involves the play of power. He conceives identity as constituted through alterity - “the relation to the Other, the relation to what is not, to precisely what it lacks” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). Any notion of identity, therefore, depends on its difference from or negation of some other term. And because identity is constructed through social and discursive practices (e.g., De Fina, 2003; Gee, 1990; Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, & Riazi, 2002; McKay & Wong, 1996), identity is a positioning—unstable, incomplete, and always changing (Hall, 1989, 1990, 1996). According to Bhabha, the moment(s) of instability that allows for the re-positioning of identity is the “in-between” or “third space”. Bhabha explains:

For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges; rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (p. 211)

This understanding of multiple identities (or subjectivities) within the self that emerge through discourse and representation allows for sites to continuously open for reidentification and resignification—for the construction and re-construction of identities (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990).

The three texts presented below were chosen purposefully for their potential to illustrate cultural contact zones, cultural hybridity, and their potential to foster dialogue with educators and researchers about immigrant teens. They remind us that adolescents
have lives outside of school and that perhaps mainstream English is not always their target. The texts expose and elucidate reasons for maintaining ties to the home language and culture. Staying connected with their Somali community, culturally and linguistically, does not preclude the fact that youth are developing new, multicultural, or hybrid identities nor does this process imply that the Somali community is culturally unchanging. The texts that follow will facilitate one possible understanding of the symbolic choices youth make as they embrace and reject aspects of the cultures and languages around them.

These carefully selected texts are not meant to be representative but rather instructive in illuminating the theoretical notions from the literature reviewed. The individuals who produced the texts were not interviewed in order to inform or confirm the interpretation offered. The meaning of the texts is open for speculation, and the readers’ scrutiny and debate.

**Text #1: Religion, Language, and Life in the Diaspora**

The Somali community in Minnesota boasts a large number of Somali intellectuals and politicians. Some say it is the largest such group in the world (Dirie, 2007). At a recent literary event, an award-winning Somali writer, Nuruddin Farah, came to town to do a reading to promote his latest novel, *Knots*, a book written in English, set in Somalia, about a Somali woman who lives in Toronto. The reading was held at a literary center over a chic, urban bookstore and there were hundreds of Somalis in attendance. After the reading, Farah fielded questions ranging from who his favorite character in his book was, to his views on current politics, to advice about how to overcome the trauma from the Somali civil war. (He recommended journaling.) It was evident that the community admired and respected him a great deal. But one topic provoked the audience. Farah does not believe Somali women should veil in ways similar to Arab women (e.g., wearing the hijab), and his position caused great indignation among many in his audience, male and female, young and old. An on-line review of the Farah’s reading by Abdirahaman Aynte (2007) captured some of this discord and debate within the Somali community, and 45 readers posted on-line comments between February 9, 2007 and March 15, 2007. These comments were written in English and Somali and mixes of both languages. The posts are interesting to read because they are written within and for other Somalis, not members of the dominant society. The texts appear naturalistically on a public website and not in an educational setting. They do, therefore, offer a genuine and uncommon glimpse of some of the views within the Somali community in Minnesota.

Many people write in defense of Farah, but the most recent post, presumably by a young man, is critical of the author. Muhammad wrote the following comment:

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<th>Original Text</th>
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Post #1
Salaamz 2 all my broz and sis in Islam, Quite disappointing and sadly missing da whole point of Being creative and writer. Nuura Diin brotha, instead of using ur gift for 4 da Deen R u actually preaching our pride, beauty and power in our our Muslim women 2 be thrown away? Shame on you, probably u need 2 b doing da reading but from da right bookz. Eebaa mahadleh maadaamaa aan sixun niyad jab iigu riday, waxaan admire-gareeya, wiilasha, iyo gabdhaha sida wada jirka ah diintooda u stick up gareeyeen WELLDONE AND MAY ALLAH REWARD UZ ALL 4 IT........AAMIIN. Muhammad Hassan Umar

Muhammad begins with a typical Somali greeting “Salaam,” clipped from the full Arabic “Salaam-Alaikum”. He continues in text messaging vernacular (e.g., “u need 2 b”), flavored with an urban vernacular (e.g., “da right bookz”) common in the oral language among many urban youth, particularly African-American youth. It is also notable that the writer switches at the end to Somali, with two words code-switched back into standard spellings of mainstream English – admire and stick up. Code switching is a common phenomenon among bi- and multilinguals and is often touted as a particular, non-random, linguistic skill necessary for being a member of a certain speech community (Heller, 1995; Rampton, 1995). However, while the language used is edgy and urban, the message of Muhammad’s response seems fairly conservative. He ties the hijab to Somali women’s pride, beauty, and power and questions whether Farah is truly wise or “reading…from da right bookz,” presumably referring to the Quran. The switch to Somali at the end seems to be a direct encouragement to multilingual young Somalis (“boys and girls”) who are striving to maintain their religion in a very Judeo-Christian society.

