

Literacy for What? An Exploration of the Literacy Practices, Relationships, and Schooling
Experiences of a Latino Family

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ABSTRACT

Charna D'Ardenne: Literacy for What? An Exploration of the Literacy Practices, Relationships, and Schooling Experiences of a Latino Family
(Under the direction of Jocelyn Glazier)

In this two-year post-critical ethnography, critical literacy was used as a theoretical framework for exploring the literacy practices, relationships, and public schooling experiences of a Latino child, Javier, and his mother, Nina. The study illustrates the push and pull between school and home, and between cognitive and critical literacies, in a way that attends to the complexities of enacting critical literacy practices in a context where schooling is authoritatively maintaining a cognitive, individualized construction of literacy. This authority is compounded by a culture that privileges individual performance on high-stakes standardized tests and sees difference from the white, middle-class, academic definition of literacy in deficit terms. Findings highlight the varied and vibrant literacy practices in which Javier and Nina engage, as well as the relationships between child, mother, and researcher. The study reveals how school authoritatively trespasses on these relationships and, in doing so, narrows Javier's literacy practices and his understanding of literacy. Recommendations are made for researchers and educators to embrace the wealth of literacy practices that exist in students' homes and to seek spaces in which to engage in critical literacy practices.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

Context

The student population in U.S. public schools is undergoing unprecedented change, becoming increasingly ethnically diverse, due in large part to growing numbers of Latino¹ families immigrating to the United States. Between 1990 and 2010, more than 7.5 million Mexican immigrants arrived in the U.S. (Migration Policy Institute, 2014). This transformation is particularly salient in North Carolina, where 2000 and 2010 census numbers indicate that the general Latino population in the state grew by almost 400% between 1990 and 2000 and then doubled between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The resulting diversification within North Carolina public schools presents the possibility for an increasingly heterogeneous public school community, one in which rich cultural differences among students and families can nourish the culture of learning in classrooms in new and meaningful ways.

This increased diversification in public schools is happening in conjunction with a larger political shift toward conservatism. Anti-immigration rhetoric is ubiquitous and

¹ I use the word “Latino” throughout this study to refer to people of Mexican, Central American and South American origin and including Cubans and Puerto Ricans. However, as Villenas & Deyhille (1999; p. 442) contend, I recognize that it is problematic to talk about a “Latino” experience in education because of the vast heterogeneity of people encompassed in that lump-sum label. My participant, Nina, identifies herself as Latina and Mexican-American and her son, Javier, as Latino and Mexican-American. Throughout this paper, I provide the most specific identifiers possible.

immigration policies are a hot-button topic in many political races. Historically, U.S. public schools have been conceived with overt nationalist goals of assimilating immigrant populations into white American culture and creating a citizenry “worthy” of American democracy (Graham, 2005; Spring, 2011; Tyack, 1993). Today, schools are controlled more than ever by the Federal Government via the standardization of curricula and the omnipresence of standardized testing. That standardized tests—and accompanying curricula—are culturally biased in favor of white, middle-class students has been widely discussed (Banks, 1995; Giroux, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Salinas, 2009). Some argue that standardized tests are particularly oppressive to students who speak a language other than English at home due to the tests’ incongruity with students’ home cultures and languages (Lopez, 2004; Macedo, 2000).

This “norming” of American public schools (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Hector, 1999) via the standardization of curriculum and the high-stakes testing environment oppresses students from non-dominant (that is, non-white, non-middle-class, non-English-speaking) communities. When schooling is directed toward normalization, any difference from the norm is ignored or treated as a deficit to be remedied. Whether it is because they are essentially unseen or poorly ‘remediated,’ “...national trends demonstrate that Latina/o students are being underserved in public schools, and this situation has resulted in the lowest educational attainment of all racial/ethnic groups, with approximately 43% of Latina/os achieving less than a high school diploma” (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004, p. 251).

The high stakes testing environment in public schools creates a ripple effect in which poor results on tests often lead to greater standardization of curriculum, which has

the potential to further water down the curriculum and make teaching less child-centered (Au, 2007; Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Johnson, Boyden & Pittz, 2001). Teachers and administrators are charged with the task of reconciling the tension between a diverse student body and uniform curricula that hold performance on standardized tests as paramount. Many schools struggle with the challenge of how to equip students from diverse home cultures with the academic tools they need to succeed in the public school system when there is a gap between the home culture and the school culture (Kostogriz, 2011).

Literacy and language learning is a primary site for this tension. In her work, Brice Heath (1983) found that there was a disconnect between the home language practices in a working class community and the language expectations in schools the children from the community attended. Her ethnography illustrated the fact that these home language practices were not “less than” school language practices but that they were based on the social and cultural practices of the communities themselves. Children’s language development served its purpose well in their home communities, but when the children entered school, a whole new set of language expectations were placed upon them.

Schools, Brice Heath found, privilege the home literacy practices of white, middle-class homes including “attending to books, acknowledging questions about books, accepting book-related activities as entertainment, and engaging in conversation around books”(1994, p. 76-7). Calling these “mainstream practices,” Brice Heath wrote,

The ways of taking meaning [from books and conversations] employed in the school may in turn build directly on the preschool [home] development, may require substantial adaptation of the preschool development, may require substantial adaptation on the part of the children, or may even run directly counter to aspects of the community’s pattern (p. 91).

Thus, children whose home language and literacy practices do not mirror those privileged in schools may feel they are entering a whole new world upon starting school, one with potentially unfamiliar literacy and language practices.

Some educators bridge this gap by basing the curriculum on children's "funds of knowledge, or historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning or well-being" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133). Bringing students' funds of knowledge into the classroom both honors their home literacy practices and also helps provide a foundation of understanding for them to do better in school (Gutierrez, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo & Collazo, 2004; Moll, et. al., 1992).

While some schools embrace their students' funds of knowledge, other schools remain more traditional in their approach. Often, especially with students who are learning English as a second language, schools focus heavily on teaching English language and literacy skills in order to prepare these students to succeed in school and beyond (Snow, Porche, Tabors & Harris, 2007). In order to increase the literacy achievement of all students, including those students who speak a language other than English at home, schools "raise standards" which in practice often entails using standardized tests widely and often. While the intention may be for all students to succeed, the result is often that the literacy curriculum and learning experiences are narrowed substantially (McNeil, 2002; Kohn, 2000). This has the effects both of further ostracizing Latino students from an already unfamiliar school culture and of making any student who does not identify with the mainstream school culture (including Latino students) invisible (Brown, Santiago & Lopez, 2003).

Furthermore, the benefit of schools focusing primarily on providing students access to English language and literacy skills, at the expense of other learning contexts, is questionable. It cannot be assumed that access to this dominant discourse is inevitably positive. In fact, numerous ethnographies have documented situations in which, despite the fact that non-dominant populations gained access to the dominant discourse, this access did not translate into tangible change in the form of social or economic power for these communities (Blackburn, 2003; Branch, 1998; Collins, 1995; Ghose, 2002). In addition, when schools teach students academic English and the “ways of being” that will help students succeed in school, they often do so at the expense of students’ home cultures.

This cultural “whitewashing” (Murphy, 2007) doesn’t just occur in the classroom. Parent-teacher conferences, school curriculum nights, and homework are often focused entirely on the culture of schooling, leaving little to no room for any cultural difference. Spanish-speaking parents struggle to help their children with homework, sometimes spending hours nightly (De Gaetano, 2007). It is likewise difficult for parents to engage with their children in school-related literacy activities, such as nightly reading and book discussion, not only because of the language barrier, but because the ways of reading and talking about books that schools privilege may be unfamiliar to them (Ortiz & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2005). Schools attempt to support parents in helping their children by holding family literacy events, during which teachers communicate to parents the types of home activities that will help their children do well on school literacy tasks. However, these family literacy events become culturally contested spaces for non-dominant communities such as Latino families because they must choose between their own home cultures and languages and assimilating to the dominant culture (Giroux, 1998; Luke, 2003; Macedo, 2000).

In this dissertation study, I explore the home literacy practices of a Latino mother and son, paying particular attention to how literacy practices shape and are shaped by the participants' relationship with each other and with me as a participant observer. I further consider how navigating school literacy tasks influence the participants' literacy practices and their relationships. School literacy tasks are defined here as school-based activities that occur in the home, such as homework and nightly reading, that are focused on teaching children to read, write, speak and understand the English language and to use that language with facility to meet academic standards. The following questions guide the research:

1. What sorts of literacy practices does Javier engage in at home?
2. How do Javier's relationships with his mother and the researcher shape, and become shaped by, his understanding of literacy?
3. How does school define literacy, and what literacy practices are valued in school?
4. How does school literacy shape Javier's understanding of literacy and impact his relationships with his mother and the researcher?

To answer these questions, I will use sociocultural theories of literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 2010; Luke, 2000; Street, 2003) as a conceptual framework and Post-critical Ethnography (Noblit, Flores, & Murrillo, 2004) as a methodological framework. While this research is meant to be situated locally and specifically with one family and does not purport to generalize to entire populations or subcultures of people, it has the potential to inform educators who work with emerging bilingual students and their families with regard to how they form relationships with their students and families and how they construct literacy experiences for inside and outside the classroom. Further, this project

has the potential to add to the existing research on sociocultural literacies and qualitative research methodologies because the study illustrates how literacy practices shape and are shaped by relationships.

Definition of Key Terms

Literacy – A broad term, used to refer to the idea of literacies. “Thus, literacy is, in a sense, ‘multiple:’” literacy becomes different ‘literacies,’ as reading and writing are differently and distinctively shaped and transformed inside different sociocultural practices” (Gee, 1999, p. 356). These literacies are embodied in literacy practices (see definition below), and they are not limited to traditional representations of text (see Multiple Literacies, below).

Literacy Practices – “The basic unit of a social theory of literacy...the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives...practices are not observable units of behavior since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships” (Street, 1993, p. 12). In this study, literacy practices are understood in conjunction with multiple literacies (defined below) to refer to a broad range of ways individuals “read the word and the world” (Freire, 1970) in order to make meaning of themselves and the world.

Othering – Marking and naming those considered different from oneself (Weiss, 1995).

Emerging Bilingual – a label for students learning two languages at the same time. Often used in place of “English Language Learner” because the latter names the student based only on the student’s deficit, that is, their learning of English (Soltero-Gonzalez, Escamilla, & Hopewell, 2012).

Multiple Literacies - Ways in which individuals “read texts,” in the sense of “reading the world, the word, and self in the context of the home, school, and community...” (Masny, 2006, p. 175). Within this view, “Text is assigned a broad meaning to include

visual, oral, written, and possibly tactile forms" (p. 176). Gee (2014) further clarifies, denoting texts as "semiotic domains," or things that hold meaning. From this standpoint texts can be all sorts of things that "take on meaning, such as images, sounds, gestures, movements, graphs, diagrams, equations, objects, even people like babies, midwives, mothers, and not just words" (p. 17). All of these things are considered texts because "these things are signs (symbols, representations, whatever term you want to use) that "stand for" (take on) different meanings in different situations, practices, cultures, and historical periods" (p. 17-8). For my purposes in this work, then, multiple literacy practices involve an engagement with a text (understood broadly) for the purpose of imbuing, understanding, or communicating meaning.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

United States Public Schooling: A Historical Context

The history of U.S. Public Schooling is a chronicle of how those in power in this country have struggled to make sense of a nation made increasingly diverse by immigration. In colonial America, schools were created to teach children to read and write so that they could obey the laws of the state and religion, and “a just society was to result from inculcating religious commandments and teaching obedience to civil law” (Spring, 2011, p. 13). Schools, especially institutions of higher learning, helped maintain social distinction, as only the elite were able to attend. For young colonial children, schools were an extension of the family and church, where students studied “the Bible, along with spellers, books of prayers, catechisms, and other religious texts” (Reese & Rury, 2008, p. 31). Still, not all children had the privilege to attend these schools, and those who did often only remained for seven or eight years (Reese & Rury, 2008).

The colonists had escaped religious persecution in England, and they were determined to create a new national identity in America. Schools provided a way to begin to establish and develop the cultural norms to which they wanted their citizens to ascribe. This extended beyond colonial children to Indigenous Americans as well. “Motivated by sincere religious convictions and a belief in the superiority of English culture, European Americans engaged in an educational crusade to turn ‘heathen’ and ‘uncivilized’ Indians into models of Protestant and English culture” (Spring, 2011, p. 12). The colonists’ belief in the necessity to educate Indigenous Americans within the constructs of British culture and

Christianity was foreshadowing for how dominant groups in the United States would perceive the 'other' with respect to schooling.

From the 1820s to the 1870s, the second major wave of immigrants came to the United States. This group included people from Great Britain, Ireland, and Western Germany. During this time, the common school movement took shape in America. Primarily conceived by Horace Mann, the common school was a free school that was open to all students regardless of social class (Fielding & Moss, 2010; Reese, 2011). The idea of the common school was based on several ideologies. First, like the early colonists, creators of common schools believed that "human nature can be formed, shaped, and given direction by training within formally organized institutions" (Spring, 2011, p. 81). But common schools distinguished themselves from earlier schools in that they were not to be limited to Protestant doctrine, and they would be locally controlled by state agencies (McLaughlin, 1995). Common school advocates believed that a public school could "improve public morality, end crime and poverty, and provide equal opportunity" for all of America's citizens, while creating a "common culture and reducing social class conflict" (Spring, 2011, p. 80).

Intrinsic to these goals was a paternalistic stance that in some ways echoed that of the colonialists. Common schools would be available to all children in the hopes of providing economic mobility and social uplift via a universal, non-sectarian curriculum (Kaestle, 1983; Tyack, 1993). However, Warder writes that Mann and other common school supporters sought to create "the virtuous republican citizenry needed to sustain American political institutions, the educated workforce needed to expand the American economy, and the disciplined generation needed to forestall the social disorders so

common in American cities in the decades before the Civil War” (Tyack, 1993, p. 27).

While arguably freer from specific sectarian doctrine and open to a greater number of students, common schools still operated under assumptions of moral norms and values that were espoused as neutral. These principles, imposed on all students, were representative of the culture of the white, Christian, elite classes and did not value differences among races, ethnicities, or cultures.

When the United States government made school attendance compulsory in 1865, a new facet was added to the picture. Students were now required to attend schools that indoctrinated them into predetermined social strata (Glenn, Jr., 1988; Graham, 2005.)

The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy. Specifically, the social relationships of education—the relationships between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, and students and students, and students and their work—replicate the hierarchical divisions of labor (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 131).

In this way, schooling can be thought of, not as a provider of equal opportunities for all, but as a means of perpetuating the social hierarchy of United States culture by both explicitly and implicitly indoctrinating students, via their school tasks and relationships, to the hierarchical divisions of labor in the U.S.

Tyack (1993) notes that at this time national discourses were forming with regard to the education of immigrant children. There was a sense of growing anxiety in government that foreign “colonies” of immigrants were forming in city neighborhoods. The prevailing opinion in the government was that the “newcomers were inferior in intelligence and morality to those who preceded them; and that [immigrant] children must be compelled to attend school, learn English, and be deliberately inculcated with American

political and cultural values” (Tyack, 1993, p. 14). William Torrey Harris, the U.S. commissioner of education in 1877, wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, “Our public schools are filled with a conglomerate mass of foreigners and children of foreigners sprung from generations of ignorance and untrained intelligence...what this country needs at this time more than all else is the elevation of its citizenship” (in Graham, 2005, p. 11). Thus, ideals of a democratic citizenry and equal opportunity were shadowed by implicit, narrow assumptions of a good, intelligent, moral citizen whom school would make worthy of United States citizenship.

The 1880s brought a third wave of roughly 23.5 million immigrants to the United States, primarily from southern and eastern Europe. Ellis Island opened in 1892, and 1907 saw one million people immigrate to the U.S. in one year. This, along with World War I, created a milieu of increased anti-immigrant sentiment (Graham, 2005, Tyack, 1993). The 1917 Immigration Act restricted the immigration of “undesirables” in part by implementing a literacy test for immigrants 16 or over to demonstrate their ability to read and write in any language. It also created an “Asiatic Barred Zone” which excluded from entry anyone born in Asia, excepting those born in Japan or the Philippines (U.S. Department of State, 2015). This paved the way for the 1924 Immigration Act, which “was instated to preserve the idea of U.S. homogeneity” (U.S. Department of State, 2015). This Act established stricter caps on immigration in general, while increasing restrictions on people from Japan, Africa, and the Middle East. In the eyes of the government and many citizens, “cultural diversity had come to be defined as a national crisis” (McClymer, “in Tyack, 1993, p. 15). The Common School was a means by which immigrants could be

assimilated to American culture by being taught English and the moral norms of white American society.

During this time, John Dewey helped to establish the progressive education movement. Dewey pushed back on the frenzy for national conformity, disparaging the idea of the immigrant 'other,' as Irish-American or Italian-American, for example, writing, "The fact is, the genuine American, the typical American, is himself a hyphenated character" (Dewey, 1916, p. 185). Dewey's philosophy of education placed a greater emphasis on the agency of the individual child, where education would work toward a balance of individual self-actualization and an understanding of the world. Dewey's progressive education also focused on social change, but it did so through a focus on self-actualization and civic responsibility. Dewey and other progressives looked forward to what skills they believed would be necessary in an industrialized world ruled by scientific progress. Progressive schools emphasized problem solving and critical thinking in the context of highly personalized, child-centered goals.

Despite progressive education's increased focus on the individual child, Dewey's work still seemed to operate under an idea of "American universalism," which, Higham (1993) writes, "as a civic credo is universal in grounding public life and institutions not on an exclusive heritage but on natural rights—that is, on rational principles...that grant all citizens equality in public life and encourage all residents to claim a common citizenship" (p. 197). Dewey's "universalistic" stance was all-inclusive and progressive. However, Dewey's work did not explicitly engage with race and ethnicity in American schooling. Because of this, his colorblind ideals could not, even in theory, fully extend to children of color. In this way, even progressive public schooling in the United States overlooked

students and families of color by aiming to assimilate them into “universal” culture without regard to their home cultures and identities.

Mexican-Americans in United States Public Schools: A Historical Context

This phenomenon of exclusion and/or whitewashing was striking with Mexican-American citizens. Historically, many Mexican-Americans are descendants of people who settled on land that was either an independent republic or under Spanish or Mexican rule. The United States seized southwestern territory by winning the Texas War of 1836 and the Mexican-American War, as well as by the Gadsden Purchase of 1853. Half of Mexico’s land was taken by the U.S. as a result of the Mexican-American War alone. The majority of Mexicans who lived in these territories became full U.S. citizens at that time, but many of those landowners lost their land in subsequent lawsuits or were sent to Mexico in mass deportations (Guerra, 1998; McDonald & Carrillo, 2010).

Since then, there have been several waves of Mexican immigration to the United States, fueled by numerous political and economic factors (Rong & Preissle, 2009). “From the moment the ink was dry on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in 1848, the thousands of Mexicans who had previously moved fluidly across the Rio Grande into Northern Mexico were now immigrants, not citizens in their own country” (McDonald & Carrillo, 2010). Because Mexicans were considered racially “white” at the time, their immigration was not restricted by the Immigration Act of 1924. The 1910 Mexican Revolution and agricultural demands from U.S. farmers caused an increase in immigration from Mexico to the border states, primarily Texas and California.

Schooling for Mexican-American students at this time, when it occurred at all, was separate and unequal. In 1928, 40% of Mexican-American children in Texas did not attend

school, a statistic owed in great part to the fact that historically, white ranch owners comprised much of the school boards in Texas. Children who did attend school were segregated from white students in all-Mexican schools. One “American rancher” was quoted thus,

If I wanted a [Mexican] I would want one of the more ignorant ones—possibly one who could read and write and weigh his own cotton. The educated Mexicans are the hardest to handle. Educate them? We have to do that under the law of the state. It is right; they pay taxes. It is all right to educate them no higher than we do in these little towns. I will be frank; they would make more desirable citizens if they would stop about the seventh grade. The Mexican parents don't send their children. Some children near here have never been to school” (Salinas, 2009, p.79).

If community school boards contained attitudes such as these, Mexican children could hardly hope to be treated to academic opportunities equal to those given their white counterparts, if they were expected to attend school at all.

In 1923, Los Angeles Superintendent Susan B. Dorsey told a gathering of district principals, “We have these Mexicans to live with, and if we Americanize them we can live with them” (Gonzalez, in Darder and Torres, 2014). Menchaca (1995) notes that the school board in Santa Paula, California justified segregation and discriminatory actions based on three “smoke screens:’ Mexican students had language problems, Mexican students were unhygienic, and Mexican students had learning problems and therefore needed to be taught proper behavior in special Americanization classes” (in Tejeda, Martinez & Leonardo, 2000, p. 127). Mexican schools were “generally under-budgeted and overcrowded, administered and taught by inferior personnel, and embraced [goals of Americanization]...In some districts, especially those in Texas, migrant children were

simply too important to the agricultural economy and were denied entry into schools” (Gonzalez, 2013, p. 52).

A crucial part of this Americanization of Mexican children was teaching them English. “Educators expected Americanization instruction to result in the understanding and use of English and the termination of the Spanish language” (Gonzalez, 2013, p. 19). Salinas (2009) writes, “Another early educational policy as to Latinos involved segregation into ‘language handicap’ schools” (p. 331). In 1930, a federal court judge determined in *Independent School District v. Salvatierra* that Mexican-American students could not be segregated from Anglo students based on their ethnicity, but they could be separated for educational (language-learning) purposes. This meant that, in practice, Mexican children were still segregated into all-Mexican schools (Tejeda, et al, 2000).

In 1947, a federal judge ruled in *Mendez, et al. v. Westminster [sic] School District of Orange County* that separate schools were in violation of Mexican students’ constitutional rights, and furthermore, that segregating Spanish-speaking children in separate classrooms within schools was not beneficial to their learning the English language (Teaching Tolerance, 2015). Though this ruling did not immediately change the law of the land, similar lawsuits began to be filed elsewhere, and white schools began to admit Mexican students.

The mid-twentieth century saw the creation of the Hart-Celler/Immigration Act of 1965, which abolished national origins quotas. Immigration from Mexico and other Latin American countries increased, and the first Spanish-English bilingual school was established in Florida (Spring, 2011). In 1968, the Bilingual Education Act provided federal funding for schools to develop bilingual education programs. In 1974, the Supreme Court

ruled in *Lau v. Nichols* that a group of Chinese American students could not be discriminated against on the basis of their language learning status, further expanding the rights of students who spoke a language other than English at home. The ruling also paved the way for expanded research on teaching emerging bilingual children (Rong & Preissle, 2009).

The 1980s saw another spike of Mexican immigration, due in part to the massive devaluation of the *peso* in Mexico (Vukelich-Selva, 2014). Negative sentiments toward non-white, non-English-speaking 'others' persisted. Residential segregation meant that Mexican children often attended schools that were majority African-American and Mexican. When Mexican children did attend white-majority schools, they continued to be segregated within the schools (McDonald & Carrillo, 2010). In 1994, California's Proposition 187 ruled that illegal immigrants could not receive publically funded services, including public schooling. Four years later, Proposition 227 banned bilingual education in California, thus guaranteeing that Spanish-speaking students would need to abandon their home language while at school. Both propositions were subsequently overturned, but they remain important indicators of pro-white, pro-English-only attitudes in the U.S. (Salinas, 2009).

The current political milieu in the United States is arguably not a great deal better. The 9/11 attacks, as well as the economic recession, have contributed to a political trend toward nationalism, conservatism, and a reinvigorated fear of the 'other' (Chandrasekhar, 2003; Johnson, 2002; Naber, 2006). Though California's anti-immigrant propositions were overturned, Gandara & Rumberger (2009) note that they served as signposts for the nation. The author further laments that, in a country where the discussion of academic achievement of public school students is ubiquitous, too few seem to care about the

achievement of English learners in particular. Orfield (in Suarez-Orozco & Paez, 2002) points out, “Latino students, whose numbers have exploded since national data were first collected in the late 1960s, are by far the least successful group of students in finishing high school, and their access to college is declining” (p. 390).

