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Learning about Us and Them: Participation and Practice

Learners, sharers and teachers within self-consciously globalized environments, such as an English Learning Center, International Studies courses and English-language social events in China, often abruptly encounter Us and Them categories as a primary part of an educational process about Other language and culture. Participants' conceptions regarding Us/Them, East/West dichotomies deeply affect communication about these categories because of possible consequences for the identities of those involved. Formal and informal educational processes of negotiating and communicating about such categories depend largely on actors' modes of participation which are multiple and frequently contradictory; actors can be active and passive, conscious and unconscious, eager and resistant. This panel presents three disciplinary perspectives, education, cultural studies and anthropology, on how the process of educating and communicating on and around these categories and any possible deconstruction of such dichotomies is vitally dependent on the predominant modes of participation of those involved.