Muhammad’s comments are suggestive of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). Muhammad’s language suggests hybridity due to his use of multiple varieties of English (vernacular and mainstream), Somali, and text-messaging vernacular. But this short text
also reveals some of the intra-ethnic tensions that often frame the lives of Somali young people. Farah, the most famous Somali author, makes statements that may conflict with the values of other Somali Muslims, as Muhammad’s response suggests. The text urges Somali youth to “stick up for their religion,” presumably within and beyond their own ethnic community. Muhammad has chosen for his comment a register and code to signal a youthful urban identity which, due to the code-switching, did not include monolingual English speakers. This phenomenon speaks to literature in the field showing that not all English language learners have learned or chosen mainstream English as their target language (e.g., Bashir-Ali, 2006). Whether or not Muhammad can shift registers/dialects is unknown, but he is clearly skilled in using his linguistic resources to communicate a message to his audience – other young, religious Somalis in the diaspora.

Given the cultural hybridity represented in Muhammad’s comment, it would be interesting to know how Muhammad is “read” by others in the wider Minnesota society. Is he read as a young man who is “becoming Black” (Ibrahim, 1999), or adopting an identity in which he aligns himself to what he imagines is the Black or African American community? If so, Muhammad’s likely complex racial, religious, and ethnic identity may be masked by “quick reads” or assumptions about who he is and what his affiliations are. Peers and teachers from other ethnic groups may assume that some Somali youth are African American, not Somali, due to stereotypes of their fashion tastes or language use. Bigelow (2008) quotes from Somali elders in this community who are concerned if youth seem to be acting “Black” (African American). They see any appearance of what they have come to understand as “Black” (e.g., language, dress, taste in music, choice of friends) as evidence that their youth may be at risk for getting into trouble, not doing well in school, leaving Islam behind, forgetting their culture, etc. This concern reflects the elders’ awareness of potential risks to their youth, but may also reflect a lack of understanding of the process of adapting to social norms in U.S. high schools, the diversity that exists within the African American population, and the mainstream popularity of hip-hop culture.

Judging from his writing style, Muhammad’s posting may look like evidence of his assimilation to U.S. youth culture. Given his opinions, and the fact that he took the time to post a thoughtful response, it does not seem that Muhammad is leaving Islam or “his culture” as some may worry. At the moment he composed his post, he seems to see himself as both Somali and Muslim. He is reading Somali internet sites, attending Somali events, and displaying an opinion that would be aligned with the more conservative members of the community, even as he uses American teen vernacular and text-messaging vernacular. He is using the languages he possesses, within his community. Consequently, Muhammad offers an example of a cultural space where he is able to “wear” and articulate his multiple identities for what he presumes to be a similarly linguistically talented audience.
Muhammad’s posting raises many interesting questions for ESOL and language arts teachers to contemplate, such as: How can classroom learning include opportunities for multilinguals to use their multiple language skills to write for the multilingual audiences that they actually address in real life? How can language arts topics such as voice, register, and audience include the types of writing done outside of school among multilinguals and skilled code-switchers? How can texts such as Muhammad’s and the others be used in classrooms to develop students’ awareness of rhetorical devices in making an argument?

Text #2: Being and Becoming Somali

The next text came from a panel discussion of high school students organized by a group of language teachers at the University of Minnesota. The focus of the panel was multicultural education, and the purpose was to understand multicultural education from the perspective of the students. The audience was a class of pre-service teachers. The panel discussion was video recorded and later made into a digital video case on the topic of multicultural education. The on-line tool offers video clips from four students on a range of topics and questions for teachers to discuss or reflect upon. A Somali high school student (Moxammed) on the panel, a senior already accepted to a state college, introduced himself this way:

I’m from Somalia, but I never grew up in Somalia. I don’t have no idea how it looks like. But I was told by my mom always never to forget where I’m from. She always keeps reminding that at home while we are at home always know how to speak in Somali even though my Somali is not as perfect as like the rest of the people who come from Somalia. But I do feel – um I do have like a strong culture identity. Because everywhere I go today my culture is being represented no matter where. In every country I’ve been I’ve seen like a lot of people know where my country is - in Africa and stuff like that. So basically, by the way I learn my culture was just you know to learn from people who come from my country, my homeland, where I’m from. So I just take my- I see what they do and then try to follow it and try to you know learn from it. And at the same time if I do something wrong of course they are there for me and they will tell me that’s not how things are done up here and I kind of accept it cause I don’t know how things were dealt with back there so. And I’m still learning today, everyday. Every day that goes by I see a new person I learn something. So, so that’s how it is for me basically.