Many scholars agree that these national trends demonstrate that Latino students continue to be underserved by U.S. public schools (Beck & Alleksaht-Snyder, 2002; Darder & Torres, 2014; Harris & Kiyama, 2015; Villenas & Foley, 2010). It is necessary to understand the institutional barriers and systems that “limit and derail schooling for this student population” (Harris & Kiyama, 2015). What is it about public schools that positions Latino students as either separate and inferior or invisible?

How U.S. Public Schools ‘Other’ Latino Students

Literacy researchers agree that the home provides a foundation for language and literacy learning (Bhola, 1996; Brice Heath, 1983; Carter, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Mui & Anderson, 2008; Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner & Meza, 2003; Cairney, in Anderson, 2005). As reflected in chapter one, Brice Heath (1983) documented the language practices of young children in two working-class communities (one white and one African American). She found that the “place of language in the cultural life of each social group is interdependent with the habits and values of behaving shared among members of that group,” values that are formed by family structures, religious groups, and concepts of childhood (p. 11). She furthermore found that there was a disconnect between the language expectations in the working class communities and the language expectations in school. Her ethnography illustrates the complexity and worth of the home language practices; that is, she does not judge the home practices as “less than” the school practices.

Rather, she demonstrates how the two are different and suggests that this distinction makes schooling more difficult for children whose home cultures contrast from school culture.

Brice Heath's work further details several home literacy practices that exist in white, middle-class homes, including attending to books, acknowledging questions about books, accepting book-related activities as entertainment, and engaging in conversation around books (1994, p. 76-7). Labeling these as "mainstream practices," she holds that students with this pre-school preparation do better in school than children who engage in different language and literacy practices at home, because the home practices culturally match the school practices. The way that school language and literacy practices align (or not) with students' home language and literacy practices has a great bearing on how pre-school children will do in their early years in school.

Bringing children's home culture into the classroom is one way teachers bridge this disconnect between home and school. This practice not only values the identity of the child, but also helps the child to be more successful in school (Gutierrez, 2008; Kostogriz, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Moje, et. al., 2004; Moll, et al, 1992). This practice goes beyond superficial cultural awareness nights or cultural parties at school. Rather, Moll and colleagues use the term "funds of knowledge" to refer to the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (1992, p. 133). Valuing students' funds of knowledge requires that public school teachers become learners about students and families. Teachers and families can then partner to use these funds of knowledge (such

as farming, knowledge of contemporary and folk medicine, and household management, to name only a few) as the basis for the curriculum.

Moje and colleagues (2004), examined the “intersections and disjunctures” between everyday home and community funds of knowledge and school-based, content area literacy practices of Latino middle-school students. The authors found that students drew upon many different funds of knowledge from their homes and communities to inform their school experiences, but they did not make their everyday knowledge part of the “official scripts” of their classrooms. The researchers highlight the importance of teachers engaging students in academic activities that focus on, or at least include, the texts and experiences from various communities of which the students are a part (p. 65).

However, U.S. public schools have been criticized for having a *subtractive* approach to working with Latino students, or a stance that emphasizes deficiencies in students and their home cultures, as defined by the school system. In their work on immigrants in schools, Rong and Preissle (2008) note that subtractive processes are “prevalent throughout schools and social institutions.” Proponents of this traditional, subtractive approach emphasize complete assimilation via “English-only instruction, rapid Americanization, and a mono-cultural approach [to schooling.]” This perspective, the authors contend, “dismisses the influence of ethnic cultures and discredits the authority of parents as well as the support systems of ethnic communities” (p. 16).

Ladson-Billings further contends that the official school curriculum is a “culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (1998, p. 13). Giroux concurs, suggesting that, “...schools play a powerful role in legitimating the values and language practices of the dominant culture, particularly through the mechanisms of

overt and hidden curriculums” (2001, p. 214). The hidden curriculum entails the style, language, and mannerisms with which the overt curriculum is taught. Both the explicit and hidden curriculum of American public schools favor the white, English speaking, middle-class in how they socialize children to perform their roles within the social and economic hierarchy of U.S. culture (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Popkewitz, Pereyra & Franklin, 2001).

For students in a classroom who do not themselves identify with this culture of power (Delpit, 1998) the process of retaining their historical and familial cultural ties while assimilating to the dominant culture is fracturing (Calhoun, 1994; Souto-Manning, 2006). Apple (2000) describes how Western schooling’s endeavor to acculturate students into the normative paradigm has created a racialized ‘other.’

Put another way, the dominant discourse ensures its dominance in how it describes (and thus defines and validates) itself and that which is ‘other’ than itself. This is in part because “race” as a category is usually applied to “non-white” people. “White people are centered as the human norm. ‘Others’ are raced; ‘we’ are just people” (Apple, 1998, p. 14). The school-related values and practices that the dominant (white, middle-class) culture engage in are likewise tacitly accepted as the norm, while ‘other’ values and practices are set apart as undesirable. In this framework, students and families who do not identify with the dominant discourse are then left either to be invalidated by it, or to abandon their own cultures in order to gain access to it.

The standards and achievement-based ideologies that exist today more than ever in schools help construct and reproduce the oppressive nature of the institution of schooling via a narrative of individual meritocracy (for a Critical Race Theory discussion of the fallacy

of meritocracy, see Delgado, 1995). Tyack (1993) writes, “Though theoretically they have adapted schooling to individuals, in practice educators have also created tracks and niches in schools that have tended to segregate pupils by class, gender, and racial or ethnic background” (p. 13). Latino students who speak Spanish at home are often separated from mainstream students based on their language status. Moreover, Latino students are more likely to be referred for Special Education services than white students (Skiba, et al., 2008). This segregation and increased rate of referral often occurs based on standardized assessment measures in spite of the fact that standardized tests are culturally biased in favor of white, middle-class students (and thus against ‘other’ students) (Banks, 1995; Giroux, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Salinas, in Dyson & Weddle, 2009). Some argue that standardized tests are particularly oppressive to students who speak a language other than English at home due to their incongruity with students’ home cultures and languages (Lopez, in Ybarra & Lopez, 2004; Macedo, 2000).

Taking on the English-only movement, Macedo (2000) articulates that the debate over bilingual education in the U.S. cannot be understood unless analyzed “within the context of a theory of power relations and an understanding of social and political production and reproduction” (p. 21). The author pronounces the ideological principals undergirding the English-only movement as consonant with the colonial ideology “...designed to devalue the cultural capital and values of the colonized” (p. 20). Students’ language, he contends, is “the only means by which they can develop their own voice, a prerequisite to the development of a positive sense of self worth” (p. 22).

Yet, English-only literacy instruction is practiced with the vast majority of emerging bilingual students in the U.S., 79% of whom speak Spanish at home (Payan & Nettles,

2008). This is despite the fact that a great deal of research has demonstrated that the use of a first language is helpful for learning a second language (Cook, 2001; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). The result is not to empower students by providing access to the dominant discourse, but rather to strip them of their identities and notions of self-worth. The cultural disconnect children feel between their home lives and school lives is compounded when schools, even unintentionally, erase their home identities entirely.

Valenzuela writes, "...students are objectified by a double standard that calls on them to make sense of schooling when schooling is not attempting to make sense of them." This objectification is experienced by students as a "forced-choice proposition between being Mexican or American...When the definition of what it means to be educated in U.S. society systematically excludes the Mexican culture, the Spanish language, and all things Mexican, the prescription that students 'care about' school can be a hard pill to swallow" (1999, p. 258). Ironically, students' resistance to 'swallow the pill' of assimilation in schools, whether it be in the form of truancy, poor academic performance, or unwillingness to give up their home language, serves to bolster the deficit-based labels to which they are subjected.

In her work, Cardenas (2004, in Kells, Balester & Villanueva) asks the question, "What happens to a student who sees liberation in leaving the classroom, who is glad to be through with high school" (p. 116)? She writes of her own experience being silenced in American public schools as she became aware of how her use of Spanish marked her. This awareness caused her to feel so out of place in school that she couldn't wait to be free of it. Ybarra (2004, in Ybarra & Lopez) argues similarly that teaching writing to Latino students

using mainstream white, middle-class communication structures involves asking them to “change their cultural identity ... this pattern of teaching does epistemological violence to Latino students because of the marginalization and cultural implications that take place” (p. 90).

Freire writes, “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor...the more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them (2005, p. 72). This practice “removes the student from any active participation in the construction of knowledge or the sharing of power” (Giroux, 2001, p.39). In this way, the student is stripped of her subjectivity and becomes an object to be manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally, by others. Because language and literacy are primary sites for this manipulation, these schooling practices call into question the way we choose to define literacy and literacy learning for students. As Ladson-Billings asks, “Literacy for what?” (1992, p. 318).

Literacy Paradigms

The Cognitive Model of Literacy

The cognitive model of literacy learning has its beginnings in the work of cognitive psychology. Early cognitive literacy scholars sought to understand the cognitive differences between “literate” and “illiterate” individuals; that is, individuals who can and cannot decode and encode print. For example, Goody (1963), widely cited in current

discussions about cognitive perspectives on literacy, conducted research with communities deemed literate and illiterate and constructed a theory that positioned literacy as having an independent effect on other human cognitive abilities. In particular, Goody claimed that the development of logical thought is dependent on knowledge of print (Goody & Watt, 1963; see also Stanovich & Cunningham, 1992).

Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener (2004) describe the main connection between cognitive psychology and current literacy research as being exemplified by the use of empirical research to study human cognitive functioning, thus legitimizing literacy research as scientific, observable and applicable to large populations of students. Purcell-Gates and colleagues further note that constructs from research on cognitive functions such as perception, attention, memory, problem solving and comprehension “run deep in the knowledge base of reading researchers [who study]: (a) letter and word recognition; (b) automaticity; (c) bottom-up/top-down processing; (d) schemas; and (e) stages of learning” (p. 42).

This last element represents an important theme in the cognitive literacy paradigm. A great deal of research has been undertaken to isolate and describe stages of learning to decode print. This work, conducted in order to inform literacy pedagogy, is largely done in controlled experimental situations and focuses on the “in-the-head” operations that individuals do or do not undertake as they learn to read print (Purcell-Gates, et. al, 2004, p. 45). O’Connor reiterates, “The focus in education-oriented cognitive science research is to better understand the learner...and thus to improve the ability of schools to foster learning and development” (in Cook-Gumperz, 2006, p. 270). Thus, attention is focused on

individual processes that can be scientifically determined to be universal elements in learning to decode and encode.

Snow (2000) argues that in spite of this focus on individual, internal processes does not mean that cognitive literacy researchers disregard the importance of the social contexts of literacy. She asserts that the cognitive view regards reading “as an inherently developmental process—a process in which cognitive changes within individuals affect the nature of their participation in the social events that constitute literacy” (p. 117). Snow points to the importance of sub-skills involved in decoding, including letter recognition and sound-symbol correspondence, as well as those needed for more general literacy practices, such as “skills with various forms of discourse privileged in the classroom” (p. 117). Conceived this way, literacy is first a set of individual developmental processes that can be thought of as being situated in social and cultural contexts.

The cognitive model provides the theoretical foundation for much of literacy instruction and assessment in U.S. public schools. While literacy teaching varies among states, districts, schools, and teachers, the country as a whole has turned toward the standardization of literacy, both in terms of how it is defined and how it is taught. The implicit assumptions here include that reading and writing are politically neutral in that they are universally positive. Academic literacy skills equip students with the tools they need to do well in school lessons and on standardized tests, to graduate from high school, and to attend college. Standard courses of study and the research that supports them further assume that literacy is an individual, developmental skill that can be broken up into sub-skills. Thus, literacy learning and teaching is seen as a ladder of discreet sub-skills that, when mastered, support academic achievement.

However, a number of literacy scholars have suggested that the cognitive model of literacy has several fundamental problems. Luke (2000; 2003a; 2003b) warns against the naïve empiricism of the cognitive literacy model. He claims that it is dangerous to assume that there can be “free-standing pedagogical and psychological decisions around the official classification and framing of literacy as school knowledge independent of broader sociological, linguistic, and ethnographic analyses” (2003a, p. 136). Luke argues that such a stance is destined to have “limited, accidental, and contradictory effects” (2003a, p. 136). Macedo (2000) specifies these effects as including the censorship of certain (non-English, non-dominant) languages and bodies of knowledge (p. 17) as well as the treatment of students and families as objects to be manipulated rather than subjects who possess an agency of their own (p. 18).

This empiricism of the cognitive model is naïve because positivist science ignores the existence of a culture of power and unwisely treats scientific research and often literacy itself as neutral when in fact it is not. Privileging academic literacies often has the effect of encouraging students to relinquish their home cultures and non-academic literacies (Au, 1998; Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Ghose, 2002). Collins (1995) points out the importance of mass schooling and universal literacy in constructing particular national identities and allegiances (p. 82). He writes, “Schooling did not replace illiteracy with literacy, but rather these heterogeneous domestic, religious, and workplace literacies were replaced with that particular shaping and standardizing of scripted practices we can call schooled literacy” (p. 82; see also Giroux, 1988; Hull & Schultz, 2001).

“Schooled literacy,” in this sense, is the narrowing of literacy practices by divorcing them from students’ social and cultural histories and instead situating literacy practices

solely within the (white, middle-class) discourse of schooling. In her study, Ghose (2002) likewise discusses literacy's power to enforce dominant values, specifically dominant national languages (p. 161). Taken together, these authors provide a compelling argument for skepticism regarding cognitive literacy's claims to an "objective" method of arriving at "the truth" about literacy practices as neutral and autonomous concepts.

Another site of contention for critics of the cognitive literacy model is the idea that teaching children with non-dominant status how to read and write in English will provide them with tools they need to succeed in U.S. culture. Learning to read and write in academic English, researchers say, gives children access to the dominant discourse, or way of knowing, thinking, and speaking that is sanctioned as important and correct by people and institutions of power.

This view is an alluring argument for the cognitive literacy model because it is assumed that this access will help all children obtain cultural and social capital. Citing Bourdieu (1984), educational researchers have adapted notions of cultural and social capital to educational settings (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Martínez, Martínez & Pérez, 2004). Lee and Bowen (2006) provide definitions for both concepts that capture their use in the research. They maintain that *cultural capital* for students and parents in relation to the educational system is primarily comprised of personal dispositions, attitudes and knowledge; possession of tangible educational resources such as books, computers or academic credentials; and connections to education-related institutions. *Social capital* involves having knowledge about the "obligations and reciprocity in social relationships" as well as an understanding of social norms and information channels (p. 196-7).

However, to view cultural or social capital either as stable traits that must be mitigated or as one-dimensional characteristics that can, for example, be taught (or bought) within intervention settings is detrimentally simplistic. It encourages educators and researchers to turn their analyses away from complex social and cultural systems represented in public schools and toward the families themselves, locating the problem within 'othered' families. In this way, the dominant paradigm of inequality based on race, class and educational difference is, either intentionally or unintentionally, perpetuated. This only continues to "naturalize and normalize the cultural practices of some while stigmatizing and marginalizing the cultural practices of less-powerful others" (Prins & Toso, 2008, p. 585). Operating within this framework also threatens to build relationships, between teachers and students as well as between schools and families, that are dependent upon replacing families' cultural practices, including literacy practices, with new, "better" ones (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992).

Finally, treating cultural and social capital in this manner makes the assumption that access to the dominant discourse will inevitably lead to academic success and future empowerment. In fact, numerous ethnographies focused on literacy practices within non-dominant communities have documented situations in which this was not the case (Blackburn, 2003; Branch, 1998; Collins, 1995; Ghose, 2002). These studies illustrate complex contexts in which, despite the fact that non-dominant populations gained access to the dominant discourse, this access did not supersede systemic barriers. That is, this access did not translate into tangible change in the form of social or economic power for members of these communities. Street (2004) writes, "Just 'giving' non-mainstream children access to the language and literacy of the ruling group does not of itself ensure a

change in the power structure” (p. 327). For these reasons, research that utilizes this view of cultural and social capital must be located within the contexts of families and communities. When learning to read and write in the dominant discourse is divorced from a critical consciousness of the world and one’s place within it, the value of the literacy practices is greatly lessened (Freire, 1987).

Teaching students to read must not be assumed to be an independently empowering process. For example, Street (2003), a scholar working within the sociocultural framework of New Literacy Studies, argues that a cognitive or “autonomous” view works under the assumption that introducing literacy to “illiterate” communities will have the effect of improving both their cognitive skills and their social prospects, “regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their ‘illiteracy’ in the first place” (p. 77). This autonomous view is framed on a “Great Divide” between “literacy” and “illiteracy” that oversimplifies what counts as literacy (Branch, 1998; Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Street, 2003). Street counters that an “ideological” view of literacy posits literacy practices as dependent upon social context. Because of this, literacy practices “are always rooted in a particular world-view” with unequal power dynamics (p. 78).

If literacy educators and researchers ignore this fact, the practice of “providing access” by teaching children to read, divorced from its social and political context, will only maintain the currently existing oppressive structures in society and continually marginalize students from non-dominant communities. Furthermore, Au (1998) points out that “conventional school literacy practices may serve as instruments of control and disempowerment, superseding and displacing the literacy practices of students’ families and communities” (p. 308; see also Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). Kostogriz (2011)

argues that it is the responsibility of literacy researchers and educators to ensure that children from non-dominant communities can exercise both their right to access to the dominant discourse and their right to sustain their home culture. The following section offers some further insight into how this might be done.

Sociocultural Models of Literacy

Sociocultural theorists see literacy as an inherently social set of practices that cannot be divorced from local and specific social circumstances (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 2010; Luke, 2000; Street, 2003). Key assumptions of sociocultural literacy theories include the ideas that: (a) there are different literacy practices associated with different domains of life; (b) literacy is historically situated; (c) literacy practices change dynamically and are acquired through regular processes of life learning; and (d) literacy practices are inextricably linked to social institutions and power relationships embedded there (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004).

Gee (1999) describes New Literacies Studies, a sociocultural framework of literacy, as follows:

The New Literacy Studies approach literacy as part and parcel of, and inextricable from, specific social, cultural, institutional, and political practices. Thus, literacy is, in a sense, 'multiple': literacy becomes different 'literacies,' as reading and writing are differently and distinctively shaped and transformed inside different sociocultural practices. Additionally, these sociocultural practices always have inherent and value-laden, but often different, implications about what count as 'acceptable' identities, actions, and ways of knowing. They are, in this sense, deeply 'political.'" Furthermore, these practices always fully integrate language, both oral and written, with nonlanguage 'stuff,' that is, with ways of acting, interacting, feeling, valuing, thinking and believing, as well as with various sorts of nonverbal symbols, sites, tools, objects, and technologies (p. 356).

Through this view of New Literacy Studies, Gee moves the idea of "reading" outside of the individual, away from measurable decoding and encoding sub-skills, and into the realm of

the social, political and cultural. This is what is described as the “social turn,” which is based on the view that “reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural (and we can add historical, political, and economic) practices of which they are a part” (Gee, 1999, p. 3).

This perspective views literacy not as a subset of skills that one ‘knows’ but as a group of socially embedded practices that one ‘does.’ This is important, not just for literacy researchers, but for teachers as well. Compton-Lily (2009) writes, “New Literacy Studies helps educators to move beyond skills-based approaches to literacy learning, enabling them to recognize that a vast range of experiences contribute to literacy learning” (p. 88). Compton-Lily argues that while teachers must be highly knowledgeable about the teaching of reading skills such as phonics and comprehension, they must never divorce these skills from the whole child or the social and cultural context of which the child is a part because doing so ignores the subjectivity of the child.

The idea of multiple literacies fits within the sociocultural paradigm. Regarding literacies as “multiple” means different things for different scholars. I am interpreting multiple literacies to signify that “the individual is reading the world, the word, and self in the context of the home, school, and community...” (Masny, DATE, p. 175). Masny defines literacies as

...words, gestures, attitudes, ways of speaking, writing, valuing a way of ‘being’ in the world. Literacies are value-laden, interwoven with gender, race, religion, ideology, and power. When a person talks or reads, she or he constructs meaning in a particular context. More precisely, this act of meaning construction that qualifies as “literacy” is subject to cultural, sociopolitical, and sociocultural interpretations within that society and of its institutions. The meaning of literacy is actualized according to a particular context in the time and space in which it operates (p. 175).

Within this view, "Text is assigned a broad meaning to include visual, oral, written, and ... tactile forms" (p. 176). Harste (2003) concurs, "In addition to language, humans have developed a variety of ways to mean [i.e. make meaning] (art, music, movement, etc.)" (p. 9). The term "literacies" can refer to multiple "ways of reading the world in particular contexts" (Kerka, 2002, p. 3). In this way, literacy practices can include different ways that an individual engages with texts of various kinds and makes meaning of them (Cervetti, Damico, & Pearson, 2006).

Reading the world, a key part of sociocultural frames of literacy, involves uncovering social power structures. This effort is forefronted in studies and practices of critical literacy in particular. Shor writes, "...*literacy* is understood as social action through language use that develops us as agents inside a larger culture, while *critical literacy* is understood as 'learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations' (Shor, 1997, p. 2). Janks (2000) likewise describes Critical Literacy as being concerned with the relationship between language and power. The author specifies that Critical Literacy scholars explore how language, and discourse more broadly, are "powerful means of maintaining and reproducing relations of domination" (p. 176). Put another way, language and other social semiotic systems work together to construct the cultural and social realities within which people live (Halliday, 1993). Those who are in power define for a culture which practices are acceptable, important, and imbued with power. Gaining agency within these power structures, even to dismantle them, requires that one access and become fluent in the dominant discourse (though, as is discussed above, accessing the dominant discourse alone does not guarantee that one will gain agency).

In teaching practice, the concept of a dominant discourse of academic language in schools, for example, may be explicitly taught when teachers clarify to students that a dominant discourse exists and that gaining access to it provides the potential for success within the institution of public school. In their study, Hammond and Macken-Horarik (1999) examined how teaching emerging bilingual students academic scientific language, as well as being explicit about the importance of scientific language within the culture of school, helped those students to succeed in public school science classes. This Critical Literacy practice helped the students to gain knowledge about the tools needed to succeed in an academic context. The teachers did not treat the language as neutral, or better than the students' home language practices, but explicitly named it as localized and necessary for the students' success in the unit and as potential scientists.

However, Critical Literacy theorists caution against an access-only approach to teaching students about the dominant discourse. An access-only approach is one that aims simply to provide students with the tools needed to succeed in the school context. Teaching students the cognitive skills of reading and writing may grant them access to the dominant discourse in at least one sense. However, doing so maintains the status quo of unjust power relations within a given culture. Giroux (1992) writes, "Students need more than information about what it means to get a job or pass standardized tests...they need to be able to assess dominant and subordinate traditions so as to engage their strengths and weaknesses...they need to be able to understand how cultural, ethnic, racial, and ideological differences enhance the possibility for dialogue, trust, and solidarity" (p. 8). Only in this way will students be able to use their literacy in ways that value them as worthy participants and agents of change in our diverse democratic society.

Thus, sociocultural theories of literacy are not neutral either, nor do they claim to be. Sociocultural literacy scholars view the current dominant social and political system as oppressive of those who do not identify with the white, middle-class norm. Literacy educators and researchers have a responsibility to work toward social change in schooling because of the diverse students with whom they work (Blackburn, 2003; Giroux, 1992; Gutierrez, 2008; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Tejada, 1999). However, it is important to see potential social change as being more complex than simply providing access to the dominant discourse.

