

Language and Ethnicity at School: some implications from recent work in Sociolinguistics

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This paper begins with some reflections on the ways in which the notion of 'speech community' has been displaced in recent years by research on language ideologies and 'communities of practice', and raises questions about the priority that sociolinguists has traditionally given to the relationship between home and school. It then turns to research on everyday interaction in a multi-ethnic school in inner London, where it finds

- that popular media culture provides one of the most insistent alternatives to the state curriculum,
- that kids use German from their foreign language lessons as a peer group code (rather than Bengali or Arabic), and
- that in one of its commonest forms, code-switching involves exaggerated class varieties of English (posh & Cockney).

Ethnicity certainly matters in this school, but so too do other affiliations and dimensions of identity, and the paper asks: if sociolinguistics prioritises ethnolinguistic processes, does it risk being part of the problem rather than the solution?