Moxammed shares a number of personal facts in his introduction. He is from Somalia, but does not know what it looks like. He speaks Somali, but not as perfectly as others who come from Somalia. Moxammed is guided by others who “know how things were dealt with back there”. He is still in the process of learning about being Somali. His words touch on his Somali identity and his investment in being Somali and

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2 The digital video case can be viewed at this URL: http://cehd.umn.edu/CI/faculty/projects/bigelow/multic.html
3 This is a Somali language spelling because it uses an “x” not an “h”.

learning to speak and act Somali. The idea that he is part of something bigger than himself and his family is obvious. He may feel a part of an imagined community that comes from “back there” and extends to “here.” Anderson (1983) and Hall (1990) have framed imagined community as the creation of new practices and self-representation discursively created and thus imagined. Blackledge (2004) and others have extended this construct within the idea of nation, and Norton (2001) has used its basic tenets to consider belonging and engagement in imagined communities of linguistic practice, which include race, gender, and social class, but not necessarily with a focus on national identity. This construct seems to be useful in understanding Moxammed’s experience. He imagines himself as a member of a community that transcends place and nationality. Culture and language have a powerful and symbolic value for him, and all seem to be facets of being Somali in his family and being Somali in his community in Minnesota.

Moxammed is engaged in a process emblematic of hybridity which is constantly shifting. Moxammed instructs listeners, too. Being “Somali” does not necessarily require first person experiences of life in Somalia. Someone else’s memories about Somalia may suffice. Furthermore, a person can learn how to speak and be Somali from others who are doing it, and this is possible to do in Minnesota. He reminds us that there are many narratives among immigrant communities about their identity – some based on nationality, some ethnicity, and perhaps some drawn upon idealized or nostalgic identities that encompass specific ways of acting and speaking. Surely, these nuances depend on many factors, including length of time in the United States, age of arrival, and connection to other members of the Somali Diaspora.

Some of the questions that arise from Moxammed’s text are the following: How is a person’s potential for imagining shaped by contrary or more powerful imaginations? Is one’s own imagining powerful enough? It must matter whether identity is legitimized by others or whether it is coming from an in between place where it is in the process of being transformed. It is compelling to consider what it means to be misunderstood, misrepresented by more powerful others, and, if so, how are immigrant students in schools “imagined” by others? Moxammed’s introduction of himself affirms for educators the relevance of speaking the home language and the importance of educational best practices that include native language maintenance and development. One purpose of native language use in the classroom for a student with strong English language skills such as Moxammed is to affirm his multilingualism, his home language(s), and to allow him to engage all of his linguistic skill to create expressive, meaningful texts, perhaps for audiences which are also multilingual. Many language arts standards can be learned and expressed through multiple languages (e.g., produce texts across multiple genres, for multiple audiences).

Text #3: “You bring out the Somali in me” and Connecting Home with School
The final text was composed and given to the author by a 7th grade Somali student. It is a poem entitled “You bring out the Somali in me.”

You bring out the Somali in me.
The prayers of fayr. The awaiting school.
The puzzled teachers when they see my work.
The angry teachers that know only one language.
The “whup that ass” maintenance they call it.
You bring out the prayer of “Duhr” in me
the whole yummy food of my Mom.
The pat on the Hedd, and the kiss on the cheek. The “Sidee Tahay” word that never fades between her smiles.
You bring out the soccer in me.
My crazy friends and neighborhood. The daily arguments of world-class teams. You bring out the “madrassa” in me.
My dear Qur’an and
The prayer of “asr” in me. The loud voices of children reading “kitabs” in me.
You bring out the tasty dinners of my sisters.
The “maghrib” prayers which I love.

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4 The poem is reprinted here with the student and his guardian’s permission. The student produced this text as part of a poetry unit focused on identity. The class had read poems such as Pat Mora’s Legal Alien and You bring out the Mexican in me by Sandra Cisneros. They watched a video clip of a high school girl’s interpretation of “I’m Nobody” by Emily Dickinson from a website (http://www/favoritepoem.org/videos.html). They had also discussed culture and identity with questions such as “If you could choose three aspects of your culture and put them in a time box for the future, what would you save?”
The family meeting every night. The free
time with
my brother. You bring out my brother in me.

His muscles and strength which he says is
for “my
protection”. The crazy girls chasing him around

All waiting for attention from him. He looks at me and says “Heck no” “I ain’t leaving you alone”:

You bring out the prayer of isha in me, the freshly bought milk afterward. My comfortable
bed as I sleep.
You bring out the dreams in me.