For example, Freire and Macedo (1987), Critical Literacy theorists, are skeptical of the ability of print literacy knowledge “to trigger the social emancipation of the subordinate classes” (p. 106; see also Branch, 1998; Collins, 1995; Ghose, 2002). They argue that one’s ability to read the *word* is inextricably tied to the ability to read one’s *world*, or to obtain a critical consciousness of oneself within a particularly situated social reality.

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world...In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35).

In other words, people learn and use literacy practices for specific purposes within their world. Their needs and aspirations help construct their purposes and therefore the types of literacy practices in which they engage. Furthermore, engaging in literacy practices, in a Freirian sense, is for the purpose of establishing oneself as an agent of transformation within the world.

In this way, Freire and Macedo provide a socially-situated definition of literacy that necessarily connects the reading and writing of print to critical and physical action in the world (see also Christensen, 1989; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Macedo 1993). For example, in their work, the authors depict how Brazilian “peasants” are empowered to make changes in their socially lived experiences through and in conjunction with learning to read print. The authors morally frame the teaching of print literacy as non-neutral and ideally connected to critical understanding and social transformation through action.

Learning to read and write print is one crucial part of a social justice framework. Divorced from this endeavor, academic literacy loses its capacity to empower. However, when individuals practice literacy within the context of critically understanding themselves and the power dynamics within their relationship with the world, they can harness their agency. In this way, *literacy itself* does not empower individuals as objects. Individuals as subjects may potentially use literacy for empowering ends. Because of this, when schools require students to engage in literacy practices that are divorced from the socio-historical worlds of which the students are a part, schools strip the literacy practices themselves of the fundamental worth that they have for the students. It is via students’ existence as agents in *relationship* with their lived world that literacy practices hold power.

The Significance of Relationships within a Sociocultural Literacy Framework

Relationships are central to sociocultural models of literacy. Freire (1970) writes, “...the literacy process must include the relationships of men with their world” (p. 212) because “the word is not something static or disconnected from men’s existential experience, but a dimension of their thought-language about the world” (p. 215). In other words, literacies as practices are used within an individual’s relationships with the world

and with others. A person's understanding of and interaction with the world around them² is constructed with and through their language. In this way, language forms the fabric of one's lived reality, as well as a basis for understanding and transforming that reality via one's literacy practices. Beck (2005) clarifies, "Through a process of naming and analyzing these complex relations, individuals become critically aware about the conditions of their existence" (p. 394).

Yet, critical literacy is concerned not just with personal relationships but also with power relations on a macro level (Behrman, 2006; Christensen, 1999; McLaughlin, 1995). "Literacy as embedded in the world means 'taking up' the relations and fields of social, cultural, and economic power where people actually use texts" (Freire, 1970, p. 205). This is in part because power exists in relations between people and/or institutions. Clegg argue[s] that "power is not a property held by persons, as some forms of episodic agency would have it, but that power is relational, and is the product of structured sets of relations among people, relations which are not attributable to or created by particular people, but are more historically, institutionally and discursively produced" (Gilbert & Low, 1994, p. 7).

Put another way, individuals interact with their world via their relationships. Because of this, "empowering" students by means of literacy education is not simply a matter of improving their skills in reading and writing. Their empowerment is rather about the ways in which they can use literacy practices as tools within their relationships in communities in order to establish themselves as agents in their worlds. This involves a focus on day-to-day power relations between individuals as well as a focus on institutions of power. Because these unequal power relationships are not "attributable to or created by

² I value gender neutrality and therefore often use "their" as both singular and plural.

particular people,” a critical, emancipatory framework must seek to address how micro-level relationships can potentially affect macro-level systemic oppression. For Freire, this jump from local to universal occurs when individuals’ critical understanding of their existence is “accompanied by an ethical and social responsibility to transform the world” (Beck, 2005, p. 398). In this way, individuals gain critical understanding via their literacies and then use this critical understanding as the impetus to take action.

Literacy practices are furthermore *learned* in relationships (Freire, 1970; Street, 2003). Though for Freire the goal is for literacy practices to impact relationships in a particular way--that is, critically and for the purpose of transformation--literacy practices inherently impact relationships because they exist only in communication between individuals or groups. Caine (2003) writes, “Literacy is an extension of human relationships” (p. 47). Bean and Moni (2003) agree, “Critical literacy shifts the boundaries of discussion between teacher and students, changes relationships, and generates substantive conversations about text” (p. 10). That is, it is through one’s connection to another individual that one learns to engage in a particular literacy practice, and it is these literacy practices that in essence form the fabric of one’s relationships with others.

Given the premise that literacy practices shape and are shaped by relationships, it is helpful, when considering literacy learning, to think not just about the content of the literacy skills and strategies children learn, but also about the nature of the relationships that shape and are shaped by that literacy learning (Carter, 2006; Moje, 1996). Haden and Fagan (1995) write that in literacy learning contexts, “the modeling of literacy must be authentic; the social relationships must be genuine. Students must be encouraged to read because reading is meaningful, enjoyable, or functional. They must see that literacy entails

a broader web of social relationships than between child and teacher or principal” (p. 261). In other words, children need to see others engaging in literacy practices in authentic, meaningful ways within genuine relationships in order to learn that literacy practices hold some worth to them outside of a specific learning context.

Skolnik (2000) argues that teachers and schools make a choice between accomplishing the above or doing just the opposite, by teaching isolated skills that aren’t directly linked to anything--or anyone-- outside the classroom. “The curriculum diet we offer children invites them to share in a rich banquet or a handful of stale crackers and hardened cheese” (p. 111). She goes on, “What we teach will never ‘take’ unless it connects with the inward core of our students’ lives” (p. 111). Connecting with students this way requires an approach to teaching that involves a deep commitment to learning about students’ lives and the literacies they practice both in and out of school. In short, it requires that teachers fully engage in authentic relationships with their students.

Ostrosky, Gaffney, and Thomas (2015) agree and maintain that literacy learning is predicated on an adult-child relationship that “is far more profound than what is captured in the terminology of ‘teacher-child rapport’... we envision communication that is embedded within literacy interactions, not something before, after, or distinct from teaching...The strength of the relationship is built on the teacher’s grasp of the teaching craft and commitment to meaningful interactions with a child” (p. 184). This “profound” kind of relationship is necessary, the authors argue, for children to learn, not just literacy skills and strategies, but also how they can engage in literacy practices in meaningful and worthwhile ways beyond the classroom.

Relationships and Literacy Practices Beyond the Classroom

Of course, teachers are not the only participants in children's literacy relationships. Parents and caregivers make up part of children's primary relationships, and their literacy practices are powerful shapers of their children's literacy practices (Janes & Kermani, 2001; Taylor, 1993; Whittaker & Pianta, 2012). Moll and Greenberg (1992) argue that every household is an educational setting because family relationships are the primary contexts for learning literacy practices.

Family literacy practices reveal cultural funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) that may not be valued in public school settings but are nonetheless legitimate literacies that hold value within the communities that use them. They write, "Without a focus on social relationships and persons-in-activities, it is very easy for outsiders (educators) to underestimate the wealth of funds of knowledge available in [for example] working class households. Funds of knowledge are available regardless of the families' years of formal schooling or prominence assigned to [traditional] literacy" (p. 327). The authors highlight the value of families' funds of knowledge and point to the fact that public schools do not always recognize funds of knowledge as being valid or important.

Janes and Kermani (2001) found the same thing in their research with Latino families in a family literacy program. The authors found that replicating in the home what children do with texts at school may not be effective and may lead to "a notion of literacy that is unidimensional, and will alienate caregivers and children" (p. 464).

Midway through their family literacy project, the authors modified their family literacy model so that, instead of replicating school-sanctioned shared reading techniques, parents

and caregivers were encouraged to interact with their children around texts in ways that made sense to them. They found that “Literacy became a joyful and interactive experience, a family- and culture-specific celebration, an *aficion*,” or hobby (p. 464).

Clearly, relationships are central to the understanding of literacy practices and literacy learning. While the cognitive model of literacy fails to adequately attend to the importance of relationships to a child’s growing literacy practices—though at least one cognitive literacy researcher (Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007) does claim that literacy can be both developmental and situated within social practices—in a critical literacy framework, literacy practices cannot exist without social relationships.

Relationships are the primary sites for an individual’s interaction and communication with the world around them. As such, they both shape and are shaped by literacy practices.

Critiques of Critical Literacy

Because relationships are so integral to literacy practices, it makes sense that literacy researchers would study children’s close relationships as sites for literacy learning. However, what critical literacy looks like in practice is in fact point of critique of critical literacy theory. North (2009) questions whether a teacher focused both on using the home cultures of students as the basis for curriculum and on teaching students to critique institutions of power can still focus the necessary time and energy to teach students to read and write with academic proficiency. Janes and Kermani’s (2001) study of family literacy, for example, focused on the nature of the relationships between caregivers, children, and texts. They did not, however, measure the success of the family literacy program in terms of the students’ proficiency in academic literacy. North casts doubt on whether such work is truly educating for social justice.

Other researchers claim that the work of the major critical literacy theorists is too abstract and lacks clarity about what critical literacy in action actually looks like. In their work, Pessoa and Freitas (2012) drew on principles of critical pedagogy, which shares with critical literacy the tenet of the necessity to develop and maintain a critical consciousness for the purpose of transforming an unjust world. The researchers found that it was in fact a very difficult process to teach a critical language learning course to undergraduate students. In particular, they discovered that it was problematic for them as instructors both to be accepting of students' views and experiences and at the same time to use theory to be assertive about principals of inequality based on race, class, and ethnicity (p. 773).

Ellsworth (1989) goes further in her critique, claiming critical pedagogy theory is so abstracted and decontextualized that putting it into practice—as she attempted to do with undergraduate students in an anti-racism course—only results in reproducing relations of domination in the classroom (p. 298). She contends that by prescribing “moral deliberation, engagement in the full range of views present, and critical reflection,” critical education, like other historical discourses concerned with ‘rational thought,’ has the effect of setting up an “irrational other” in students who approach issues of anti-racism in ways that embrace the conflict within personal experiences rather than transforming it into “rational argument” (p. 301). In other words, for Ellsworth, the practical application of a critical pedagogy framework alienates ‘others’ and perpetuates an oppressive discourse rather than embracing voices that counter the mainstream discourse.

In their research with emerging bilingual students in a critical literacy framework, Hammond and Macken-Horarik (1999) agree that, while they are “broadly in support of critical approaches to [teaching English as a second language] in the field of literacy

education...a number of questions remain to be resolved in the implementation of such approaches (p. 542). These questions also center on the practical application of a critical literacy model:

- *To what extent does development of an effective critical literacy in English presuppose control of mainstream literacy practices?*
- *To what extent do critical literacy programs introduce students to the cultural and linguistic resources necessary for them to engage critically with texts?*
- *What recognition is there of the time and effort required on the part of both teachers and students to develop such resources and of the need for explicit and systematic teaching in order to assist students in this development (p. 528).*

Hammond and Macken-Horarik raise fundamental questions for the pragmatic use of a critical literacy framework. Like North (2009), they point to the possible tensions between students on one hand “engaging critically with texts” and on the other, having “control of mainstream literacy practices.”

Luke and Dooley (2009) respond to these critiques and acknowledge that critical literacy involves “a dual orientation towards a more equitable distribution of textual and discourse resources among learners and towards the critique of ideology, culture, political systems and inequitable material conditions” (p. 9). The authors point to researchers such as Fairclough (1990) who addresses this tension by teaching students to utilize critical textual analysis to create “categories and procedures for analyzing how text works,” thus making practical and manageable the act of critiquing the ideological and hegemonic functions of texts (p. 8).

Still, Luke and Dooley (2009) concede that many more examples of critical literacy in practice are needed. They write, “Whether and how critical approaches can make substantive differences in the cultural understandings, socioeconomic pathways, and political engagement and agency of learners is the outstanding question” (p. 10). Clearly,

more research is needed that sheds light upon what critical literacy looks like in practice, as well as what school and home literacy practices look like through the lens of a critical literacy framework.

This study has the potential to help fill this gap in the research. In the Findings and Discussion, I provide an illustration and analysis of the push and pull between school and home, between cognitive and critical literacies, in a way that depicts the challenges and complexities of enacting critical literacy practices in a context where schooling is authoritatively perpetuating a more cognitive, individualized notion of literacy. This authority is compounded by the existence of a school culture that privileges individual performance on high-stakes standardized tests and sees difference from the white, middle-class, academic definition of language and literacy use in deficit terms. I hope that this study both highlights the varied and vibrant literacy practices in which Javier engages in his relationships outside of school, while also revealing how school authoritatively trespasses on these relationships and, in doing so, molds Javier's understanding of literacy and his literacy practices.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Methodological Foundations

Through this research, I examine the literacy that occurs inside and outside of school contexts for Javier, a Mexican-American student, and the impact of these varied literacies on his relationships. I set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What sorts of literacy practices does Javier engage in at home?
2. How do Javier's relationships with his mother and the researcher shape, and become shaped by, his understanding of literacy?
3. How does school define literacy, and what literacy practices are valued in school?
4. How does school literacy shape Javier's understanding of literacy and impact his relationships with his mother and the researcher?

Informed by sociocultural theories of literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 2010; Luke, 2000; Masny, 2007; Street, 2003), this inquiry is methodologically based on Postcritical Ethnography (Noblit, Flores & Murillo, 2004).

Postcritical Ethnography

In their book, *Postcritical Ethnography: Reinscribing Critique*, Noblit, Flores and Murillo (2004) describe a move from "critical" to "postcritical" ethnographic research. They contend that if critical ethnography is ethnography with a political purpose, then "It is the working through of issues of positionality, reflexivity, objectivity, and representation in the context of the substantive and political interests and commitments of various postcritical

ethnographies, rather than any specific resolution of the issues, that reinscribes critique as postfoundational” (p. 22). This postcritical stance forms the basis of the theoretical framework I use here.

In Noblit, Flores and Murillo’s (2004) views, positionality “involves being explicit about the groups and interests the postcritical ethnographer wishes to serve as well as his or her biography” (p. 21). The concept of positionality “includes the ethnographer’s given attributes such as race, nationality, and gender which are fixed or culturally ascribed” (Chiseri-Strater, 1997, p. 37). Reflexivity, according to Noblit, et al. (2004) involves both “accepting that identity of those studied is dispersed and mobile,” and “working toward dialogic and bifocal (emic and etic) exigesis that elaborates the alternative possibilities, identities, juxtapositions, and outcomes in any scene studied ethnographically” (2004, p. 21-2). Put another way, the researcher must commit to engage with the fluid complexities of the scene and participants being studied without seeking static or simplistic resolutions that betray those complexities.

When considering objectivity, Noblit and colleagues (2004) ask the researcher to consider cultures not merely as objects in a simple sense, but as “ephemeral and multiple while our interpretations are always partial and positional” (p. 22). Finally, representation concerns the necessity that the researcher problematize three concepts that undergird ethnographic research: “why we wish to study and represent,...the desire to, and ways of, creating a portrayal,...[and] the idea that our accounts or representations are to edify others” (p. 22). The postcritical ethnographer must eschew the idea that cultures are fixed in their characteristics and that they can be observed through a neutral lens. They must

take great care to problematize her ability and desire to represent and portray an “other,” while vigilantly questioning the purpose of the research.

In practice, these tenets of postcritical ethnography promise to overlap while both clarifying and confusing each other. They do not present a neat, easy-to-follow methodology but rather a collage of commitments to question and problematize the researched, the researcher, and the research – as a process and a product - throughout the study. It requires that I continually situate my questions and interpretations in the local and specific while continually asking, “How might I interpret this experience differently” (Anders, 2012).

Positionality

Chiseri-Strater (1996) discusses the importance of disclosing one’s positionality while being transparent about related conflicts and tensions that the researcher will inevitably face. Positionality dovetails with the commitment to be reflexive, which requires the researcher to “be critically conscious through personal accounting of how the researcher’s self-location (across for example, gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality), position and interests influence all stages of the research process” (Pillow, 2003, p. 178).

Though I more thoroughly discuss my positionality in the Findings, I wish to clarify here as well that I knowingly bring my history, identity, and privilege into every situation I enter, including my research with Nina and Javier, my “participants” in this study. I identify as a white, middle-class woman, mother, teacher, graduate student, and researcher, and these various identities guided and formed the way I came to articulate my research questions, sought out my participants, and collected, analyzed, and represented the data I

collected. I bring a great deal of privilege to my relationships with Nina and Javier, and indeed, the relationships were based in some ways on how I might be able to transfer some of that privilege to them, in the form of tutoring Javier in school literacy practices and helping both Nina and Javier to navigate the culture of school.

Reflexivity

In considering reflexivity, Pillow (2003) also calls upon the researcher to “resist writing to the familiar.” She asks, “What gestures of neutralization operate in reflexivity – leaving it unmarked even as we think we are marking it, so that reflexivity becomes reduced to a question of technique and method?” (p. 180). As I consider my positionality as a white, middle-class teacher-graduate student-researcher, Pillow’s remarks warn me to be wary of the storylines that my belief system and my graduate student training have led me to privilege.

My literature review divulges my theoretical stance as an aspiring sociocultural literacy researcher. I have done my best to take care that my critical frameworks don’t become “the container into which the data are poured” (Lather, in Pillow, p. 187). My commitment to postcritical ethnography urges me first to ask, then to problematize, questions such as: What story will I tell? Who is this writing for? What will this project accomplish? In large part, by using my researcher journal throughout the research process, but also by having explicit conversations about the research process, both with Nina and with professional colleagues, I have grappled with these questions. I cannot say that I have answered them, or that I ever will. But I have made decisions in this “moment” in time about how I will co-construct and represent this particular story. I have collected a great deal of data over two years spent with Nina and Javier, including ethnographic field notes

collected during participant observation, school literacy-related artifacts, and ethnographic field notes and transcribed interview and participant observation sessions. We have developed what I believe to be trusting relationships. I have spoken with Nina often about what I have been writing and the themes I have been thinking about. I have discussed with her what I have learned from the literature, and how that has shaped my questions and the themes which I have pursued. In turn, she has shared with me her perspectives on the research, which have guided my process as well. It is via these conversations with myself, with Nina, and with colleagues that I have worked to be reflexive as I collected, analyzed, and represented my data.

Objectivity and Representation

Throughout the research, I have been careful to continually reflect upon “the sociocultural location of the researcher as an individual and a member of a scientific field, and the cultural presuppositions in the habitual practices of a field” (2008, Arzubaiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri, p. 310). Denzin (in Pillow, 2003) suggests that a “responsible, reflexive text announces its politics and ceaselessly interrogates the realities it invokes while folding the teller’s story into the multivoiced history that is written...no interpretation is privileged” (p. 187).

This suggests that any representation of research is necessarily a discussion of itself (that is, its process and its representation) while it is a discussion of the researched and the researcher. Anders (2012) provides a useful explanation of her postcritical ethnographic research. She writes, “For me, postcritical ethnography has provided a way to study power in every day experiences, to imagine equitable practices, and to commit to a way of doing ethnographic work that includes not only a critique of power, but also a critique of self,

interpretation, and representation” (p. 100). I know that as a postcritical ethnographer I can never really get my representations “right” as neither the researched nor the researcher is fixed nor completely graspable by me; that is, I can never objectively *know*.

Villenas (1996) writes, “I must attempt to untangle my own multiplicity of identities played out in the terrains of privilege and power in ethnographic research” (p. 16). If we recognize that any research is a story of the researcher, how, then, do we as Trinh (1989) asks: ‘inscribe difference without bursting into a series of euphoric narcissistic accounts of yourself and your kind’ (Trinh, in Pillow, 2003, p. 187)? Pillow advises that one prepare both to engage with and represent “messy” texts. “Messy texts,” she writes, “are many sited, intertextual, always open ended, and resistant to theoretical holism, but always committed to cultural criticism” (2003, p. 187-88).

I recognize that this research is as much, if not more, about myself as it is about Nina and Javier. My own identity and positionalities as a white, middle-class teacher and aspiring sociocultural researcher have led me to form the premises for my research questions and the questions themselves. In many ways, I see this research as a way, not to answer questions, per se, but to illustrate in as much complexity as possible phenomena that I believe to be vitally important: that of relationships, literacy practices, and the institution of public schooling.

The research process, and in particular my relationships with my participants, have given me new and varied ways in which to consider these phenomena. I recognize as a researcher that I operate within academia, a system that has traditionally held scientific objectivity and expertise paramount. I hope that my relationships with Nina and Javier, which continue now and will continue, I hope, for a lifetime, will help to problematize and

question that elite stance. I hope also that my representation of the data will demonstrate my commitment to Nina and Javier's words as well as my desire to keep my own power and positionality in check, by continually questioning my own actions and motivations and presenting myself in a humble and non-expert manner. Ultimately, it is my hope that the data analysis, findings, and discussion honor Nina and Javier, my relationships with each of them, and the story we co-constructed.

Design Overview

Data gathering and analysis were guided by grounded theory techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory techniques are meant to develop social theories based on lived experience. Some of the assumptions guiding grounded theory include "the active role of persons in shaping the world they live in, an emphasis on change and process and the variability and complexity of life, and the interrelationships among conditions, meaning, and action" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 25). For these reasons, grounded theory provided an appropriate stance for a study in which I work to explore complex interrelationships between individuals, literacy practices, and the institution of school, taking into account issues of positionality, objectivity, reflexivity, and representation (Noblit, et al., 2004). In addition, grounded theory techniques allowed me to remain open and flexible to changes in the data collection process based on ongoing reflexivity in my research process (Geer, 1964; Pietrkowski, 1978).

Participants and Site Selection

I first met Nina and Javier during the summer of 2013. As a graduate student at a nearby university, I had been working with the Anderson school district's ESL Liaison, Madalena, to improve the district's communication with Spanish-speaking families. Prior

to the ESL Liaison's interceding, schools with large populations of Spanish-speaking parents would hold 1-2 family literacy nights per year. Madalena contacted me and enlisted my help in gathering research to support these family-centered school literacy events. I wrote a short literature review that Madalena presented to her supervisors at the district level so that she could garner support for her efforts. It was important to me to work with a family who was interested in talking with me and willing to freely discuss their experiences with the public school system, both positive and negative. I wished to work with only one family, because I wanted to privilege getting to know the family as deeply as possible, learning as much as I could about their experiences, rather than learning less about several families' experiences.

The Family Liaison with whom I worked suggested I speak with Nina, a Latino mother with whom I had spoken informally before, and her son Javier. Nina was seeking additional tutoring for her son because his teachers had shared with her that he was reading below grade level. Nina had two other children, younger than Javier, in the school system. Her husband worked long hours and therefore wouldn't be able to speak with me, but Nina was very interested in being able to share her experiences, and she liked the idea that there would be an equitable exchange between us: I would tutor Javier 1-2 times a week and Nina and Javier would allow me to record and transcribe those sessions in which I was a participant-observer, along with informal conversations, formal interviews, and artifact collection. These data are discussed in greater detail below.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected during the time I began to work solely with Nina and Javier. This research is focused on data I collected over approximately two years,

from June 2013 to August 2015. During this period of time, I met with Javier to tutor him in reading and writing 1-2 times per week, for roughly 10 months out of each year, depending on Nina’s and my availability. I took ethnographic field notes during and after each of these sessions, and I recorded and transcribed the last six months of these sessions. I formally interviewed Nina on 10 different occasions, and formally interviewed Javier on six different occasions. In addition, we had several informal conversations, which I either recorded in my field notes or to an audio file for transcription, depending on what was available and appropriate at the time. Finally, I collected artifacts weekly including examples of Javier’s work in school. These data sources are represented in Figure 2 and are discussed in greater detail, below.

