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# *Appalachian Englishes in the Twenty-First Century*

## Educational Materials

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### Chapter 10

#### **Teachers & Teens Making Sense of Identity, Place, & Language in Secondary Schools in Appalachia** **Audra Slocum**

**Project Ideas:** Survey and interview peers about their language and communities. Trace the words used to describe the people, places, things, and beliefs, and the local meanings assigned to these words. Projects might focus on:

1. **Words That Mark School and Student Reputations:** Which school did you attend in your county? What words do students attending this school use to describe it? What words do students attending other schools use to describe it? For example, are there local words like, “crusties,” “rudders,” “creekers,” “thugs,” or “preps” that are typically used?
  - a. Make a column for the words used by students who go to that school and students who go to rival/other schools in the area.
  - b. Analyze the similarities and differences in the words used in the two columns. Consider connections between the words and their connotations and the demographics of the school’s student body, relative to the other school(s)?
2. **Mapping Social Groups at School:** Make a map of the tables of the school cafeteria or other common gathering spaces, like a lobby, open area, library, etc. Ask peers to mark on a map of the tables in the school cafeteria where the various social groups sit and the names that they use to describe each group. What do these groups do/not do? Who belongs to these groups? What overlaps are there across groups?
  - a. What patterns do you see across the various maps and terms used?

- b. Are there shared or differing terms and meanings? What might it mean that there are different or widely shared meanings?
- 3. Teasing Teaches Us:** Collect stories about people being teased (or mocked or socially dismissed) for their language proficiency, accent, grammatical usage, or vocabulary.
- a. When someone gets teased about the way they speak, what words and accents are at the center of the teasing? What triggers the teasing?
  - b. Who gets to tease whom? What social groups do the teasers belong to, and what social groups do those who are teased belong to? Don't forget that teachers tease and are teased!
  - c. What words does the person teasing use to label the person, the words, or the sounds (or all three!)? For example, is it "country," "piker," "proper," "thug," "ignorant," or something else?
  - d. What is motivating the tease (this might not be explicit, and might require your interpretation of the usage)? To isolate the person or to show that those words don't belong in that particular context?
- 4. Standard Language Ideology Interviews:** Ask three or more teachers or peers to participate in a one-on-one interview focusing on their perspectives of language use in school and language instruction.
- a. *Background information:* Ask them where they grew up and what their role was in their community, and who they grew up with (e.g. grandparents in the home, etc.). Invite them to share memories of how they remember similarities and differences between how to act and how to talk in school and at home. Ask if they speak differently now from when they were younger, or if they knew others who changed how they spoke when they left home.
    - i. Based on these stories, reflect on who had stories of inclusion and/or exclusion, who had stories that related feelings of shame, avoidance, pride, or other powerful emotions. What ideas about people (e.g. who is considered 'acceptable', who is considered 'less acceptable', etc.) were sources of the inclusion and exclusion and triggered those emotions?
  - b. *Contextual Language Use:* Ask them if they modify how they speak in different contexts (e.g. visiting their grandmother, with a childhood friend, with a supervisor, etc.). If they do modify their speech, ask for example words, phrases, and sounds that they change, and for them to share why they make these modifications. If they say they do not modify their speech, ask why.
  - c. *Marginalized or Non-standard Language Use in 'Professional Contexts':* There are many different perspectives on how people who use marginalized language features associated with Black English or African American Vernacular English, should speak

in 'professional' (e.g. offices, schools, etc.) contexts. Some people believe that speakers should use more formal or 'standard American English' features. On the other hand, many who use vernacular forms assert their communicative abilities and cultural norms should be accepted in all contexts.

- i. Ask interviewees if they view any forms of speaking as 'wrong' or 'inappropriate' for school or workplaces. Ask them to give examples and share their reasoning.
- ii. If interviewing teachers, ask them how they teach about language 'correctness'.