By Ahmed Suleiman

**Isha – last prayer of the day**

This poem shows much linguistic skill. Ahmed uses the structure of the models he was shown which includes this formula: “You bring out the _____ in me.” He aptly uses this structure numerous times, as in the following lines:

1. You bring out the prayers of “Duhr” in me.
2. You bring out the soccer in me.
3. You bring out the “madrassa” in me.
4. You bring out my brother in me.
5. You bring out the dreams in me.

Ahmed then adds the five prayers of the day, as an additional structure, possibly signifying the presence of his faith in his life and throughout the day. The poem reveals his views about his day as including school, friends, family, soccer, and religious school. Ahmed’s poem is multi-vocalic, incorporating voices of his teachers (“whup as ass” maintenance), his mother (“Sidee Tahay”), and, most of all, his brother (“my protection,”
“Heck no,” “I ain’t leaving you alone”). Ahmed offers just a couple comments on school and his teachers:

1. The puzzled teachers when they see my work.
2. The angry teachers that know only one language.
3. The “whup that ass” maintenance they call it.

The feelings Ahmed’s teachers have for his work and the fact that they speak only one language are not lost on Ahmed. His teacher surmised that Ahmed’s line containing “whup that ass maintenance” is likely in reference to the fact that he was in an advanced ESL class and could have thought he no longer needed to be in ESL.

The poem reverberates with adolescent life in the United States, but also includes an ethnic Somali and religious perspective. As such, Ahmed has created a sense of his life which is suggestive of cultural hybridity. Ahmed’s poem reminds readers how important out-of-school, family, and religious lives are to students. Muslim students still report struggles at school related to following the mandatory religious observances (e.g., prayer times, fasting) and coping with classmates’ and teachers’ fears or stereotypes about Islam (Bigelow, 2006, 2008).

This text opens up possibilities to educators because it was the outcome of a class activity. It shows that displays of multilingualism, albeit moderate, and expressions of ethnic identity were welcomed by the teacher. Ahmed even spoke back to authority – his school and teachers. Ahmed’s poem is a powerful example of how a classroom learning context can open up spaces of expression where religious diversity is welcome.

**Conclusion**

The texts analyzed in this paper show great diversity in terms of how language is used and how cultural hybridity is expressed. The texts are at once very personal, yet also tap into a collective and somehow unified Somali culture, or “Somali-ness.” In the first text, the writer seems to be addressing an audience like himself: multilingual and religious. He calls out to them in support for “keeping their religion.” In the second text, the speaker claims a Somali identity, but tells of how he is still “becoming” Somali because those who are somehow “more Somali” are showing him how to act and speak. The third text names the things that the writer sees in his everyday life that symbolize the Somali culture, but also shares a sense of family warmth and youthful enjoyment that seem culturally universal. All three texts offer examples of immigrant youth expressing themselves in hybrid or third space ways. The texts do, however, offer somewhat different visions of what it means to be Somali in U.S. society, but none expresses the vision of cultural adjustment being a process of wholesale assimilation. Rather, they are suggestive of segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993). The texts affirm the fact that cultural incongruities can occur within individuals and between members of the same ethnic groups.
As educators, a plethora of questions arise: How can the existence and creation of hybrid identities occur in the classroom? As immigrant youth grow up, finding themselves academically and professionally within the fabric of American cities and towns, whom do they choose to be culturally? What forces in society help or hinder their adaptation? How can learning climates and cultures make it possible to contest other-imposed identities in hallways, in lunchrooms, on the bus, and in class? How can educators and youth resist dichotomous perspectives or activities that essentialize identity or culture in ways that do not honor the way students’ lived reality is represented? What local knowledge can and should educators include in curricula that have been opened up to revision or critique? And what borders do educators need to cross to begin to understand local knowledge? It is important to explore these questions, even if there are misunderstandings and missteps. When educators notice the social and cultural issues immigrant youth face, as well as how these issues are part of school life, they can facilitate more and better learning environments where diverse and changing perspectives are welcomed and perhaps examined.

The previous texts suggest that native language use exists outside the classroom and, in the case of Ahmed, perhaps inside the classroom, too. This is likely to have positive consequences for the academic, the emotional, and, eventually, the economic well-being of these young people. Joining the everyday literacies of home and community life with school includes many pedagogical practices which have the potential to support native language use and thus support bilingualism. Maintaining native language use is beneficial to youth because of the potential of keeping ties to parents and elders in the community strong. Besides the benefits of close ties to co-ethnic adults (e.g., emotional, financial) youth may also leverage the native language as a symbol (among many) of ethnic or national identity which, when strong, may help them cope with the dynamic school/peer contexts.

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