Figure 2: Data Collection Table

Dates Collected	Type of Data	Total Visits	Resulting Data
June 2013 – August 2015	Participant Observation	137 Sessions, 25 of which were recorded and transcribed	Ethnographic Field Notes, Transcriptions
August 2014 – August 2015	Mother Interviews	9 sessions, 3-5 hours per session	39 hours of transcription
March 2015 – August 2015	Child Interviews	6 sessions, approximately 1 hour per session	6.5 hours of transcription
August 2014 – August 2015	Artifacts	Collected weekly	52 weeks of home literacy artifacts, homework, school communication, report cards, and assessment results
June 2013 – August 2015	Researcher Journal	Utilized weekly	Approximately 100 weeks of data

Ethnographic Field Notes

I collected ethnographic field notes during and after the tutoring sessions I had with Javier. These sessions occurred 1-2 times per week, for roughly 10 months of each year, beginning in June 2013 and lasting through August 2015, for a total of 137 sessions. My data collection goals during and after these sessions were to take down information that pertained to Javier's literacy practices both in and out of school, as well as details about how he completed school literacy tasks, what was difficult for him, his affect, and his behaviors around these tasks. Often, before and/or after these sessions, I would talk with Nina and/or Javier about how school and life was going in general. The types of things that were discussed during these informal conversations included me translating school communication or homework for Nina and Javier, what extracurricular activities Javier was participating in, what school meetings or conferences were coming up, and how life was generally going for the family. During the last six months of the study, from March – August 2015, I recorded and transcribed these sessions, for a total of 25 recorded and transcribed sessions.

Artifacts

Throughout the research process, I collected and organized artifacts that represented school literacy practices. These "School Artifacts" included all school literacy-related schoolwork, homework, formal and informal assessments, report cards, test results, and written family-school communication. Nina saved these artifacts for me and I collected them each week. Additionally, I collected any artifacts that came to my attention that spoke to Javier's literacy practices outside of school. These included but were not limited to

church class activities, the invitation Javier made me for his first communion, artwork or other activities Javier completed for extracurricular camps or classes he attended, and writing Javier completed on his own (not for a school assignment). I collected and saved these original artifacts with Nina and Javier's permission, and I plan to return them upon the completion of this study.

Mother Interviews

I conducted 9 formal interviews (that is, for which I had a formal interview script as a guide) with Nina over the last year we worked together, from August 2014 – August 2015. These interviews were intended to last from 1-2 hours each, but in reality lasted from 3-5 hours each, as Nina often got in the habit of telling me stories during the interview times. I recorded these interviews and transcribed them for analysis, for a total of 39 hours of transcribed interview data. I intended for these interviews to focus on Nina's school and immigration history, Javier's schooling history, Nina's experiences navigating school contexts with Javier, and Nina's general views on literacy, education, and Javier's future. For each interview, I came prepared with a script I had composed ahead of time (see Appendix B: Parent Interview Questionnaire).

After each interview, I took ethnographic field notes and wrote in my researcher journal, and these reflections helped me to compose additional questions for the subsequent interview. Thus, from the second interview onward, my script included questions I had composed based on the content of the first interview, and so on. Still, during our interviews, Nina was very open and willing to tell about herself and her family, and so often the interviews took on a life of their own, during which I asked questions based on what Nina had just shared with me in the moments prior. In this way, each

interview was a co-construction, based not only on questions and topics I had gleaned from the previous interview, but also on topics Nina felt moved to talk about in our sessions together.

Interviewing and transcribing was a copious process. Each of the interviews with Nina were held in Spanish. While I have an intermediate facility with Spanish, each time we spoke, I hired a native speaker who would be able to clarify any questions either Nina or I might have, and who would be able to translate anything in Spanish that I couldn't understand. During these interviews, I took copious notes in English and added notes from the translator in key areas where I needed translation help. When it came time to transcribe the interviews, I listened to the audio files in Spanish with my interview notes close by, and I transcribed the interview text in English. Whenever I had difficulty with the transcription, I called upon my native Spanish-speaking translator for clarification. When I included Nina's words in my research findings, I went back to the original audio file to ensure that I got Nina's original words. In addition, I will be reading my research to Nina prior to its publication. This will provide a form of member checking, but it is most important to me that Nina hear and understand what I've written and have the opportunity to make any changes she feels are necessary.

Child Interviews

During the last six months of the study, from March – August 2015, I also conducted six formal interviews with Javier. While I was able to speak informally with Javier during our tutoring sessions, I found that I wanted to have opportunities to question him directly on different literacy-related areas, such as how school was going, and what kinds of literacy practices he was engaging in, both in and out of school. For each of these interviews, I

brought an interview script with sample questions (see Appendix C: Child Interview Questionnaire), however, as with Nina's interviews, my questions for subsequent interviews were dependent upon what Javier talked about in previous interviews. Each of these interviews lasted approximately one hour, for a total of 6.5 hours of transcribed interviews. These interviews were held in English; however, Nina was always nearby, and whenever she had a question about what we were discussing, we switched over to Spanish to bring her into the conversation. I transcribed the interviews in English, and whenever I shared Javier's words in my research findings, they are in his original English.

Researcher Journal

Keeping a Researcher Journal throughout the entire research process helped me to engage in the level of reflexivity, with regard to my participants and myself, required of post-critical ethnography (Noblit, et al., 2004). Reflexivity, according to the authors, involves both "accepting that identity of those studied is dispersed and mobile," and "working toward dialogic and bifocal (emic and etic) exigesis that elaborates the alternative possibilities, identities, juxtapositions, and outcomes in any scene studied ethnographically" (2004, p. 21-2).

I kept a researcher journal throughout the two years I worked with Nina and Javier. This journal was separate from ethnographic field notes and had a different purpose. After each participant observation or interview session, I took ethnographic fields notes based on the content of that session and my observations of the session, including themes I noticed were arising. The researcher journal was something I wrote in at least once a week—as often as possible, I wrote in it directly after taking post-session field notes. It was my goal to be open and flexible at all times by consistently reflecting on the work and

considering how the work was going and how it might go differently, with the goals of post-critical ethnography in mind. I used the journal to interrogate my positioning in the study as researcher, teacher, and participant observer. In the journal I was able to take note of my uncertainties as to how the study was going, and what I believed those uncertainties were based upon. I will discuss how I used the data from this journal in more detail in the Data Analysis section.

Data Analysis

I used constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) as a guiding tool as I moved back and forth from my experiences in the field to the data, in a recursive process in which I used my reflections on the data to generate further questions for the field, and so forth. For example, after each participant observation or interview session, I took ethnographic field notes about the content of the session, as well as questions I had for future sessions. Over time, I was careful to take note of different themes I saw arising from the data. These themes helped me to cater my literacy tutoring to Javier's strengths and his readiness, as well as to construct questions for focusing future interviews. For example, in the notes from a particular tutoring session, I might write about the fact that Javier seemed uninterested in doing his homework for the evening and instead wanted to read from his book of choice. This information both helped me to make a note to provide additional reading choices for Javier in our future sessions, in an effort to do work that motivated and interested him. It also provided information for me to ask Javier in the future, formally or informally, about the differences between literacy work he enjoyed versus literacy work he did not enjoy.

Writing in my researcher journal allowed me to think carefully about my

positioning as teacher and researcher in the context of my work with Nina and Javier. For example, as time went on during the study, I found myself constantly straddling a tension between on one hand doing what I felt was good for Javier in terms of literacy learning; that is, reading and talking about text that interested him and was decodable for him, and on the other hand, working on tasks that were required by his classroom teacher and/or that Nina wanted us to work on in order to satisfy the demands of school, for example, reading passages that were “on grade level” in order to prepare for upcoming standardized tests. This journal allowed me to question my positioning as literacy expert versus as a supporter of Nina and Javier as they navigated the requirements of school.

Throughout my time working with Javier, I transcribed the interview and participant observation data as often as possible, no later than a month after the session took place. I used this data, as well as my field notes and researcher journal data, to code for themes that arose. Especially at first, I paid close attention to themes that pertained to school literacy tasks, for example, Javier’s motivation or affect during school literacy tasks, Nina’s ability or lack thereof to make sense of homework, Nina’s experiences of parent-teacher conferences or IEP meetings, etc. By midyear during the first year of data collection, however, I began to focus just as much on the many out-of-school literacy practices in which I saw both Nina and Javier engage. I could then use my researcher journal to reflect upon how and why I made these choices to focus on particular forms of literacy I was witnessing in the field.

After several months in the field I began to more formally code for different themes in the data and carefully go back through the data to find elements that supported these different themes. At first, these final themes included: (a) relationships, and (b) instances

in the data that represented Javier's, Nina's, and my literacy practices. I coded for these categories because I felt they would begin to answer my research questions. When searching for representations of relationships in the data, I looked for things that either Javier and Nina or Javier and I did together that either brought us closer together or that characterized the ways we behaved together or the things we did together as a rule. For example, Javier and Nina often completed art projects together, and they often completed Javier's homework together. Javier and I, in turn, often read *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and we often worked on choosing books that Javier would be motivated to read. Some of these instances were not things I observed but were rather things that Nina or Javier told me about, such as when the family told me about their trip to Washington DC. The second theme, instances that represented literacy practices, became three categories, one for each set of literacy practices for Javier, Nina, and I. There was overlap between literacy practices (seen broadly as multiple literacies) and instances revealing relationship.

I then looked further into instances of literacy practices among the three of us to code for (a) school-related literacy practices, and (b) home literacy practices, or any literacy practices that did not relate to school, among all three of us, creating six different categories, or two categories for each individual. Thus, I found all of the instances in the data that represented how Javier engaged in school and non-school literacy practices, and I did the same for Nina and me.

I tracked these instances by searching for activities in which individuals engaged continually over time as a form of meaning-making and communication with others. In addition, I looked for activities that would meet my definition for multiple literacies (Freire, 1970; Masny, 2003); thus, activities that represented an individual's ways of being in the

world that have the capacity to provide a means for the individual to make and/or communicate meaning for themselves or others. Much of the data I used for myself was autobiographical/historical, in the same way that some of it was for Nina and Javier when they told me about their literacy practices during interviews or informal conversations, instead of demonstrating them for me during my participant observation sessions. Finally, I searched through these six categories for anything that would reveal individual affect, emotion, or motivation (or lack thereof) for each individual engaged in a literacy practice. In this way, I found, for example, that Javier was almost always happy and motivated to engage in home literacy practices, whereas he seemed often to treat homework--or school literacy practices-- as drudgery.

As I considered how to present the findings I had to consider the messiness of the data, as what I ended up with was a complex collection of overlapping representations of relationships and literacy practices that interacted with each other in interesting ways. I chose a narrative approach of vignettes tied together with thematic threads in order to employ a “thick description” of the data that honored the complexity of the story within my research (Geertz, 1973). I was also careful to consider, as I described above, my own representations of myself in the data, as a post-critical ethnographer who was also part of the story. It was important for me, not only to include myself within this thick description, in order to own up to my presence in the story, but also to divulge my positionality and my own influence on the way the data was represented. This is, I recognize, as much a story of myself as it is a story of Javier and Nina. Willingly and freely placing myself within the story also helped me to be more critical of that placement, as I was able to some extent to separate my participant self from my analyst self when it came time to analyze the data.

There are, of course, limitations to this approach of data collection and representation. Rejecting notions of objectivity, I never intended to tell an impartial story, as I don't believe that is possible to do. My representation of the data is as inclined toward my own world view as it possibly could be. My desire to investigate relationships with regard to literacy practices, for example, was based on my sociocultural definition of literacies being multiple, as well as my belief that the relationships and literacies are intertwined. I sought, in this study, an opportunity to see if I would find this link in a situation in the world, to learn about its facets, and to depict its complexity to the best of my ability.

In some ways, I set myself up for what I would find in the way I asked my research questions. I believe, however, that this is possibly often the case in any research. My goal, then, was not to provide an objective view as much as to present a deep and rich understanding of the full picture of my data. Using my ethnographic field notes and my researcher journal as contexts for reflection, I did find that there were elements in the data that surprised me and that caused me to explore directions I hadn't considered before.

At the finish, what I have is story that I hope honors Javier and Nina and my relationship with them. While the results are not meant to be attributable to large groups of people, it is my hope that this story of my understanding of Javier's, Nina's, and my experiences will inform our relationships as Javier continues through school. I also hope, secondarily, that the momentary truth of this story has the potential to touch someone who reads it, in a way that influences the way that person thinks about relationships, literacy practices, and the institution of schooling.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter is organized into three primary sections, titled “Javier,” “Nina,” and “Charna.” Each of these cases details the various literacies, both in and out of school, that I either observed or learned about during this study, and that pertain to Javier’s literacy practices as seen via his relationships with his mother and myself. I chose to frame Javier’s literacy practices in this way, both because of my belief in the importance of relationships to literacy practices and vice versa, and also because it was these particular relationships I was able to observe and learn about throughout this study. I did not, for example, have access to Javier’s teachers and therefore could not include information about their relationships with Javier. Similarly, I did not explore Javier’s relationship with his father, or the possible mutuality of their literacy practices. During this study, I only saw Javier’s father twice, as he worked two full-time jobs. Javier and Nina both spoke fondly and often of Javier Senior and thus I glimpsed his role in Javier’s life as it was shared with me through Javier and Nina.³

Throughout this chapter, you will see that both Javier and Nina engage in a wealth of literacy practices for different communicative purposes (considered broadly as multiple literacies) in their lives. These literacy practices do not just occur *within* their

³ Including Javier Senior in future research, as a fourth case, would enrich the findings and surely change the story depicted here. As it happened, I did not have the access necessary to include him in this study.

relationships—in many ways they make up the fabric of their relationships with each other and with me. They show Javier and Nina to be intelligent, caring, and multifaceted individuals who use a variety of literacy practices in the service of relating to and making meaning of themselves and others. School, however, reveals itself to be a dominant presence that holds authority over these literacy practices because it serves as a gatekeeper for Javier’s—and to some extent, the family’s—perceived progress in life. Javier and Nina’s experience of schooling reveals school to privilege a limited, cognitive view of literacy that is expressed primarily in contexts of individual performance in the form of school tasks or standardized tests. In this way, school reaches into Javier and Nina’s relationships with each other and with me, straining and narrowing both the relationships themselves and the ways in which Javier defines himself.

The Family’s Immigration Context

Anderson, NC is a midsized southern city that has the largest population of people of color of any of the five largest cities in the state. It is home to 36,000 Latinos, and accounts for almost 10% of the state’s total Latino population (WUNC, 2010). In the mid 1990s, Anderson saw the first wave of Latino immigrants, mainly farmers and their families who were immigrating from Mexico after becoming disenfranchised through NAFTA, as well as immigrants from traditional gateway states such as Texas and California who were in search of new job opportunities (Perreira, 2011). At that time, the Latino population in the city was about 2000, or 1% of the total population (NBC, 2011).

In the decades following, the numbers of Latino immigrants in Anderson increased rapidly and helped give the city the distinction of having the 8th largest immigrant population in the United States (NBC, 2011). While currently one third of the city’s Latino

population live below the poverty level, Anderson boasts Latino business owners in several sectors, in addition to a large Latino resource center and a Latino-owned and run credit union that has 11 branches and over 55,000 members. Anderson's Latino population lives in largely segregated areas of the city, primarily in three apartment communities that are home to both African Americans and Latinos (Latino Migration Project, 2009). One of these apartment communities is where Nina and Javier's father, Javier Senior, moved in 2006 when they reached the United States from Mexico.

Anderson's public school system reflects the city's population. With over 32,500 students in 54 public schools, Anderson's students are about 21% Latino (Capital Broadcasting Company, 2015). Of these students, about 6000 qualify for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) services based on their scores on the ACCESS, a standardized test given to all public school students in the state who speak a language other than English at home. District standardized testing reports reveal that about half of all Latino elementary students and about one third of the county's LEP students passed the reading/language arts End of Grade tests in 2014 (NCES, 2014). In addition, in that year, Latinos accounted for 23% of the district's high school students, but over one third of the county's high school drop-outs (NCES, 2014).

Anderson public schools have received criticism for lacking resources necessary for Latino students and families to flourish in the school system. In 2011, the Southern Poverty Law Center filed a federal complaint with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, on behalf of the roughly 6000 LEP students in the district. The complaint cited instances of verbal and physical abuse perpetrated against Latino students. It also described ways that the district needed to improve upon its services to Latino students and

families, including providing important education documents to Latino families in Spanish, and providing adequate translation services for Latino families. At the time of the report, the district employed only three interpreters for all 54 schools (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013).

When Nina and Javier Senior immigrated to the city in 2006, neither possessed legal documentation. “The Great Recession,” or the worldwide economic decline that began in 2007 and is still felt today in 2016, was about to hit the country. While North Carolina had previously been relatively welcoming to Latino immigrants, in large part because it was hoped that immigrant labor would help uplift the state’s declining economy (Murrillo, 2002), the state’s population now exhibited increased anti-immigrant sentiment and fear of the ‘other,’ particularly on the part of residents who were hardest hit by the recession.

Still, the situation in North Carolina was preferable to Nina and Javier Senior’s life in Mexico. While Nina held a job as a lab technician at a pharmaceutical company in Mexico, her lack of a college degree prevented her from making a wage that compared to her peers. Javier Senior worked in a *tienda*, or small store, in Mexico City, because he was not able to find work in his primary field of construction. He learned from his sister, who had immigrated to North Carolina several years earlier, that there were plentiful construction opportunities in the state. The two made the journey separately, with Javier Senior traveling ahead to establish himself in the area and secure living arrangements. By the time Nina arrived, six months after her husband, the two of them had a home in a rented 1-bedroom apartment in a primarily Latino and African American apartment community in Anderson. Soon after, Nina was able to find part-time work in a local laundromat. Within the year, Nina was pregnant with Javier.

Javier

You know, some people at school get really worried about the tests. Some people can't even sleep the night before them." When I responded, "How do *you* feel about them?" He peeked up at me through long, thick eyelashes and softly admitted, with an embarrassed giggle, "I'm one of those people." Then he hugged his ever-present pillow tightly to his chest.

When Javier was born, Nina and Javier Senior were living in a 1-bedroom apartment complex inhabited mostly by Latino and African-American residents. While they had made several acquaintances and were friendly with the neighbors in the complex, they still hadn't made very close friendships and the couple didn't have any family nearby. Because Javier Senior worked a double-shift each day at a local restaurant chain that serves food that is step up from McDonalds, Nina found herself alone throughout much of her pregnancy and during the months when Javier was a newborn.

Not only did Nina have to give birth in a hospital in a strange place where very few people could speak to her in Spanish, she also had to learn to be a mother to her first child in a country where she felt a foreigner, without the help and support of her close friends and family members back in Mexico. When asked about this time, Nina said,

"Emocionalmente, no estaba muy bueno. El nacimiento no fue fácil, ni pude amamantar durante mucho tiempo . Creo que puede haber tenido depresión posparto , pero me da vergüenza hablar con los médicos al respecto, así que sólo me quedé callado."

("Emotionally, I was not very good. The birth was not easy, nor could I breastfeed for a long time. I think I may have had postpartum depression, but I was ashamed to talk with

the doctors about it, so I just kept quiet.”) Javier Senior was supportive when he was home, but because he was at work most of the time, it was often just Nina and her new baby.

As Javier grew, Nina began to make friends, primarily with neighbors, and she started to build a support system for herself. She now had other mothers to talk to and lean on when she had questions about her first baby. In Javier’s early years, he was with Nina at all times except when she was able to get hours at the laundromat where she worked. During these times, Nina would leave Javier with a neighbor mom. Javier and Nina qualified for free healthcare based on the family’s income, and she took Javier to all of his well-baby visits. He was a happy and typically developing young boy, very active, quick to giggle, and shy.

Javier began school when he was four years old, in a free Pre-Kindergarten program Nina had learned about through friends and neighbors. Nina remembers,

Fue una introducción a la escuela ... que te enseñó el entorno social y sobre las cosas que tenía que saber para kindergarten ... [como] conocer las letras, colores, formas y contando.

It was an introduction to school...they taught you the social environment and about the things you had to know for kindergarten...[such as] knowing the letters, colors, shapes and counting.

The first six months were very difficult for Javier because it was his first real introduction to learning English. While both Nina and Javier Senior had command of a few practical phrases in English, they spoke Spanish at home. Nina recalled that it was hard for him to communicate with the other kids, most of whom already spoke English. The teachers, who spoke only English as well, would try to communicate with Javier and the other Spanish-speaking children by signing and acting things out. “Para el final del año escolar , podía entender mucho más [Inglés]. Pero él era mejor en la comunicación con los niños de lo que

era con los maestros. (By the end of the school year, he could understand a lot more [English.] But he was better at communicating with the kids than he was with teachers).”⁴ Nina liked that Javier participated in a lot of hands-on activities during that year, such as planting pumpkin seeds and doing other science projects. Despite the initial language barrier, Javier developed strong relationships with his teachers in PreK. He requested to visit the PreK center every year until he was in 3rd grade, when the center closed at that location and Nina wasn’t able to track down where his old teachers had moved.

After PreK, Javier attended Kindergarten at Shady Park Elementary, a brand new magnet school in the family’s school district, where 18% of the students are labeled “Hispanic,” and 96% of those students qualify for English as a Second Language services (NCES, 2014). Beginning in kindergarten, Javier was pulled out of the regular classroom by the English as a Second Language teacher on a regular basis, to work with other emerging bilingual students on literacy activities. Nina has saved stacks of Javier’s work from his early years in school, and looking through his kindergarten work, you can find all of the typical primary school activities: Javier’s drawings with typical emergent writing, pages with numbers and letters written for handwriting practice, homemade books about different science projects such as seed-growing and weather, and worksheets on which Javier had colored objects to identify the color words. Javier bonded with his kindergarten teacher as well, and he still requests to walk into the primary wing at school to visit her whenever he is allowed.

⁴ Most Emerging Bilingual children take 1-2 years to understand and communicate informally in English, whereas academic proficiency can take 5-7 years or more to achieve (Collier & Thomas, 1989; Cummins, 1989; Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2003).

Javier's first grade year was much more academic than his year in kindergarten. Based on the Common Core Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015), first graders in North Carolina are expected to begin the school year knowing the names and sounds of the alphabet, reading short, patterned text with simple sight words (words that occur very frequently in texts and are not easily phonetically decodable, such as "you, said," and "like") and picture cues for more difficult vocabulary, and writing at least one simple sentence with phonetically spelled words and correctly spelled Kindergarten sight words, (such as "I," "at," and "in") (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015). By the end of the year, first graders are expected to be able to read books with several lines of text on the page, including much more complex vocabulary. They are likewise expected to be able to write at least five sentences on a given topic with first grade-level vocabulary (such as "shark," "family," "bread," and "fight") spelled correctly and more difficult words spelled phonetically.

Javier began his first grade year after having spent the summer playing, attending summer camps, and reading books—primarily in Spanish—with his mom and his primarily Spanish-speaking friends. Thus, he needed a great deal of review before he was ready to start doing what is considered to be first grade-level work. It is typical for students who speak a language other than English at home to experience a "summer reading loss" over the summer months when they are not participating in a structured literacy program in English (Coats & Taylor-Clark, 2001). Nina shared that Javier did read on his own a little bit that summer, though not as often as when he was in school. Most of their time reading together during the summer months entailed Nina reading to Javier in Spanish.

It was during his first grade school year, when academic literacy tasks got much more difficult much more quickly, that Javier began to fall behind. The increase in traditional academic instruction in the primary grades in recent years is widely documented (DeVault, 2003; Miller & Almon, 2009; Russell, 2011; Ziggler, Gilliam & Barnett, 2011). Lin Russel (2011) writes, “Once a transitional year emphasizing child development, kindergarten now marks the beginning of formal academic instruction” (p. 236). First grade follows logically: children are expected to begin the year reading simple sentences and end the year reading early chapter books (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). Javier’s report cards indicate that he was “below grade level” in literacy from the first marking period onward, and the gap between Javier’s demonstrated literacy skills in the classroom and what was expected “on grade level” widened as the year went on.

Javier continued to enjoy school, for the most part, in first grade. He liked his teacher, though he didn’t seem to bond with her the way he did with his pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers. In addition, during his first grade year, Javier began to become more self aware of what he perceived as his lack of ability in academic literacy tasks. Nina shared that he began to say about himself that he was “good at science and math, but not at reading and writing.” He began to notice what he perceived as the difference between his literacy abilities and those of his peers. Nina shared that parent-teacher conferences began to be primarily about Javier “struggling in reading.”

Many researchers question the value of homework, especially for students in families with non-dominant status (Corno & Xu, 2004; Gil & Schlossman, 2003; Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Nina found it difficult to help Javier with his homework, sometimes

spending several hours on one night's assignments. Nina understood very little English, and each weekly homework packet contained several pages written in English. Nina often visited neighbors in order to enlist the help of a bilingual older child. She would return home with an understanding of what was expected of Javier, but without the ability to help him consistently do it. For example, on a given night, Javier might be expected to complete a math worksheet, write three sentences on a given topic, and spend 20 minutes reading 1-2 books he brought home from school. Nina and Javier both became frustrated, because it just wasn't possible to successfully accomplish these tasks, much less every night.

Nina appealed to Javier's classroom teacher and his ESL teacher for help, but his classroom teacher wasn't able to make a separate homework packet for Javier each week, and it wasn't always possible for the ESL teacher to be available to talk Nina through the homework because she was one of only two bilingual teachers in the school and was therefore responsible for all of the school's translation and Spanish-English communication needs. Throughout the year, at report card times, Nina would attend parent-teacher conferences and get bad news. Javier wasn't reading on grade level. He wasn't writing on grade level. He didn't seem to be growing in his literacy skills as quickly as his teachers expected of him. He continued to receive small-group support both in the classroom and with his ESL teacher, but during the rest of the day, he was often placed in a situation where he wasn't ready for what was being asked of him. That is, he and Nina both remember that in class and for homework, Javier was given assignments that would require him to be able to read and write on grade level, rather than on his personal instructional level. At the end of the school year, his report card stated that he was reading almost a year below grade level.

In his second grade year, his teachers recommended that Javier undergo testing to determine whether or not he qualified for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for special education services. He qualified, based on his difficulty with reading comprehension, and began to be pulled out three times a week for additional reading instruction with a special education teacher. Thus, he spent 30 minutes a day being pulled out for ESL and 45 minutes, three times a week being pulled out to work with his Exceptional Children teacher.

Nina, meanwhile, sought ways to support Javier's literacy learning at home. For example, she began building a library of books for Javier and his sister Brenda, who was one year younger, to read. She continued to ask Javier's teachers for advice about what she could do at home to help him, and she was working hard to build her own English language skills so that she would be able to better assist Javier in reading and writing. Through the family's church, Nina was able to secure a free tutor who could read with Javier and help with homework one night a week, and Javier often attended his school's after school program where he could receive extra help with homework. Still, the gap between Javier's demonstrated reading proficiency and expected grade-level proficiency did not close and in fact seemed to be slowly widening.

Because of his low score on the reading portion of the 3rd grade End of Grade tests (EOGs), Javier was required first to re-take the test again at the end of the year, and then to attend a "Summer Reading Camp" sponsored by the district, where students attend an abridged school day for five weeks during the summer months to try to boost their reading proficiency. Students were then required to take yet another reading exam at the end of the reading camp. Javier and other students who did not pass the summer exam were

placed in a grade 3-4 combination class at the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, in order to receive more 3rd grade level instruction in the hope that they would pass another reading test in the early fall and be promoted into a 4th grade class by late fall. At the end of the study, Javier was in a 4th grade class, but was still being pulled out of the regular classroom lessons each day by his ESL and EC teachers to receive small-group instruction in reading and writing.

Eres maestra? ¿Cómo te llamas? ¿Vas a leer Javier? ¿Puedo ver los libros? Ver mi juguete? (Are you a teacher? What's your name? Are you going to read with Javier?)

I first met Javier in the summer of 2013, when he was a bright-eyed seven-year-old, looking forward to starting second grade the following year. While a graduate student at a nearby university, I had been working with the school district's ESL Liaison, Madalena, to improve the district's communication with Spanish-speaking families. Prior to the ESL Liaison's interceding, schools with large populations of Spanish-speaking parents would hold 1-2 family literacy nights per year. During these literacy nights, the school would tell parents about what their children were learning during their class's literacy block, and teachers would instruct parents on what they should be doing at home to aid the school's efforts in improving their children's literacy skills.

When Madalena, who at the time was translating at many of these school family literacy nights, got involved at the district level, she lobbied to hold more family-school literacy events and to make them more family-centered. She wanted families to have a context where they could not only ask questions and learn about their children's

curriculum but also share their aspirations for their children and their hopes and expectations for their children's schooling experiences. Madalena was hearing from several families that they were having a hard time with their schools' expectations for homework and reading at home.

Madalena contacted me and enlisted my help in gathering research to support these family-centered school literacy events. A mutual colleague who knew of my interest and experience with school literacies and family-school relationships had urged Madalena to reach out to me. I wrote a short literature review that Madalena presented to her supervisors at the district level so that she could garner support for her efforts. I also began attending some of these family-school literacy events. Childcare was provided, and parents were given time to get to know one another before they shared their aspirations and concerns for their children. In addition, Madalena shared informal presentations with parents based on the grievances she had previously heard from parents. These presentations were largely focused on how parents could think about their own home literacies and make connections between their home practices and school literacy practices. She obtained and donated books in Spanish to families who attended her events. Madalena also provided information to the parents about the benefits of students building their language and literacy skills in their first language, and she shared several different examples of literacy and language-building activities that parents could do with their children in Spanish.

It was through these family-school literacy events that I became increasingly interested in learning more about how families navigated school literacy experiences when their home language was different from the language spoken in school. Many families who

attended Madalena's workshops were happy with their child's teacher but at the same time were frustrated with the types and amount of homework they were expected to complete at home with their children. They wanted to learn more about the school's literacy curriculum and what they could do to help their children to do well in school, but they also wanted a venue where they would be heard, and where they could get to know each other and share strategies with other families who were going through the same things they were facing. I enjoyed and learned a great deal from Madalena and the families who attended the family-school literacy events, but I wanted to know more, and I hoped to get a deeper sense of a family's experience in public school. When I asked Madalena if she could recommend a family with whom I might be able to work for my dissertation research, she recommended Nina, who was looking for extra help in tutoring Javier. Madalena helped to set up a time when I could visit the family at home. It was the summer after Javier's first grade year.

I drive into the family's apartment complex on a steamy June evening, and several groups of kids are outside playing in the late-day sunshine. Clusters of kids walk by, probably on their way home for dinner, in swimsuits wet from playing in one of the complex's pools. Other children sit on tiny decks outside the apartments or play on the small patches of lawn that are interspersed between the 3-floor apartment buildings. A few friendly kids wave or shout hello as I get out of my car, lugging a bag packed with books I hope Javier will be interested in reading.

When I ring the doorbell, Javier's younger siblings, Brenda (age 5) and Samuél (age 2), bound to the door to greet me and pepper me with questions: "Eres maestra? ¿Cómo te

llamas? ¿Vas a leer Javier? ¿Puedo ver los libros? Ver mi juguete? (Are you a teacher? What's your name? Are you going to read with Javier? Can I see the books? See my toy?)” They, too, are clad in bathing suits, and towels and sandals are strewn about the small and otherwise tidy one-bedroom apartment. The family's outside deck is cluttered with a child's bike and other outdoor toys. Along the wall facing the door are several rows of boxes, neatly stacked but making the short hallway leading to the family's bedroom and the bathroom they share that much more narrow.

The small living area is bright and welcoming, with a couch and an upholstered chair facing a large TV mounted on the wall. To one side of the living space, on a colorful area rug, stand the dining table and four chairs. On it are several books, pencils and paper, and what I would soon learn were some examples of Javier's first grade writing. The small kitchen is just around the corner from the table. The apartment is very cool, and judging from the loud protests, Nina appears to have been in the process of getting the younger children ready for a post-swim bath before dinner. Now she embraces me in a warm and welcoming hug and plants a light kiss on each of my cheeks.

“¡Hola! Es tan bueno tenerte aquí, en nuestra casa. Muchas gracias por haber venido. (Hello! It is so nice to have you here in our home. Thank you so much for coming.)” Nina has big, cheerful eyes, long brown curls, and a full smile that tells you she means it. She could easily be mistaken for a woman 10 years younger than her 42 years, but for her air of self-assuredness and wisdom that it seems only veteran mothers have. She apologizes for the mess, though I guiltily think the space is considerably neater than my own home that I share only with my husband and our dog. “¿Te y Javier gustaría empezar mientras yo doy Brenda y Samuel su baño? Luego, cuando haya terminado , podemos

hablar un poco. (Would you and Javier like to get started while I give Brenda and Samuél their bath? Then when you are finished we can talk a little.)” I nod in agreement, and reply in my spotty Spanish, “Si, Gracias por permitirme trabajar con Javier y aprender más acerca de su familia. (Yes, thanks for allowing me to work with Javier and learn more about your family.)” I feel at once comfortable in the space and nervous that we are at the beginning of what I hope will be a long and positive relationship for all of us.

Javier, meanwhile, hangs back, holding what I would soon learn is his ever-present favorite pillow. He warily eyes me and my large backpack. Unlike the other children, he is silent until his mother gently but firmly instructs him to say hello and invite me to sit down at the table. I begin in Spanish, telling him a little bit about myself and asking him to share a little as well. Wails of toddler protest can be heard from down the hall, and Javier looks at me and giggles, “Ese es mi hermano. Quería quedarse con usted y ver lo que vamos a hacer. ¿Qué vamos a hacer? (That’s my brother. He wanted to stay with you and see what we’ll be doing. What are we going to do?)” I ask him if it would be ok if we read together for a while, and then I would talk to his mom a little bit before I left. “OK,” he softly replies.

Within 15 minutes Javier is chatting me up, in English, as though we are old friends. His mother works in the kitchen to prepare dinner for the family, stifling the occasional chuckle over Javier’s charm. Samuél and Brenda, after emerging from the bathroom squeaky clean and pajama-clad, are now playing in the family’s bedroom down the hall. I had previously decided to ease into the school-like assessments and instead take my time getting to know Javier and his reading likes and dislikes. We talk for a while, then I bring several picture books out of my bag and ask him if he saw any he liked that we could read together.

Javier eagerly grabs and opens *Stellaluna* (Cannon, 1993), proclaiming that his teacher had read this book to his class once the previous year. I read through the book slowly, pausing to listen to Javier's comments and questions about the story as well as share my own. After that book I bring out several easy-reader books I have borrowed from a friend who is a classroom teacher. There are a few Kindergarten-level books and a few first grade level books. Now that we are better acquainted—Javier is jovially talking my ear off—I ask him if he would like to pick out a book to read to me. "I will help you read it if you want help," I promise.

Javier surprised me in that first meeting. His teachers had told Nina that he had trouble understanding what he was reading (this was prior to his being identified for Special Education services, which would occur the following year). It's very common for someone who is learning a language to have difficulty with listening comprehension at first, especially in the younger grades when children are first exposed to an all-English environment, including picture books with complex vocabulary (Morrow, 2001). But I found instead that, with Javier, once he had chosen the picture book from those that I had brought along, and we had a chance for me to read it and for us to discuss it together, he understood the language quite well. On our third session together, I used a formal reading assessment to determine that his oral language comprehension was in fact a year above his grade level, not below as was suggested by the school.

While his teachers had identified Javier as having difficulty understanding text, I found quite the opposite to be true. While we read *Stellaluna* (Cannon, 1993), Javier commented on the main character's feelings, asked questions about the characters' intent,

and made connections both to his own life and to other literature. I had also been told by Nina that Javier's teachers said he was reading independently at a beginning-of-first-grade reading level, and that he was working on decoding short-vowel words (such as "hat" or "sit") and used picture cues and beginning and ending sounds to decipher more difficult words. This was an accurate assessment of how Javier read independently when we were together.

During our subsequent sessions, I found Javier to be an engaged reader and language user. Whether he was having a conversation with me, teaching his younger brother or sister how to slide properly in a soccer game, or reading a book—if it was something that interested Javier, he became truly absorbed. He expressed this engagement, and the relationship it engendered, both physically and verbally. For example, while we read a book together about a helicopter, Javier energetically grabbed my arm and pulled me into the bedroom he shared with his siblings to show me a toy helicopter: "I know what a helicopter is! It can fly straight up! It has a propeller! A plane has a propeller too, but it's on the front of the plane and the top of the helicopter. Have you ever ridden in a helicopter? I would really like to ride in one." This is how Javier interacted with books and the world around him. He seized them and made them his own--and sought to share that experience with another.

On another occasion I listened and watched while Javier read a book about the solar system, "There are sun spots on the srrrr...srrrr-face? Sur-face? Of the sun? There are sun spots on the sur-face of the sun? What is that [looking at me, then at the picture...]?! Is that like the top? Like around it? Oh! I know--surface! Water has a surface. Like a boat...it floats on the surface of water. It's the top, the edge-part. Surface." As an English as a

Second Language (ESL) teacher in an elementary school, I spend a great deal of learning time working with my students to help them to engage with books in this way; that is, to ask questions of the book, to connect the information to self, to the world, and to other books. More than once during our time together, I considered videoing Javier as he read, in order to use him as a model for my other students. He was engaging in the sort of practices I encourage all of my students to do.

As I wrote, during our time together, I found Javier's language comprehension--both oral and reading, as long as he was reading a text at his independent reading level--was in fact very good, especially considering he is an emerging bilingual student. I did find, however, that Javier's reading was often slow and labored enough that it was difficult for him to remember what he read by the time he reached the end of the page or story. This became exacerbated as grade-level text became harder and harder for Javier to read, and his teachers apparently tested him using grade level text. Unfortunately, we found that opportunities to read independent- and instructional-level books in school became fewer and fewer for him, because he was increasingly surrounded by grade-level texts rather than text that matched his reading level.

With regard solely to his text reading level progress, as measured by formal school assessments, I witnessed Javier's reading develop in fits and starts, with long periods of stagnation; that is, periods with no apparent growth. His standardized test scores in reading were very low, indicating that he was at least two grade levels behind in reading. In our own experiences together, I observed a more complicated picture. I saw Javier's reading proficiency change dramatically, depending on the context and materials that he was reading. For example, he might breeze through a 3rd grade level text that he was

reading for fun, or that focused on a topic about which he had background knowledge, while a technically easier text in a different context, or about something he was not motivated to learn, might cause much more difficulty.

In my experience with Javier, he was most likely to persist when he enjoyed the subject matter, or at least found it important for some purpose in his life. During one of our tutoring sessions, we were thinking over a writing assignment Javier had for homework. Javier was having a hard time developing and sticking with a topic. In an effort to help him, I asked Javier what was the most interesting thing he'd done lately. He told me about an occasion at school where one of his teachers provided him and another student with an old VCR and "she let us take it apart and put it back together!" He was over the moon about what was an unusual school activity for him. He and a partner spent what felt to Javier a very long time taking the machine apart and systematically putting it back together, with the help of the manual and a Sony website.

Once I suggested to Javier that we use this experience for his writing assignment, we were off and running. He was overflowing with things to say, and it was relatively easy for him to determine what the main idea and supporting details of his piece should be. This made Javier like every other student writer with whom I have ever worked; that is, a lot better at writing when focused on a topic of interest. Some kids are more willing than others to "do school," even when the subject matter is not particularly connected to their lives. In my experience with Javier, he was only minimally interested in "doing school." He did sometimes work hard in the classroom and on his homework. He did sometimes want to please his parents and his teachers. However, the difference in Javier's affect, motivation, and persistence, between when he was engaged in a subject matter that

interested him, and when he was working on an assignment that he was doing just because it has been assigned, was considerable.

While Javier may not have been interested in "doing school," he understood its significance. He once said to me, as we talked about an upcoming standardized test, "You know, some people at school get really worried about the tests. Some people can't even sleep the night before them." When I responded, "How do *you* feel about them?" He peeked up at me through long, thick eyelashes and softly admitted, with an embarrassed giggle, "I'm one of those people." Then he hugged his ever-present pillow tightly to his chest. This confession came a few weeks before the End of Grade tests in third grade. Nina had told me that Javier had been crying at night and having trouble sleeping, because he knew the tests were looming, and he knew he couldn't fail them, or he would be held back in third grade while all his friends moved on to fourth.

"Come on, Lee. Hold my hand, I've got you. Let's go play with blocks."

Javier is one of the most personable people you will ever meet. Quick to smile, he likes to start up a conversation with anyone who's willing, and he is mature beyond his years in his ability to genuinely engage with another person about things other than himself. He asks you questions about you, because he really wants to know. Having two younger siblings, he's learned by necessity to set aside his own wishes at times to care for someone younger than he is. Once I got to know the family better and had my son, Lee, I often brought him along with me when I visited. Sometimes Nina would watch Lee and her younger kids while Javier and I read together. By the time Lee was a toddler, Javier would often volunteer to take responsibility for Lee when I needed to talk with Nina or interview her, or just during times when Lee and I were invited to spend time with the family.

Though it sometimes made our work more difficult, I loved being able to bring Lee with me on these visits, as Javier, Brenda, and Samuél were so good with him.

Javier would take Lee under his wing and make it his business to be sure that Lee was safe and happy. Whether they were in the kids' room or playing just outside the apartment door, I would peek to check on them and see Javier teaching Lee how to use a toy, or putting his arm around him, or picking him up (no easy feat, for Lee has always been a large kid) to keep him from going somewhere unsafe. Occasionally, Javier would interrupt his mother and me, bubbling over something funny that Lee just said or did. He seemed to take the role of big brother in stride and was always willing to take Lee on as honorary little brother.

On one particular occasion, Lee and Samuél were in rather sour moods for some reason. Brenda was at a ballet class, and it was our hope that the two young boys, who by then knew each other fairly well, would be content to play together in the next room while Nina and I talked together. I was attempting to interview Nina while Samuél, only three himself and used to being the baby in the family, loudly admonished Lee for taking his toys. Javier, who had been engrossed in a video game on his tablet, walked over to the table where his mother and I were talking, and asked if he could take Lee just outside the front screen door to play.

“Samuel es celoso. Tal vez él quiere un poco de tiempo a solas. Puedo tomar Lee. (Samuel is just jealous. Maybe he wants some time alone. I can take Lee.)” Nina smiled and asked me if that would be ok with me. I agreed, impressed by Javier's awareness and kindness. Here he was, 'reading his world' and taking action based on his understanding of it (Freire, 1970). Javier got down on his knees where Lee was playing with a beloved truck

of Samuél's. He leaned toward Lee to look in his eyes, and took Lee's hand in his own.

"Come on, Lee. Hold my hand, I've got you. Let's go play with blocks." Then, grabbing a bag of alphabet blocks, Javier led the way out the front door onto the sidewalk where we could hear him asking Lee if he wanted to have the honor of dumping the blocks out. I looked at Nina in awe. "Siempre es así esto con los más jóvenes? (Is he always like this with the younger ones?)" I asked. Nina laughed, "No, no siempre. Pero él sabe cómo cuidar de los demás. Él es un buen hermano mayor. (No, not always. But he knows how to take care of others. He is a good big brother.)"

"I did it, Charna!" Javier exclaimed, his eyes shining up at me. "And I'm the first, because I'm the oldest!"

Being the oldest of three children comes with advantages as well as responsibilities. Javier was the first child in the family to take his first communion in the family's Catholic church. During Javier's second grade year, he attended extra classes at church in order to prepare for his first communion ceremony. Every Saturday, Nina dropped Javier off at the church where he learned about the teachings of the Catholic church, his relationship with God, and his place within the church community. Nina shared with me that there was sometimes reading and writing involved, though the students also participated in short skits and made art. When I asked Javier how he felt about the literacy activities he participated in at church, he said they were "good," but wasn't interested in going into much detail. Nina shared some of the work he completed during his classes and it was thoughtful and creative. This was a context apart from school in which he could express his thoughts without being judged on their presentation. "It's a big deal," he told me one day

with wide eyes as he detailed his upcoming communion. Javier typically spoke to me in English unless we were speaking with his mother or father. "I get to wear a white suit with a red tie. I get to be a real part of the church, not just a kid."

Javier made a special card to invite me to the ceremony, *"It is hapening! You are invited to come to my FIRST COMMUNION. There will be a party after it. With cake! I hope you will come. Love, Javier. P.S. And bring Lee!"* On the day of the observance, I somewhat nervously approached the church. Many families were milling about outside the grand front doors, and I could see several children dressed immaculately in white dresses and suits. I edged around the crowds of people speaking Spanish and walked in. A young man greeted me in Spanish and handed me a program. The ceremony would be held in Spanish, and I wondered how well I would be able to keep up in my second language and in such an unfamiliar context. I had never attended a Catholic church service before. I thought about how Javier and Nina must experience the same worry and alienation, only much more often and in higher pressure and less welcoming situations.

Nina and Javier Senior approached me, and Nina greeted me with her usual exuberance, engulfing me in a hug and kissing my cheeks. She was stunning in a black dress and an ornate red jeweled necklace. Brenda was dressed in a crisp spring dress with boldly colored flowers on it. She wore shiny buckled shoes, and not a hair was out of place. Samuél eyed me with a disgruntled expression, one hand enveloped in his father's and one clutching a Mr. Potato head toy. He too wore shiny dress shoes, and his button-up dress shirt was half untucked and threatening to come out altogether.

We walked to the row of pews where Nina had reserved seats for Javier's immediate family. Juan and Anita, Javier's godparents, and their children Maribelle and Veronica, were

saving spaces for us while the pews all around us rapidly filled with expectant family members. We filed in and sat, in squeezed-together intimacy. We would not be able to see Javier until he and the other honorees walked into the main hall. As the ceremony began, the din of family talk and laughter died down and we looked on, expectantly. I was able to follow only some of the proceedings. Nina helpfully shared her hymnal with me, and we realized that we both enjoy the singing part of church ceremonies the most. Samuél, soon out of his shoes and barely wearing his dress shirt, trotted from person to person, plopping onto our laps and offering us each a turn with Mr. Potato Head. Brenda stared stoically ahead at the priest, only uttering a sound when it was time to sing. From time to time I caught her peering behind her mother's shoulder to look at me.

When Javier and the other honorees filed in, we all shifted to the front of our seats and searched the line of primed and polished children for his face. We found it, as he grinned back at us, waving one hand enthusiastically. I looked at Nina and squeezed her hand. She responded in turn, wearing a proud, teary smile. Throughout the ceremony I did my best to follow the program, grateful for the hymn breaks when I felt I could better participate. We watched Javier receive his first communion. He lined up with the other kids and took the wafer and the small amount of wine. Later, he would explain it to me, "Charna! Do you know what we did? The wine is the blood and the bread is the body of Christ. It means he's with us. The wine tasted terrible!"

When he and the other kids were dismissed from their place at the front of the church, the whole room erupted into animated talk, laughter and embraces. Many of the children being honored that day were given their own bibles and rosaries to mark the rite of passage. Javier's was a gift from his godparents. Bound in shimmery white fabric and

lace, and tied closed with a white ribbon, his new bible was clearly a great treasure to him. He carried it gently and with a certain reverence, as one might hold a bird's nest full of eggs. As a complete group now with our man of honor, we shuffled over to an area decorated with flowers where all the families took pictures and video. I was surprised and honored to be included in many of them.

It wasn't until later that I got to speak to Javier privately. The family had all headed back to the apartment for a celebratory dinner. I had to go home to pick up my son before joining them. When Lee and I got there, I saw that the apartment was spotless. Nina and Anita were filling the dining room table with a feast of taco fixings, drinks, and cakes. There was rum and beer for the adults. The men were seated on the couch talking, and a soccer game was playing on the television. Javier rushed up to me and Lee. "I did it, Charna!" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming up at me. "And I'm the first, because I'm the oldest!" Grinning, I looked across the room at Nina, who was smiling back at me. I almost burst with pride. Look at this kid, I thought. *Check out this kid.* And then, on his special day, Javier took Lee's hand and happily led him into the bedroom where the other kids were playing.

Javier used the tiny key to turn the lock on his new diary. He opened it slowly and pressed down on the stiff binding, then looked up at me. "It's a diary! A place to write all my secrets!"

Javier is a natural with all things kinesthetic. He will tell you that his one true love is soccer. Much to his mother's dismay, he wears his cleats constantly – outside for soccer, but also inside and even in bed. During the rare times when Javier Senior is not working or

sleeping, he and Javier like to watch their favorite team from Mexico on television. Javier is constantly bugging me to find him books about soccer, and some of his best writing is about his experiences playing the game or his favorite players: *“It was 3 to 2 and we were wining. I was driblig the ball down to the gol. I used my left foot then my right. The uther team was getting close, but I kept the ball and—BAM—I shot the ball rite in the net! Gol!!”*

Often when I arrive at the apartment it is just after Javier and Brenda have been dropped off by the school bus, and Javier and his friends are outside playing soccer on the small grassy hill by their apartment building. Nina shares, “El deporte es muy fácil para Javier. Si se trata de fútbol, baloncesto, béisbol ... incluso si es algo que él no sabe cómo jugar en absoluto, que va a intervenir y ser bueno en eso de inmediato. (Sports are very easy for Javier. Whether it’s soccer, basketball, baseball...even if it’s something he doesn’t know how to play at all, he’ll step in and be good at it right away.)” Each night Nina battles Javier back inside to do his homework and eat dinner.

Like many other kids his age, Javier is also enamored with Minecraft. A video game where players must use variously sized and shaped blocks to build their own worlds, Minecraft is embraced by many teachers because of the creativity and problem solving skills it requires of its players. While Javier doesn’t have the gaming system needed to play Minecraft, he visits friends who do and plays as often as his mother will let him. Nina allows the children to have some screen time each day after school and on weekends, but she prefers that they spend their free time outside getting exercise. Javier owns two books on Minecraft strategy. The text level is very difficult for him to read, but he is able to get through most of it with the help of his understanding of the game, his motivation to read the material, and the diagrams and pictures in the books.

Javier also loves the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* book series and movies. The graphic novels depict a middle-school student named Greg who endures the regular social landmines of a pre-teen kid. Greg chronicles his misadventures, thoughts and opinions in his diary. Javier became interested in the series late in his 2nd grade year. He overheard some older boys reading it on the school bus one day and went straight to the school library the next morning to check out the first book. It's significant that the protagonist is an older boy who deals with slightly "older" social contexts compared with Javier's life experiences, therefore giving Javier something to look up/forward to. The fictional world in some ways gives Javier a chance to be the little brother. I think he also identifies with the main character of Greg, who is shy and sensitive.

Early on in our time together, Javier made it clear to me that his choice of reading material was the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. If we were going to read together, that's what he wanted to read. He had no interest in reading the "easy," "little kid" books I brought with me. This was a hurdle for me, because the series is geared toward upper elementary and middle-school students and isn't something Javier can decode independently. After getting Nina's permission, I talked to Javier about a plan: during each of my visits, he would read books that he chose from those I brought with me (books that I knew were at his independent or instructional level) and I would read to him a chapter from the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. In addition, he would give me hints about his likes and dislikes with regard to the "easier" books I brought so that we could do our best to make sure those would be books he enjoyed reading, also. My goals were both to help keep Javier motivated to read about things that interested him, and also to make sure he had access to and lots of practice with books that he could independently read and understand.

Javier was game to try this idea, and we began to work together to build a library of books that Javier could read fluently with comprehension, while nurturing the sense of status reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* gave him. When I asked him to write about what we read, he almost always wanted to write about Greg. He also picked up the more advanced vocabulary in the graphic novel series very quickly. He could talk about the elements of the narrative with facility. He just wasn't ready to read it on his own yet. Javier also was skilled in understanding the books he read independently or with very minimal assistance from me. As long as he could get through the text fluently, he had no problem understanding what he was reading. He was also very good at using context clues to infer the meaning of events in the story or new vocabulary.

As our time together continued, I would often bring books from the collection I've gathered over the years to give to Javier and his siblings. Javier began to be able to read series of easy chapter books, such as *Henry and Mudge* (Rylant & Stevenson, 2006) and *Amelia Bedelia* (Parish, 2003). Not owning any *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books myself, I would save those as gifts for special occasions. After I ran out of books in the series, I ordered a diary with a lock and key to give Javier. We had had many conversations over the months of reading together about diaries, what can be written in them, whether or not they are "girly" (his concern), and who can read what's inside. Javier had more than once expressed interest in keeping a diary, but he worried that his sister and brother would find it and figure out what he had been writing about. When I brought it for him, he knew it was a very special occasion, because I had wrapped it. Javier used the tiny key to turn the lock on his new diary. He opened it slowly and pressed down on the stiff binding, then looked up at me. "It's a diary! A place to write all my secrets!"

Javier's delight in receiving the diary—and using it, as he later promised me he was doing faithfully—is one example of his many literacy practices. In our work together, I have found that Javier engaged with written texts in much the same way he engaged with other people; that is, wholeheartedly and with care, sensitivity, and joy. He sought to make connections between his literacy practices, relating what he read to his own life and other books, and using what he knew about one practice to inform another. (When I finally got Javier to agree that our time together would include a combination of him reading “easy” books and me reading his choice of a more difficult chapter book, he explained, “I get it. It's like soccer. The games are the best. But you don't get to just play games every day. You need to practice the little things too. Like, we do drills sometimes. And the stuff you do in practice, it helps you do better in the games.”) In many contexts, Javier was self-assured and charismatic. He was humbly friendly and took it upon himself to care for the younger ones.

However, this confidence did not extend to school literacy contexts. There, he toiled with expectations that felt impossibly high and was continually expected to take standardized tests that he knew would only display the gap between what he could do and what he was supposed to be able to do. Javier spoke negatively about himself as a student, saying he wasn't “a good reader” and that he was “really only good at math and sometimes science.” He was increasingly pulled out of his regular class for small group instruction, and he was in danger of being retained in third grade. He cried often and argued with Nina about how to do his homework or whether he should do it at all. He looked for short cuts, and dug in his heels when either his mother, or I, or his other tutor⁵ were attempting to get

⁵ Javier met with a reading tutor provided through a program at his church once a week.

him to give his all on a homework assignment. It was almost like he was two different kids. I wondered what would have to happen for Javier to let school literacy practices in; to approach them with the spirit and intelligence I saw so often in him—or for Javier to connect the many things he loved and was good at with who he was as a student. How could school begin to recognize and understand *all* of Javier? How could Javier come to understand that school literacies could hold personal meaning and worth to him?

Nina

Hay tanta presión...Por qué está trabajando no nada?

There's so much pressure...He wonders, why isn't anything working?

Nina and I were sitting in an office the size of a closet, housed in the Anderson public school district administrative building. We were there to meet with Madalena, the district liaison for Spanish-speaking families of school children. We wanted to debrief about the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting that occurred the day before. It was the first meeting after Javier qualified for services for exceptional children, based on his reading comprehension score on a standardized test. It meant that Javier would be pulled out of his regular class by the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and the Exceptional Children (EC) teacher, and we wanted to come up with a plan to meet with his teachers and his evening tutor so that we could all coordinate our efforts.

Nina dug in her bag for the IEP paperwork as Samuél played quietly with some toys Madalena kept on hand for meetings like these. After she handed the paperwork to Madalena for her to review, Nina looked at me with tears in her eyes. She said, “Lo que no entiendo es , si tiene una deficiencia de aprendizaje, ¿por qué no me dicen qué es exactamente el mal? Lo llevé al médico. Dijo que todo es normal , y Javier está

desarrollando como un niño normal. (What I don't understand is, if he has a learning deficiency, why can't they tell me what exactly is wrong? I took him to the doctor. He said everything is normal, that Javier is developing like a normal child. I don't understand.)"

I struggled to find words, wanting to give her an explanation that wasn't there. Madalena said, "Ellos no siempre saben , mi amiga. Ellos sólo ven que él está teniendo problemas con su trabajo en clase y quieren darle ayuda extra. Lo que podemos hacer es tratar de asegurarse de que todos los maestros que trabajan con Javier haciendo las cosas de una manera coordinada. (They don't always know, my friend. They just see that he's having trouble with his classwork, and they want to give him extra help. What we can do is try to make sure that all of the teachers working with Javier are doing things in a coordinated way.)" Nina nodded, visibly struggling to hold tears back.

Nina did not show this vulnerability during the IEP meeting the previous day. These sorts of meetings can be very intimidating to parents, especially parents who, due to race, language, or socio-economic status, may already feel marginalized or alienated by their children's school (Chavkin & Williams, 1993). Madalena and I had attended the meeting with Nina, at her request. We planned to be there solely as a support system for Nina. She explained to us both before the meeting that she hoped that if there were things she couldn't understand very well that we would be able to help debrief her after the meeting concluded.

At the table were several teachers who cared about Javier and who wanted to determine the best course of action for him. Still, the image I remember is one of several white people wearing suits or other business casual clothing lined up across the table from Nina, Madalena, and me. The school had not been able to provide a translator in person, so

a district translator was put on speaker on the phone in the middle of the conference table (Madalena and I were willing to help as needed, but we preferred to be there in an informal capacity). Projected on the wall was the IEP paperwork, in English. The school psychologist toggled back and forth between the 12 single-spaced pages as she described Javier's test scores and read through the legal language.

Nina was inspiring to see. Her confidence and assertiveness seemed effortless. Even as a teacher with a decade's experience working in public schools, and the IEP displayed in my first language, I couldn't understand some of the information being presented. All of the school professionals were kind and helpful. They were also rushed; they probably had more meetings to attend to that day, or they were away from their classes, missing out on teaching-time. Nina stopped them several times to ask questions. When the teachers had side conversations in English, Madalena or I interrupted them and asked them to repeat the conversation so that Nina could hear it. Nina asked about their plan of action. She asked, how would they know whether their plan was working for Javier? When would they contact her to give her a detailed update on Javier's progress? What kind of information would a progress report provide?

Now, tucked in the relative safety of Madalena's office, I realize that it must have been hard work for Nina to appear so strong in the previous day's meeting. Here, she was allowing, though barely, her vulnerability to show itself. What was she doing wrong, she wondered? What was the cause of this? She worried aloud about her other two children. If she was doing something wrong with Javier, was she making the same mistakes with Brenda and Samuél? Would they struggle too? She asked questions about what she could do better at home, what kind of nightly routines she should change for when Javier does his

homework and reading. She was grappling with the reality that Javier had been labeled a struggling reader, a student with a learning deficiency. Worse, she was taking on all the blame herself, wondering only what she has done wrong and what she needed to do differently. She WAS naming herself as deficient, in the same way that the school was naming Javier as deficient.

During my time working with Javier and Nina, I had many opportunities to observe how the typical evening played out in their household. Javier Senior worked 6 days a week, double shifts, so Nina handled everything at home on her own. Javier and Brenda arrived home on the school bus around 4:30 every afternoon, barring any problems with the buses, which happened a few times a month. At that time, Nina had three children in a small space who were paradoxically worn-out-but-full-of-energy in the way of young kids. She had to help with homework and keep up with any cleaning that needed to be done to keep the small apartment from turning into a dumping ground for dishes, backpacks, clothing, shoes, and toys. She had to get dinner prepared and she had to get the kids to eat it. On days when one or all of the kids had an extracurricular activity, the process began at 5:30 or 6:00 instead of 4:30.

I observed how Nina interacted with Javier in the context of his nightly reading and written homework on many occasions. Nina straddled a difficult divide between having parental authority over her oldest child and at the same time knowing less English than he did. Though the kids owned many books, Nina couldn't decode most of them (although she was working on this and improving rapidly as she helped Javier and Brenda, who was ready for Kindergarten beginning readers). Several times, Nina called upon me to settle a

debate between her and Javier over some rule of grammar or punctuation. “He’s a trickster,” Nina shared.

A veces es perezoso. Él busca la salida fácil. Su maestro le dijo que la primera frase de un párrafo da una pista acerca de la idea principal, así que ahora cuando se le preguntó acerca de la idea principal, sólo copia la primera frase. En su campo de lectura [para los que Javier calificado porque no quería pasar Fin de las pruebas de grado], que se supone que leer durante 20 minutos. Si él consigue cuatro páginas hechas en los primeros 10 minutos, dice, "sólo tengo que leer cuatro páginas más ! " Y le digo , no, usted tiene que leer , así que puedas, ya sabes, a buen ritmo , para el conjunto próximos 10 minutos. Usted puede leer más páginas que eso!

Sometimes he is lazy. He looks for the easy way out. His teacher told him that the first sentence of a paragraph gives a clue about the main idea, so now when asked about the main idea, he just copies the first sentence. For his reading camp [for which Javier qualified because he didn't pass End of Grade tests], he is supposed to read for 20 minutes at night. If he gets four pages done in the first 10 minutes, he says, 'I only have to read four more pages!' And I tell him, no, you have to read as well as you can, you know, at a good pace, for the whole next 10 minutes. You can read more pages than that!

Homework was a challenge for both Nina and Javier, not just because it was in English, but also because much of the time it was geared toward a student who was reading “on grade level,” and Javier wasn’t there yet. Prior to the End of Grade tests, for example, the teacher provided test-prep reading passages followed by a series of fill-in-the-bubble questions for several weeks. Each weekly homework packet would have three such passages, which were typically 3-4 long paragraphs and contained a good deal of advanced vocabulary. This was in addition to 3-4 long math pages, 1-2 writing assignments, and an expected 30 minutes of nightly reading.

Javier chose his reading books for class, and he typically selected a book with content that was attractive to him but that was not a good fit for what he was currently able to decode. This made the nightly reading a long and very tedious process. To my surprise, Nina encouraged him to choose grade-level texts and slog through them. She seemed to be

clinging to the notion that if they could get through the on-grade-level work somehow, Javier would eventually be able to do it on his own. Nina shared,

Ha habido momentos , y no es tan inusual , donde pasamos 3 horas en una noche de la tarea. Incluso en la guardería! He ido a la escuela y habló con sus maestras. No sé por qué le darían tantas cosas que hacer que no conoce todavía. No tiene sentido para mí. Pero después de un tiempo, me di cuenta de que eso era lo que iba a ser.

There have been times, and it's not that unusual, where we spend 3 hours on one night of homework. Even in Kindergarten we would spend hours! I have gone to the school and talked with his teachers many times! I don't know why they would give him so many things to do that he doesn't know how to do. It doesn't make sense to me. But after a while, I just realized that this is how it is going to be.

Nina figured out ways to navigate the complicated homework terrain. She was sure to make good use of me and Javier's other tutor. Once, early on in our relationship, I came to the apartment one evening, ready to read from the books I had brought with me. Javier was sitting at the dining room table, copying words in English, letter by letter, from a large white board Nina had leaned against the wall. Nina told me that Javier was working on a project for school where he had to write and read for the class a report on a famous person who did good things for the world. The white board had one paragraph on it, and sitting nearby was a paper with three more paragraphs in Nina's handwriting.

Nina asked me if I could continue with the process she had started. She said they had gathered information on Martin Luther King, Jr. on the internet, and now Javier had to copy the words for his presentation and practice reading it so that he would be ready for his presentation in two days. I wasn't sure whether Javier or Nina had chosen the subject of the assignment, and I wasn't sure how much Javier had been involved in gathering or compiling the information. I asked Javier to read what he was writing for me, and he could read about half of it.

My shoulder's slumped. I wanted to set all of it aside and just *read* with Javier. I had brought a huge selection of instructional-level (which can be read by the student with a little scaffolding from a teacher) and independent-level (books that are "easy" for the student to read on his own) texts for Javier to practice with me and keep to read on his own. I wanted to build up a small library of books that Javier found interesting and that he could read well independently. I reasoned that Javier could keep the books with him in his backpack, at school and at home, to pull out whenever he had silent reading time. This could, I hoped, give Javier opportunities to read texts with fluency, thus building his automaticity with reading print, but also increasing the probability that he would be able to read text fast enough to remember and understand what he just read.

But I thought about my position in the situation, and what it must be like for Nina. She had been tackling homework situations like these for years now with Javier. She knew that the ways they completed homework was not always ideal. She was just doing her best with what she had at the moment in order to get his homework completed and turned in (and Javier was penalized at school if his homework wasn't finished each week). One week's evenings simply would not be enough time for Nina to help Javier choose and research a topic, write about his ideas, edit and rewrite his writing, and prepare to present the report orally to the class.

Weary from having Javier so often feel removed from what "other kids" can do academically, she decided this time to structure the project so that Javier had a shot at giving a presentation on par with other kids. I set aside my earlier plans for the evening, and set about writing the next paragraph on the white board so that Javier could copy the words and trace his copy in pen. There have been several times when I have questioned

one of Nina's decisions with regard to homework. At times I have chosen to discuss these decisions with her, so that we could think through them together and hopefully come up with what we both agreed was a good direction for Javier (later in the text, I further illustrate one of these occasions, when I encourage Nina to have him read independent-level texts each night). But in this instance, I chose to hold my tongue and helped Nina help her child in the way she felt was right.

As Javier got older, the academic material presented to him at school got harder, faster. In the upper elementary grades, students are expected to transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" (McLellan, 1997). They no longer are afforded the time and intellectual space to focus the bulk of their energies on figuring out how to read and make sense of text. They are expected to be able to read fluently and efficiently, so that they can purposefully use reading as a method to acquire information. As the gap widened between what Javier was able to read and what he was given to read at school and at home, he got frustrated more easily and more often. This was understandable, as he was constantly *set up* to struggle. He was learning that what it meant to be a student and a reader was to constantly fight with text that someone else chose for you to read.

Nina lamented this fact one day when we were talking and she was updating me on Javier's status at school. It was summer, and we had taken several weeks off from my tutoring visits while Javier attended his summer reading remediation "camp."

Hay tanta presión ... Trato de hacer lo leyó. Quiero que quiere leer, pero tengo que forzarlo. Trabaja duro, pero se pregunta, ¿por qué no está funcionando? ... Cuando hablamos de [la posibilidad de ser retenidos en el 3er grado] llora mucho. Él no entiende que tiene que aprender más para llegar al nivel que sea necesario. Se descalifica a sí mismo, diciendo que no es tan inteligente como el resto ... cuando le digo que tiene que hacer el

trabajo para mejorar, dice 'OK', pero en el momento en que se enoja y frustra y se da por vencido ... es muy difícil ...

There is so much pressure...I try to make him read. I want him to want to read, but I have to force him. He works hard, but he wonders, why isn't it working?...When we talk about [the possibility of being retained in 3rd grade] he cries a lot. He doesn't understand that he has to learn more to reach the level that is necessary. He disqualifies himself, saying he isn't as smart as the rest...when I tell him he has to do the work to get better, he says 'OK,' but in the moment he gets mad and frustrated and he gives up... It is so hard ...

In this instance, Nina lamented the intense pressure she and Javier both felt, based on the discrepancy between his reading proficiency and grade level proficiency. Not only was Javier rarely internally motivated to read anymore, but he defined himself in deficit terms with regard to school literacy practices. Reading for school was a constant battle between the two of them. Nina wanted Javier to feel confident and good about himself, but she also wanted him to raise his reading proficiency in order to succeed in school. Nina shared that she was relentlessly making deals with Javier and setting up consequences for when he didn't do his nightly reading. With the added tension of the possibility of Javier being retained in 3rd grade, it was increasingly difficult for the two to escape "reading for school." Nina shared that it seemed that much of the time they were together, they were either planning for school reading, engaged in school reading, or battling over school reading.

When I ask Nina if she would consider meeting Javier where he was, for example by providing him with texts he could read independently more often, she too became frustrated. "Sé que cada niño es diferente y que necesito aprender a su manera, a su propio ritmo. Pero, todavía tiene que ser en un cierto nivel. Él tiene que estar con el resto. No me gusta, pero es la manera que es. (I know that every kid is different and they need to learn in their own way, their own pace. But, he still needs to be on a certain level. He needs to be with the rest. I don't like it, but it's the way it is.)" I continued to push back, telling her that

in my experience, the best way to help students improve their reading was to meet them where they were and provide a little support to help them grow, rather than provide a lot of support with work that was very difficult for them. She agreed to allow me to continue reading “easier” books with Javier, but I could see she was still discouraged. Throughout our time together, I saw her continually offering Javier grade-level chapter books.

She expressed her frustration with Javier, especially when he refused to read or put up such a fight that it made for a difficult night (this happened often). She worried that he was lazy, unwilling to work hard when life was difficult. Drawing from her own difficult experiences when she was young, she lectured him:

Yo le voy a dar ejemplos de cómo es la vida si no funciona para lo que quiere, como las personas que reparan nuestro techo hace dos semanas, fue de 100 grados y estaban arriba en los tejados. Esto es lo que es como si no trabajas para mejor! ¿Quieres trabajar en un restaurante de comida rápida en todo el día y la noche? En vez Usted podría trabajar en una oficina y tener una hora para el almuerzo. A medida que crezca me temo. Me temo que un día simplemente se negará y dejar ir. Si yo lo empujo demasiado duro que va a abandonar los estudios.

I'm giving him examples of what life is like if he doesn't work for what he wants, like the people repairing our roof two weeks ago, it was 100 degrees and they were up on the roof tops. This is what it is like if you don't work for better! Do you want to work in a fast-food restaurant all day and night like papa? Or you could study now and instead work in a cool office and get an hour for lunch each day...As he gets older I am afraid. I am afraid one day he will just refuse and let go. If I push him too hard he will drop out.

This passage resonated Nina's panic. She feared that if Javier continued to do poorly in reading at school, he would eventually give up completely and quit. She was seeing him resist his reading homework in small ways, such as arguing about the number of minutes versus the number of pages he absolutely must read in one sitting, or taking a shallow short cut to determine the main idea of a passage. Javier was only nine years old, and Nina felt

she needed to tell him about how difficult his father's and other less-educated men's jobs are, in order to motivate him to read at night. It seemed that Nina and Javier had pressure coming not just from school, but also from Nina's goals for her son. For Nina, Javier's education was very high stakes.

Yo sé que la educación lo es todo ... si consigue una educación, que va a vivir mejor.

I know that education is everything...if he gets an education, he's going to live better.

Nina was telling me about the first job she took upon immigrating to North Carolina, as a maid in a pharmaceutical company:

Yo estaba aprendiendo el trabajo de otra mujer latina que había trabajado allí por alrededor de un año. Tuvimos que pasar la aspiradora y oficinas de polvo, baños limpios, vacía la papelera. Y estábamos caminando por una habitación con una ventana en la puerta y me miró. Era un laboratorio, al igual que la que yo solía trabajar. Tuve tantos sentimientos. Echaba de menos mi antiguo trabajo tanto, y sin embargo, aquí el sabe que parecía tan lejano. Convencí a la otra mujer que deberíamos entrar. Quería hablar con la gente que trabajaba allí. Estaba preocupada que íbamos a llamar mucho la atención y ser deportados. Pero yo acababa de venir al país. Yo pensé: "Si me deportan, bueno! Voy a ir a casa a México y continuar donde lo dejé. "Le pregunté a hablar con el director del laboratorio. Él era en realidad allí, y le habló de toda mi experiencia en México, trabajando como técnico de laboratorio en una empresa farmacéutica en el sector de la salud. He trabajado en la fabricación y la congelación de secado de diversas vacunas, y los prepara para su distribución, la realización de experimentos y análisis de muestras. Le pregunté al director de lo que tendría que hacer para trabajar en el laboratorio aquí. Me dijo que tendría que aprender Inglés, obtener un GED, y llevar a cabo la ciudadanía legal. Dijo que eventualmente necesitará un título universitario, pero yo lo sabía. Eso fue hace 11 años. Me pregunto si todavía está allí.

I was learning the job from another Latina woman who had worked there for about a year. We had to vacuum and dust offices, clean bathrooms, empty the trash. And we were walking by a room with a window in the door and I looked in. It was a lab, much like the one I used to work in. I had so many feelings. I missed my old job so much,

and yet here being able to do that seemed so far away. I convinced the other woman that we should go inside. I wanted to talk to the people who worked there. She was worried that we would attract too much attention and be deported. But I had just come to the country. I thought, "If I get deported, oh well! I'll just go home to Mexico and pick up where I left off." I asked to speak with the director of the lab. He was there, and I told him about all of my experience in Mexico, working as a laboratory technician in a pharmaceutical company. I was in the health sector. I worked in the manufacturing and freeze-drying of various vaccinations, preparing them for distribution, performing experiments, and analyzing samples. I asked the director what I would have to do to work in the lab here. He said I would have to learn English, get a GED, and pursue legal citizenship. He said I would eventually need a college degree, but I knew that. That was 9 years ago. I wonder if he's still there.

Nina was reliving her experience in a low-wage job in the U.S. where she was confronted with vivid memories of her higher status job in Mexico, as a chemist in a pharmaceutical lab. Her tone of voice as she relayed the experience to me conveyed the pride she took in her work. At the same time, this memory was tinted with nostalgia over her lost vocation. There was a clear chasm between her life now and the possibility that she would ever be able to return to career that she once loved. After nine years, Nina had yet to receive her GED, and while she possessed some conversational English skills, she was still much more comfortable speaking in Spanish. It was hard to know if and when she would be able to pursue legal citizenship in the U.S. At the time of this study, there was no clear path for "illegal immigrants" to become legal citizens.

Nina had to leave this custodian job shortly after her encounter with the lab director, because there were rumors that the company was checking workers' documents in response to political pressure at the time. This was 2006, and the United States was heading into the recession. There was a nationalist, anti-immigrant mentality growing in many communities, including the southern city of Anderson. Nina and her husband, Javier

Senior, lived in constant vigilance. Soon after losing her job, Nina was able to find employment at a laundromat about 25 miles from her home, traveling over an hour each way by bus. She could work while Javier went to preschool, and during evening shifts when she was able to find inexpensive childcare.

Soon after Nina and Javier Senior welcomed their second child, Brenda, Nina attempted to go back to her job at the laundromat, but she was refused. She was worried about being able to afford childcare for two children anyway, so she decided to stay home with Javier and Brenda. Meanwhile, Javier Senior was working long hours in a construction job, but soon after, he lost his job as well because his employer started checking documents. He took two shifts at a local restaurant, and then eventually, after Samuél was born, he traded one shift to do mechanic work part-time. Nina had yet to find stable work that would make it financially worthwhile to pay for childcare. “Al menos en México, se puede trabajar en la calle. Me gustaría hacer tortas y jello vender. En este caso, ¿qué pasa si la policía viene ... ¿dónde están sus papeles? ¿Dónde están sus papeles? (At least in Mexico, you could work on the street. I would make cakes and jello to sell. Here, what if the police come...where are your papers? Where are your papers?)”

For a while, Nina was taking courses in English and studying to obtain her GED, but she had to travel long distances on public transportation in order to participate in the classes, and finding affordable childcare was too difficult. As this study was drawing to completion, her youngest child, Samuél, had begun preschool, which afforded Nina a little more time and flexibility to devote to herself. With that time and flexibility, Nina began participating in a program through Javier’s school where, on alternating evenings, Spanish-speaking parents teach the elementary teachers Spanish and the teachers in turn teach

Spanish-speaking parents English. Nina also enrolled herself and her husband in an ESL class through her church.

Cuando llegué aquí, en mi maleta me traje el sueño americano de seguir estudiando en una universidad y así progresar en un sentido personal, intelectual y económica. Pero aquí mi estado de inmigración me limita; es difícil de resolver en un trabajo sin documentos y los salarios muy bajos. No creo que mis metas son imposibles, pero son complicadas. Y, por supuesto, me convertí en madre, así que ahora mis hijos son mi prioridad. Voy a seguir luchando para mejorar la vida de mi familia .

When I came here, in my suitcase I brought the American dream of continuing to study at a university and so to progress in a personal, intellectual, and economic sense. But it was not what I thought it would be...Here my immigration status limits me; it is difficult to settle into a job with no documents and very low wages. I don't believe my goals are impossible, but they are complicated. I didn't know it would be this hard. And of course I became a mother, so now my children are my top priority. But I will continue fighting to improve life for my family.

Here, the reality—or, myth—of “The American Dream” unfolded for Nina and her family. Their experience was complicated and fraught with myriad challenges, both expected and unforeseen. However, though her immigration and life for her family here were difficult, Nina remained attached to the idea that their lives had more potential in the United States than in Mexico. “No me arrepiento de venir aquí. Me volvería a alojar aquí y lo haría por mi familia Si el gobierno permite que nos quedemos, me quedaré. Debido a que hay muchas oportunidades para los niños. (I don't regret coming here. I would stay here, and I would do it for my family. If the government allows us to stay, I will stay. Because there are many opportunities for the kids.)”

Nina saw education as being key to her kids having a better life here in the United States than they would have if they grew up in Mexico. “Quiero Javier tiene una vida mejor. Yo sé que si él consigue una educación, que va a vivir mejor ... y no sólo económicamente ...

Yo quiero que tenga un propósito. Para tener una meta que él trabaja y alcances. (I want Javier to have a better life. I know that if he gets an education, he will live better...and not just economically...I want him to have a purpose. To have a goal that he works for and reaches.)” Nina believed if they had the desire and the work ethic, her children could make use of the opportunities afforded them in the United States and achieve not only a better economic life, but also a sense of fulfillment and commitment to a personal vocation. For Nina, this path hinged on education.

“Quiero Javier tiene una educación. Quiero que se invierta en la educación ... Yo no quiero que se deslice en el medio y se caen de la educación ... Yo sé que la educación lo es todo para el futuro y quiero Javier hacer algo que realmente quiere y para llegar a su metas. Sé que si él consigue una educación, que va a vivir mejor. (I want Javier to have an education. I want him to be invested in education...I don’t want him to slip in the middle and fall out of education...I know that education is everything for the future and I want Javier to do something that he actually wants and to reach his goals...I know if he gets an education, he’s going to live better).”

This belief in the power of education stems from Nina’s own experience of schooling growing up in Mexico City. When she was a young girl, school wasn’t easy for Nina; she remembered that she had to work very hard to do well. Because her family didn’t have the money to purchase the books she needed, she spent long hours traveling to and from and studying in the library almost every day. Excelling especially in science and art, Nina shared that she was often “the best in her class.”

Nina’s father was not a part of her life in her school years. She lived with her mother and brother, and as she grew older she often found herself in the position of caretaker for

the family. Nina attended school, worked to help pay for household necessities, and cooked and cleaned at home. When she was in high school, she took classes to become certified in cosmetology, but shortly after graduating she went on to earn the equivalent of an associate's degree to qualify her to work as a chemist in a lab at a pharmaceutical company.

Her experiences there instilled in her an understanding of the social capital that can be granted when one has a college degree. Of her own career in Mexico, she remembers,

En el momento en que había trabajado [en el laboratorio] por un tiempo, yo estaba haciendo todo el trabajo que las personas con grados de maestría estaban haciendo. A menudo era capaz de hacer análisis y realizar experimentos más rápido y mejor que pudieron. De hecho , a veces me gustaría ayudar a [esas personas] si han cometido un error o no sabían cómo hacer algo. Pero yo no podía obtener un ascenso. Yo no podía hacer que el dinero que ellos hicieron. Si tuviéramos que presentar nuestros análisis, mi supervisor quiere que haga el trabajo, pero luego alguien con un título - que era menos calificados que yo estaba, tendría que firmar en él... era tan frustrante. He trabajado en la industria durante 10 años antes de venir al país de los sueños, ¡jaja!

By the time I had worked [in the lab] for a while, I was doing all the work that people with Master's degrees were doing. I was often able to do analyses and conduct experiments faster and better than they could. In fact, sometimes I would help [those people] if they made a mistake or didn't know how to do something. But I couldn't get promoted. I couldn't make the money that they made. If we had to present our analyses, my supervisor would want me to do the work, but then someone with a degree—who was no more qualified than I was—would have to sign off on it...it was so frustrating. I worked in the industry for 10 years before coming to the country of dreams...

Here, Nina referred to the irony of leaving a skilled vocation in Mexico where she was denied promotion and pay increases in order to pursue “The American Dream” in the United States, where she struggled to keep even a very low wage job. But she also lamented the fact she personally did not obtain a college or graduate degree. Though she had not given up hope of pursuing her own career in the United States, Nina primarily focused her energies on her children's potential. As an undocumented immigrant in the

U.S., it would be very difficult to realize her personal aspirations, but her children, as citizens, have opportunities.

Nina hoped that her children's dual nationality would allow them to avoid many of the legal and social prejudices she faced. But she knew that her children's ethnicity would convey negative social meaning to some. "Política entran en juego. Mis hijos siempre están gong tener esa doble nacionalidad - US [ciudadana] y ciudadano mexicano. La gente no va a mirarlos como si fueran normales. Pero si tienen la prueba, en el documento , que demuestra que se fueron a la escuela, podría tener más credibilidad. (Politics come into play. My kids are always gong to have that double nationality – U.S. [citizen] and Mexican citizen. People are not going to look at them like they're normal. But if they have proof, the paper, that proves that they went to school, they might have more credibility.)" Nina wanted Javier to obtain a degree: a neutral, universally valued, form of currency that would grant him admission to the dream that was still proving evasive for her and her husband. "Él puede ser mejor de lo que somos ahora. (He can be better than we are right now.)"

Nina's story of immigration to the United States in search of a better life for herself and her children is a common one. Though she sometimes questioned the feasibility of personally achieving this "American Dream," she was fiercely devoted to Javier's and her other children's education, as she saw it as a ticket to further opportunities and access to a better life, both economically and personally. By remaining here, she had potentially permanently set aside her own career opportunities and fulfillment for the sake of her children. But she projected her intense discipline and commitment to education onto her children, especially Javier, as he was the oldest and had been in school the longest. Moreover, when Javier was not successful on school literacy tasks, she attributed it to

Javier's lack of motivation or poor work ethic, saying he was "lazy" or trying to motivate him by telling him about how hard his father had to work in a low wage job in order to support the family. Nina's powerful aspirations for Javier interfaced with the school's steep academic literacy demands of him, and both together influenced their relationship on a daily basis—the pressure they both feel saturated their interactions together.

I was sitting on the couch in Nina's apartment, hanging out with the kids before Javier and I start our tutoring session. The family had recently moved from the one-bedroom apartment I first visited to a larger place with more common space, two bedrooms, and two bathrooms. This allowed everyone a little more personal space, and it afforded more storage for the family's belongings. The main area in the apartment also served as a dining room and living room. Sliding glass doors opened to a small patio, and a large couch and chair faced the T.V. There was also a small table with a desktop computer beside the upholstered chair in the living room.

A very large desk with attached shelves sat in the corner opposite the television. The desk was very neatly stuffed full of school supplies and binders with various papers from school that Nina had saved, including homework, projects, report cards, and notes from the teacher. The walls of the main living space were cluttered with artwork and projects that Javier and Brenda had done in school or at home with their mother. The children's books were stored on a shelf in the bedroom Brenda shares with Javier, along with other games and toys.

We hadn't seen each other for a couple of weeks because my son had been ill, and I wasn't able to get away to visit regularly. Nina was close by in the kitchen getting dinner

ready for the kids. Samuél, wearing a full batman costume, was running around the small apartment, imitating the superhero. Occasionally he rushed up to me with a face that was trying so hard to be formidable but was really just charming. Javier was vying for attention in between his brother's exclamations of "Estoy Batman! (I'm Batman!)" "Charna!" he said, "look at this thing my mom helped us do. This is mine and this is Brenda's..." He showed me two rectangular pieces of construction paper that were made of many long multi-colored strips of paper woven together. Nina loved making art, and she often shared this part of herself with her kids. Often while we were talking, she would sketch a picture for Brenda or Javier to color or mimic on their own paper. In fact, she was able to make a little money creating artistic cake and jello molds for friends' parties or special events.

Brenda came rushing out of the bedroom she shares with Javier. She plopped herself next to me on the couch and began to show me pictures she took while the family was in Washington D.C. the past weekend. "Wow," I ask, "todo fue a la D.C. la semana pasada?" "(Wow," I ask, "you all went to DC last weekend?") Nina poked her head out of the kitchen, "Sí, mi comadre me Viernes llamó y me dijo, ' Vamos a ir a Washington DC! " Pensé que estaba loca, pero Javier Superior era capaz de conseguir Sábado fuera del trabajo. Me apresuré a recoger algo de comida para el viaje. Ni siquiera nos quedamos allí , nos dirigimos en ambos sentidos en un día. (Yes, [Javier's godmother] called me Friday and said, 'Let's go to D.C.! ' I thought she was crazy, but Javier Senior was able to get Saturday off of work. I rushed to pack up some food for the trip. We didn't even stay there. We drove both ways in one day.)"

The kids had recently received two tablets as gifts, so they were able to take extensive pictures and video while on the trip. Brenda regaled me with the story of the

seemingly endless car ride and the long trek through the city. I was treated to pictures of the kids at the Washington Monument and the whole family at the White House. I was trying to imagine what it would be like to drive for four hours, walk around the city all day, then repeat the drive, all with three young children. “Wow,” I deadpan again, and Nina laughed. She joined us in the living room to look at the photos from the trip, and I asked her if she had recovered yet.

“Bueno, era largo, pero fue divertido. Ninguno de nosotros había estado allí antes. Me siento un poco cansado hoy, sin embargo, porque he levantado desde las 4:00 am. (Well, it was long but it was fun. None of us had been there before. I’m feeling a little tired today though, because I’ve been up since 4:00 am.)” It turned out a local recreation center was providing heavily discounted pool passes to the first 50 families who arrived at the center that morning. Nina got there at 5:00 am and was the second in line. I had heard Nina and the kids talk about the various camps and activities they participated in, but I asked her to tell me about the extracurricular programs they’d joined in the past year.

Bueno, Samuel se queda conmigo , hasta el momento , pero el año que viene lo hará más. Brenda y Javier , durante el año se han natación dos veces por semana y tutoría de dos veces a la semana durante 3 meses cada uno. Entonces Javier ha baloncesto y Brenda tiene ballet durante 3 meses. Y los domingos hay doctrina (clase iglesia). En el verano se van a acampar ciudad durante 4 semanas. Ellos van a los museos y las piscinas, y el miércoles que va al cine. Luego de dos semanas se van a otro campamento de verano donde exploran el río (en el parque estatal local) y aprender sobre la ciencia. Para que el campamento se realizaron en una obra de teatro. Tengo un video. Y este año Javier había el campo de lectura de verano en la escuela.

Well, Samuél stays with me, so far, but next year he’ll do more. Brenda and Javier, during the year they have swimming twice a week and tutoring twice a week for 3 months each. Then Javier has basketball and Brenda has ballet for 3 months. And Sunday there is church class. In the summer they go to the city’s camp for 4 weeks. They go to museums and pools, and Wednesday they go to the movies. Then for two weeks they go to another summer camp where they explore the river [in the local state park] and learn about science. For

that camp they performed in a play. I have a video. And this year Javier had the summer reading camp at school. All of the activities, except swimming, are free, but it can be hard to get in because you have to sign up early.

I was impressed with all of the opportunities Nina was able to obtain for her kids within a city where she didn't speak the primary language. She shared that she found out about programs through church, friends and neighbors, and sometimes school. Then, once they were admitted into courses, she learned about what she needed to do to keep them involved at little or no cost, as well as about new programs that might become available. There were not opportunities like this in Mexico, she told me. "No, si eres pobre, no tienes nada. (There, if you're poor, you have nothing.)" Perhaps that is why here, Nina seized and utilized every bit of social capital she could to provide resources for her kids--even driving 8 hours in one day--, further leveraging this capital for future opportunities.

"There really isn't anything she doesn't do."

I was scrambling into Javier's elementary school, worried I'd missed the show. It was a bright and warm spring Saturday, and there were several families milling around the lobby area and on the lawn outside the school's front doors. Large and colorful child-made signs were everywhere: "*Festival del Latino del la Escuela Parque Sombreado [Shady Park School Latino Festival]*"⁶, "*¡Espectáculo de Danza Especial Hoy! [Special Dance Performance Today!]*" "*Comprar Boletos de la Rifa en el Interior [Buy Raffle Tickets Inside].*" Inside the building, swarms of elementary school children and their younger siblings, many of them in

the traditional dress of their home culture or special party clothes, scurried from place to place, talking, giggling, and sampling treats from the buffet in the cafeteria.

Shortly thereafter, I was greeted by Nina, who rushed to me and gave me a big hug, planting a kiss on each cheek. She was with Javier Senior and Samuél. Javier and Brenda were elsewhere, preparing with other students for the Mexican square dance they would perform soon. Nina was wearing the dance costume as well – a western shirt with a bandana around her neck and a cowboy hat with cowboy boots. Though I'd never seen her wear makeup in the two years since I'd known her, that day her lips were the same bright red as her shirt. She would be introducing the dance group and filling in for an absent student in the performance, she told me.

I left Nina and Javier Senior to stand with other families who are waiting for *La Feria de las Flores* [The Festival of Flowers] to begin. About a hundred brightly dressed parents and students snaked a parade through the school building, simulating the tradition that represents the end of slavery in Colombia. Javier's teacher and I stand and watch as a grinning Javier pulled the younger Samuél – dressed in full Mariachi garb – along at the head of the parade. Nina brought up the rear of the procession and then quickly rushed off to prepare for the next event. "She's amazing," Javier's teacher said to me. "Yeah," I agree, "Nina's worked really hard on this program." Javier's teacher continued, "There really isn't anything she doesn't do."

Families in the school's Latino organization have volunteered to donate time, talent, and food in order to raise money for Shady Park, a relatively new visual and performing arts magnet school in Anderson, NC. When Nina learned about the school's opening 4 years earlier, she applied for Javier to go there:

He oído la gente habla de él y que les dicen cómo la escuela era bueno ... empecé a investigar y descubrí más sobre la escuela. Fui al Centro Latino [una organización para la gente latina en la ciudad] y empecé a averiguar cómo aplicar para la escuela. Algunas personas me dicen que las escuelas magnet eran mejores que las escuelas tradicionales ... Entendí que les enseñarían más cosas. Siempre he sido ese tipo de persona que le gusta informarme ... Puse la aplicación en rápido porque sabía que la escuela sería tratar de obtener el mayor número posible de estudiantes .

I heard people talk about it and they would say how the school was good ... I started investigating and found out more about the school. I went to Centro Latino [a support organization for Latinos in the area] and started finding out how to apply. Some people would tell me that magnet schools were better than traditional schools ...I understood that they would teach them more things. I have always been that kind of person who likes to inform myself...I put the application in fast because I knew the school would try to get as many students as possible.

Nina worked very hard to search out and obtain the best experiences she could discover for her kids. She paid close attention to what parents around her apartment complex were talking about, she made herself knowledgeable of the programs advertised at a local not-for-profit advocacy center for Latinos in Anderson. She kept abreast of programs offered at the family's church, and she took advantage of any and all programs and people who were there to help her and her family. She made the best choices for her kids that she could, based on all of the information she was able to gather.

This was evident not only in her choice of the magnet school for Javier and his siblings, but also in her leadership role in school organizations and events. Nina wanted her children to know about and own their home culture and their identities as Mexican-Americans. It was rare that she or the kids communicated with her family in Mexico, because of the time change between their locations, lack of resources, and work schedules. But Nina talked regularly with her children about their home culture. She took advantage of homework assignments that were focused on family to sit and talk with the kids and

share about their history. Nina also signed the kids up for a series of classes—provided for free at the family’s church—that focused on Latino culture, with an emphasis on Mexican culture, because so many of the church’s parishioners immigrated from Mexico or have family in Mexico.

Es importante que [Javier] saber de dónde venía , donde sus raíces son. Lo sé porque hemos nacido en Estados Unidos, que también tienen que aprender lo que su identidad es y donde su cultura es ... Cuando sea mayor , me van a criticar porque sus padres son inmigrantes , porque algunas personas son realmente malas personas. Es importante para ellos saber de dónde vienen y no se sienten mal porque sus padres son sólo los inmigrantes .

It's important for [Javier] to know where he came from, where his roots are. I know because they were born in America, they also have to learn what their identity is and where their culture is...When he gets older, he will get criticized because his parents are immigrants, because some people are really bad people. It's important for them to know where they came from and not to feel badly because their parents are just immigrants.

I thought about Nina’s words as I watched her dance on the stage with Javier and his classmates at the school’s *Hispanic Heritage Festival*. Grinning nervously, Javier performed the dance steps almost perfectly, sometimes watching his mother out of the corner of his eye to make sure he was in sync. At the end of the performance, the gymnasium exploded in deafening applause and whistles, and the group bowed in choreographed unison, all proud smiles. While Nina ducked behind the curtain to make sure the next act was ready to go on, Javier returned to his seat on the gym floor, to playful praise and admiration from the other kids. It seemed he has earned a certain prestige among his classmates. Nina, who helped organize the day’s activities, designed and created costumes for her son’s performance, and contributed trays of food and a raffle prize, had co-constructed a school context where her son shined. Javier not only belonged there, he was respected and admired for his abilities. And he and Nina both knew it.

It is evident that Nina had a split focus concerning her children's education. It was very important to her for Javier and his siblings to learn English, do well in school, and obtain a high school diploma and a college degree. Nina carefully researched schools and chose what she believed to be the best option for her children. She helped Javier with his homework as often as possible, and she enlisted the help of two academic tutors for Javier. She built a library of books for her kids to read, she set aside a relatively quiet and neat place for Javier to do homework each night, and she clearly set an example that school and school work are important, as evidenced by her conversations with Javier, the kids' work covering the walls of the family's living room, and the stacks of neatly organized archived work from Javier's years in school. Nina attended regular parent-teacher conferences and scheduled additional times to talk with Javier's teacher. She asked questions and advocated for Javier in school meetings. She tried to help motivate Javier to do his schoolwork, not only by sharing her and Javier Senior's life experiences but also by being present, available, and interested when he worked on it. Nina was, in essence the epitome of what a teacher would want from a parent.

Nina also saw the significance of the kids' dual identities. She wanted for them to know who they were and where they came from, in order to build a sense of self and to withstand the prejudices she knew they face and will continue to face as they get older. Furthermore, she clearly wanted them to develop a variety of "multiliteracies," or ways of reading and writing the world, through activities outside of school, including church classes, outdoor science camps, cultural classes, and swimming, ballet, and basketball lessons. When Nina learned of an opportunity to visit the nation's capital, she dropped her

weekend plans, made the trip happen for her kids, and talked about it later with a smile on her face, despite being deprived of sleep as a result. The varied opportunities Nina was able to dig up for her children, often for free, were truly amazing—even more so when one considers her status as an “illegal immigrant” who didn’t speak her city’s primary language.

In a sense, these out-of-school literacies inhabit a world totally separate from school. When I asked Javier a week later whether he shared stories about his trip to D.C. with his teacher or his class, he shrugged, “I told some friends at lunch,” he said. “Did you write about it for your homework or anything?” I prod. “Nah.” At the same time, school literacy tasks undoubtedly enter home on a daily basis, through Javier’s homework, and the worry both Nina and Javier felt about impending tests and the gap between Javier’s performance and what is expected of him at school. As we sat together on the couch that day, Brenda and Javier chattering away about different Washington D.C. landmarks, Nina and I finally reminded Javier that it was time for us to get started on the night’s homework. Groaning audibly, Javier dragged his feet over to his backpack and began rummaging for his silent reading books and his homework packet, where we would find that night’s reading passage with comprehension questions. The contrast was clear – out-of-school literacy was fun and exciting, while school literacy was forced drudgery. And while school literacy practices impacted Javier and Nina’s relationship and daily life on a variety of levels, school literacy itself remained impermeable to interference from out-of-school literacy practices.

Charna

I thought, “Maybe it will be enough if we can just get him to master the system.”

Weeks later, Javier was munching on the strawberries his mother had set out for us to snack on during our session together. He dug in his backpack for his homework packet. For the past several weeks, in preparation for the End of Grade tests, Javier and I had spent the majority of our time together working on the test prep worksheets his teacher had included in his weekly homework. Each homework packet contained three such worksheets, and on each worksheet was a fiction or non-fiction passage, 3-4 paragraphs long, followed by several multiple choice questions. Javier was able to complete one each week, with my help. He had a list of test-taking strategies his teacher had given him and his classmates: *“Underline the main idea. Circle words you don’t know, and use context clues to help you figure them out. Answer every question!”* it says, among other things.

The passages were hard. Each one contained many words that were difficult for Javier to pronounce, therefore slowing his reading down and making it harder for him to remember what the passage was about. There were at least three vocabulary words in each paragraph that were brand new to Javier. My main task those weeks had been to coach Javier through the passages and help him practice strategies he could use to be able to decode as much as possible and make the most sense he could of each paragraph, to prepare to be able to do it without my help. Each time Javier got stuck on a word and just moved on, I made him back up and try again. “Think about your strategies,” I say. “First, try chunking. Are there any smaller words that you know within the word? Still not sure what it is? Go back to the beginning of the sentence and read it through with a blank in place of the mystery word. Does the context help you figure it out?” I similarly coach him

in the use of appropriate strategies when he's answering the multiple-choice questions. My goal was for Javier to utilize these strategies on his own when I was not there.

Nine times out of ten, when I cued him to use his strategies, he was able to figure out the word. The problem was that one passage, coupled with the questions, could take us almost an hour of seriously hard work. By the time he finished the last question, Javier was completely worn out and often frustrated by how *hard* it all was. Half of what I did during those test prep sessions was to act as a cheerleader, cueing him to persist, "Keep going! Don't give up, you're almost there..." I worried about him working on the real test on his own, in a silent room with proctors pacing.

There were only two weeks until the End of Grade test in reading, and I explained to Javier that it was time for him to try out his strategies on his own, to complete the exercise from beginning to end without me. I was edgy about the whole situation. Part of the reason I had so carefully avoided teaching situations that involve standardized tests is that I dreaded that feeling that I'm throwing my students to the wolves. I felt a little like that in that moment, like I was sending Javier off to climb Mt. Everest without a jacket or a guide. Only instead of Mt. Everest it was a passage that detailed Benjamin Franklin's many contributions to society.

Javier began reading silently but by the third sentence was reading aloud, which most kids do when they are having a hard time with the words. I leaned back and looked away, trying to appear nonchalant. But from the corner of my eye I was intently focused on him. I was wondering: *Does he have any background knowledge of Benjamin Franklin? Will he be able to decode "inventor?" I know he knows what it means, if he can pronounce it. What*

about "Pennsylvania Gazette," will he remember not to worry that he can't pronounce it perfectly and focus on figuring out what it basically means? I was sweating.

Forty-five minutes transpired in this manner. Javier occasionally talked himself through a tough phrase or question, and a few times he appealed to me for help. I reminded him that he had to do it on his own this time. I reminded him to think about the strategies we had practiced. I reminded him that he could do it if he didn't give up. By the time he was working through the multiple questions I could no longer sneak glances at his paper. After fifty-seven minutes (I was secretly timing him on my phone to see how he did), Javier put his pencil down and rubbed his eyes wearily. "Done?" I ask. "Yeah, I think so," he said.

Not having read the passage before myself, I quickly skimmed through the paragraphs and then checked his answers. When I finished, I looked at him and he eyed me expectantly. "Javier," I tell him, "Get ready for this. You have only missed one out of the nine questions! That means you got eight out of nine EXACTLY RIGHT!" He gave me a relieved laugh, "That's good!" he says. "Good?! That's awesome! That's amazing! You are a champion!" On cue, Javier stood up on the kitchen chair and flexed his biceps for me. I grabbed Javier's paper and rushed in to the kitchen, where Nina was preparing dinner for the kids. "Nina!" I exclaimed, "Javier lo hizo! ¡Lo hizo! Él sólo lució en un pasaje de comprensión de lectura de 3er grado! (Javier did it! He did it! He just aced a 3rd grade reading comprehension passage)!" She smiled at me and opened her arms for Javier, who had followed me into the kitchen. "*He did it.*" I thought, "*Maybe it will be enough if we can just get him to master the system.*"

Maybe it would be enough if we could just get him to master the system. Later that night, I was sick to my stomach over what happened. There was nothing wrong with Javier and I being happy and proud over his success with the test prep passage. But having his success on the 3rd grade End of Grade test even remotely in the realm of possibility had eclipsed my hopes for us to make his nightly literacy work more catered to Javier. I wanted reading and writing to be something he genuinely wanted to do, that was interesting to him, that connected with him personally. Success on the school's terms only had felt both impossible and also beneath Javier. I thought if he could become attracted to reading and writing as something meaningful, valuable, and even fun—high standardized test scores would eventually be a positive, but secondary, outcome.

Instead, so pervasive was testing's influence on our work together, we had put our regular reading routine on hold in order to prepare for the upcoming tests. There simply wasn't enough time to do it all. I had allocated an hour and a half to work with Javier, and after a long school day and after-school playtime, he didn't have much more than that in him anyway. There was time enough for the test prep and 20 minutes of Javier reading from the collection of books he could read independently. I put *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* on hold. He was required to read independently each night for homework, I reasoned at the time, and to respond in writing to what he read. In retrospect, I wondered why I didn't bend the rules so that we could enjoy our "reading just for fun" time together. I wondered if I had made a mistake even working on the test prep passages in the first place. How did it come to pass that I set aside what I believed to be good for Javier in favor of something I believed was far less beneficial and even harmful for him? It felt like I had deserted both Javier and my identity as a teacher.

“Aw, man! Why do we have to do these, Ms. D’Ardenne?! We hate these!” I was sitting down in the school library with my three third grade students. I taught English as a Second Language at Corner Elementary School five mornings a week, and I had 3-6 students per grade in grades K-5. Whenever I could, I pushed in to the classroom. I was setting my sights on a team-teaching model where I would push in to all the classes and work with regular classroom teachers on lessons with Emerging Bilingual students in mind but that would benefit the whole class. But this was my first year at the school, and I knew that building those types of relationships with teachers took time and had to be done carefully and respectfully. So, the reality of the job was that I pushed in occasionally with two of my most open-minded teachers, and I pulled kids out for small group lessons in the rest of the grades.

On this occasion Ms. McKnight, a stellar third grade teacher, had asked me to work with our students on some test prep passages, the very same types of test prep work that Javier slogged through every week for homework. Ms. McKnight planned to retire early at the end of the year due to standardized testing constraints and the recent drop in teachers’ salaries. My relationship with her was my strongest teacher-teacher partnership at the school. I loved her room the minute I walked into it and promptly begged her to let me join her classroom community. A no-nonsense—at times almost gruff—teacher, Ms. McKnight didn’t allow any of her students to take the easy road. She also provided a wide variety of learning environments and opportunities that appealed to her kids’ individual talents and learning goals. In short, she was a gem, and I learned so much from her.

While I had spent my teaching career working to carefully avoid standardized tests as much as possible, first by teaching in the primary grades and then by working with small groups of children who qualify for ESL services, Ms. McKnight had taken a different route. She grumbled about the high stakes testing environment, but she heartily embraced the state's core standards and aimed to fight the system by working day and night to get each and every one of her kids to ace those tests. Her kids did consistently score in the top 2% of the districts' third grade classes, even when compared to schools whose students are majority white and middle- and upper-class. Corner's student population was 78% non-white, and 70% of the students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch. As a strong veteran teacher, Ms. McKnight also got many of the kids whom earlier teachers had deemed "challenging." She considered it her calling as a teacher to be able to maintain quality, complex learning experiences for her students, while still being able to get them to jump through the structural hoops necessary to be successful in school.

It was my respect for her that had me doing test-prep that morning with my kids. As I fielded their complaints, I was whining right along with them internally. I left the regular classroom setting because, even in the early grades, testing had taken over so much class time in public schools. It was not just the tests themselves and the time they took away from learning and teaching. It was the way they took over the culture of school, or perhaps the culture of school had embraced them and kept on running. In past teaching experiences, primarily with children of color and from working-class families, I had witnessed the heavy focus on whole class, direct instruction, skills-based curricula and the weighty sanctions that followed when students could not individually perform. In this position at Corner, I had been able to set my own schedule and do what I thought was best

for my students on a daily basis. I *loved* my job. And I still had a sore spot for being asked to acknowledge the reality of the End of Grade tests. But Ms. McKnight asked me to, and I was going to do this test prep with my students. I decided to bribe them, promising them that after we worked through and debriefed the comprehension passages we could get an early start on creating the set for our last readers' theater play of the year. It worked, and we all begrudgingly dug in.

I grew up in a family that would be labeled working poor. My single mother worked several different jobs throughout the years to support my older brother and me. We ate a lot of government cheese sandwiches, and we didn't always have electricity. When I turned 4, my mom somehow figured out a way to trade hours of labor as a cleaning lady for my admission to a Montessori school. The school was run by a couple on their small, idyllic farm. It sat at the end of a winding, tree lined dirt road with pastoral views, and it was home to sheep, goats, cows, horses, and chickens. We got to do our learning all over that place: in the old farmhouse kitchen, sitting on couches or the floor rug in the living room, out in the sprawling yard, or in the barnyard with the farm animals. The fact that I still have clear memories of the school says a great deal of how it affected me.

By the time I went to Kindergarten, I was in the small public elementary school right across from the modest house we rented. For at least a year before being allowed to go, I would bug my brother or my mom to take me across the street to ask the teachers if they had any books or school supplies they weren't using. My brother and I tore through the school dumpsters from time to time and found all manner of treasures there. I taught my pretend classes under the plum tree in our back yard. During my years there, I don't think

it would have mattered to me what the political landscape of education was, I was so intoxicated with learning how to “do school,” please my teachers, and learn anything and everything there was to be learned.

After taking out several new cars worth of student loans to attend a fairly elite private liberal arts school, and buoyed by the privilege and social capital it bestowed upon me (along with the privilege I brought with me to college in the first place), I began teaching in New York City. This was the first time I worked with students of color in a context other than one-on-one tutoring, and this was the first time I was a racial minority in any context. Throughout the next ten years, I continued to work in public schools, mostly in urban areas, that served populations of students that were majority “minority” and who qualified for free and reduced-price lunch. I began to ask questions about race, social class, and the white, female, middle-class teaching force. I could see the difference between the kind of scripted curriculum and traditional learning environments that were deemed necessary for my students and the project-based, loosely structured contexts enjoyed by the mostly white and middle-class students in the next town or neighborhood over. The high-stakes testing machine began to descend upon schools, especially the kinds of schools I taught in, devouring teaching and learning that wasn’t standardized.

I took these questions and tensions with me to graduate school, first in a masters and then in a doctoral program. In my time as a graduate student I have tried to move toward a more precise definition of my core interests in learning and teaching: the student-teacher relationship as it is framed by race and class, what students and teachers do with their time together in classrooms, and who or what dictates how they spend their time together. Both as a teacher and as graduate student researcher, I have struggled to

reconcile my own educational beginning in the Montessori school, which I have held dearly as a personal ideal learning context, and the reality of public schools, especially those serving primarily low-income students and students of color. I have wondered, what if the public schools serving these students were structured like my Montessori school? What would that look like? Could I make it happen somehow?

Inherent to my constant search for ways to meld these visions together are issues of whiteness (my own as well as that of the culture of schooling) and power. I have what might be considered a radical vision of schooling. When I allow myself to dream, to brainstorm what my ideal school would look like, I imagine my students and I roaming outside in the woods, maybe building things, maybe bringing something to read, maybe asking empirical questions about what we see. There would be no standards at all, in the sense that they exist in public schools. The curriculum would follow the students, and the student-teacher relationship in the traditional sense of the words would be blurred; that is, each member of the community would be student and teacher in different degrees on different days depending on the activities of the community.

But, after returning to teach in public schools as an advanced doctoral student, and possessing considerably more freedom than I had as a classroom teacher, I did not work to radicalize my students' learning experiences. I did not—at least for the most part—construct or allow the curriculum to follow their leads, their questions, their interests. I did care deeply about my students and my relationships with each of them. I did work very hard to provide my best teaching and learning experiences for the kids, and I did focus my energies on being a responsive teacher. But I also planned my weeks around the common core standards, and I pushed into traditional classroom lessons whenever I could.

Why did I teach this way? Why didn't I use the relative freedom I had in my current teaching position to teach in very different ways? The answers are tied up with my whiteness and the culture of power in schools. I question whether I can or should construct learning experiences for my students that are based—yes, in part on my pedagogical knowledge, but also on my *personal* ideal teaching and learning context. The further left of center I make the curriculum, the further away it gets from the culture of power. I know that a radical curriculum can be critical of the culture of power. But, working with students from non-dominant sociocultural backgrounds, I wonder if—unless we blow up the system sometime soon—it would do my students harm to provide learning experiences too far outside the dominant culture of schooling. Research I have previously outlined tells us that teaching the culture of power alone is not a panacea, but it is one important part of a social justice framework that students with minority status need to be taught the culture of power in order both to succeed within it and to be able to be critical of it (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, 2005). Would I be doing my students—children who don't have the privileges of whiteness or middle-class status that I have—any favors by handing them my own ideal schooling experience? Don't my students need to be operating within the culture of power in order to learn to map it, navigate it, and then critique it? Does one need to master the system before one can transform it or transcend it?

As a mother of a 2-year-old, the crisis of the rapidly increasing standardization of public schooling experiences looms large. I provide my son with lots of books to read, experiences visiting museums, and lots and lots of conversation. I don't do these things in order to ensure his "success" in school. I'm doing them because I *love* language and

literacy, and I want to share that with him, as well. I want him to see all of the beautiful possibilities in words. I want him to learn about who he is, where he is, and how he can transform this place. I want these same things for Javier.

Of course, I don't *need* to think about my son's belonging in, or understanding of, the culture of power. His (apparent) gender and his whiteness will likely pave the way to all the access he needs, and he'll likely be free to do what he wants with his membership—he'll have the time, energy, and space because he won't *need* to engage in connecting himself to the dominant culture. In many ways he's already the very definition of the dominant culture. Furthermore, I'm his mom. For better or worse, I get to do what I want with him. Javier, on the other hand, doesn't have those privileges, and neither does his family. I am one of their many tenuous connections to the possibility of Nina's dream of a "better life" for her kids. Nina does not want to buck the system. She wants Javier to master the system and use it to climb. Who am I to tell her that this is wrong?

Part of keeping my whiteness in check, as a researcher, a teacher, and a fellow mother, is to carefully avoid thinking that I have "the answer" for any of my students, and in particular for Javier and Nina. As a new mother myself, I have come to believe that, above all else, I must respect Nina's wishes for her son. This doesn't mean that I'm completely passive in my relationship with her or with Javier. But, despite my literacy credentials, neither am I an expert with a solution. The best course of action, I continue to believe, is via our relationship. If we can build trust, mutual respect, and understanding between us, perhaps then I can best share what I have to offer Javier, and Nina can choose to use what she deems valuable for her son and her aspirations for him. Perhaps Javier can benefit from the best of both of us and make his own choices with our support.

Still, my interactions with Javier are not completely mediated by Nina. Though I have deferred, and will continue to defer, to her judgment regarding Javier, I am as uninhibited in my interactions with him as I can be. I do not restrict my passion for words and phrases and books. I try to fight against the box of standardization by showing him what it looks like to love reading and writing and by encouraging him to love it, too. That is the only way I can imagine ideally opposing the standardization--by refusing to attend to it and instead by *being* what is preferable to it; that is, by being free and personal and varied with my literacy practices. And offering to share this way of being with Javier.

However, Javier, Nina, and I are operating in a standardized system: the context of literacy learning within traditional public schooling. As Nina expressed, she doesn't like it, but that's the way it is, and she wants Javier to succeed within the system. In my ideal world, Javier wouldn't even have homework. We would spend our time together reading and writing about things that interested him. But he does have homework, and I help him with it. On several occasions throughout our time together, I have forfeited my intentions for our session and instead helped Javier in a manner that did not feel good to me (for example, when I helped him copy the words for his presentation on Martin Luther King, Jr.).

When Javier was required to attend the summer reading camp for five weeks, we temporarily stopped reading together, because Nina felt that Javier should focus on the school's program and then be able to rest when he was at home. I could understand where she was coming from and reluctantly agreed with her. I visited the family a couple of times just to check in and socialize, but Javier and I didn't read together during that time. During one visit, Javier asked me if I wasn't coming to read with him regularly because I was angry

with him for failing the End of Grade Test, or if I was giving up because I thought he couldn't do it. Horrified, I sat him down and carefully explained that I couldn't be more proud of him and I would never give up on him, regardless of how he performed on a million tests. We enjoyed the rest of the afternoon together and made plans to start up our tutoring sessions after his summer camp was completed. Still, we had lost something. Our time together was being set aside for the sake of the school's program. It was taking so much time and energy to work within the system, it was getting harder to remember how to see literacy experiences as being valuable independently of that system.

I am an experienced teacher, working on a doctorate, who has spent over 15 years working with kids in literacy contexts. I see mutually open, respectful relationships as being central to teaching and learning. I sought out a relationship with Nina and Javier so I could learn about their home literacy practices and their experiences navigating school literacy practices. After getting to know Javier and his mom, I worked with them to set up a routine for myself and Javier where we could enjoy reading together and help Javier grow as a reader and a writer both in school and out. I found Javier to have many literacy strengths and have worked to embrace them and build upon them. But despite all of this, I still found myself deferring to the culture of schooling that seemed to encroach upon all of our relationships. I still struggled to situate myself and our work together in such a way that was both true to my own beliefs and also honoring of Javier, Nina, and their own personal aspirations. Even now as I write, I still grapple with how I will balance these realities as our relationship continues.

Conclusion

Taken together, Javier's relationships with Nina and myself demonstrate the wide variety of literacies in which we engage, revealing both Javier and Nina to be complex and intelligent individuals who use their multiple literacies to communicate and make meaning of themselves and others. Javier is able to make connections between his literacy practices and use what he learns via one practice to inform another. He furthermore uses his literacy practices to define himself and grow within the contexts of his relationships with others. He is for example, "a soccer player," "a big brother," "a parishioner." He proudly wears these identities in connection with the people in his life, and he brings himself fully and passionately to his relationships with Nina and myself.

School, however, is an authoritative presence in Javier and Nina's life, which encroaches on their relationship because of the way it narrowly defines literacy. Javier and Nina's experiences navigating school reveal that the institution places literacy in a high-stakes culture of individual achievement in which literacy practices are gauged on performances within standardized contexts. School authoritatively names which literacies are valuable and invalidates Javier's and Nina's other literacy practices as irrelevant to Javier's growth as a student and thus unnecessary or even worthless.

In this way, school trespasses within Javier and Nina's relationship, as well as my relationship with them both, making these strained and more singularly focused on school's ends. The result is that Javier adopts the identity that school has given him—that of "struggling reader." He furthermore seems to see no connection between the literacy practices valued in school and those practiced in his life outside of school, in large part

because it appears there is no place for Javier's full self within school. Because school defines literacy practices in such narrow terms, Javier is taught to relate to himself and others in very restricted ways. In this way, school makes the facets of Javier that exist beyond his performance in school invisible, not only within the school walls, but also in his relationships of school. School as an institution fails to see the richness of Javier's personality and his abilities to relate to others using his multiple literacy practices.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Throughout this study, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What sorts of literacy practices does Javier engage in at home?
2. How do Javier's relationships with his mother and the researcher shape, and become shaped by, his understanding of literacy?
3. How does school define literacy, and what literacy practices are valued in school?
4. How does school literacy shape Javier's understanding of literacy and impact his relationships with his mother and the researcher?

I first met Nina in the context of family literacy workshops for Spanish-speaking parents that were being held in her school district. After hearing the parents express their passion for their children's educations, along with their sincere desires to be a part of that education, I sought to work specifically with one family over time, in order to get a deeper picture of how that family navigated public school literacy contexts.

I also embarked on this research with a deep belief in the connection between relationships and literacy practices, a connection that is supported by sociocultural theories of literacy (Bean & Moni, 2003; Cainey, 2003; Freire, 1970; Street, 1995). Freire (1970) writes, "the literacy process must include the relationships of men with their world" (p. 212) because "the word is not something static or disconnected from men's existential experience, but a dimension of their thought-language about the world" (p. 215). In other words, language and literacy practices are used by individuals to make sense of themselves

and their relationship with their world. This is especially salient when considering home and school contexts—and the relationships that are formed there—as sites where a child learns to engage in literacy practices and build their understanding of themselves and the world.

What I found from this study was that Javier and Nina both engage in a variety of vibrant literacy practices that both shape and are shaped by their relationships with one another and with me. However, their story is also one of a push and pull between school and home, between cognitive and critical literacies. This account of their experiences illustrates the challenge of enacting critical literacy practices in a context where school is perpetuating a more cognitive, individualized form of literacy within a school culture that privileges the measurement of literacy learning via individual performance on high-stakes tests.

In this way, school does not merely hold governance over school-related literacy tasks. It encroaches upon Javier's relationships outside of school, narrowing his understanding of literacy and his literacy practices. This interference calls into question not only the goals of school literacy tasks, but also the purposes of schooling in general. Is it enough to teach children to read and write, regardless of the context? As Ladson-Billings (1992) asked, "Literacy for what?" (p. 318).

What sorts of literacy practices does Javier engage in at home?

Multiple Literacies

The idea that literacies are multiple is foundational to this study. Masny (2005) writes,

Literacies are comprised of words, gestures, attitudes, ways of speaking, writing, valuing a way of 'being' in the world. Literacies are value-laden, interwoven with gender, race, religion, ideology, and power. When a person talks or reads, she or he constructs meaning in a particular context. More

precisely, this act of meaning construction that qualifies as “literacy” is subject to cultural, sociopolitical, and sociocultural interpretations within that society and of its institutions. The meaning of literacy is actualized according to a particular context in the time and space in which it operates (p. 175).

Thus, Javier’s and Nina’s literacies are socially and culturally situated. Their literacy practices are shaped by their histories, as well as the values and aspirations they possess, both individually and together. Moreover, their literacies are multiple; that is, they are not limited to practices with the written word but expand to include multiple literacies, or ways of being and making meaning in the world. Therefore, the term “literacies” can refer to multiple “ways of reading the world in particular contexts” (Kerka, 2003, p. 3). Thought of in this broad way, Javier and Nina’s literacies include cooking, caring for others, playing soccer, participating in church ceremonies, and reading graphic novels, among others, because they are all ways of “reading the world” and of making meaning of oneself within the world (Freire, 1970). In this section, I reflect on Javier’s and Nina’s literacy practices that are unrelated to school, based on school’s relatively narrow, cognitive view of literacy. I discuss school-related literacy practices in a later section.

Javier’s Literacy Practices

As reflected in Chapter Four, Javier engages in multiple literacy practices across his day. These include playing soccer, reading the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, writing in his diary, reading *Minecraft* strategy and playing the video game, participating in church services, and caring for others. Of particular interest are those practices that illustrate Javier as an expert--as one who is a confident participant in the particular literacy practice. For example, Javier took his first communion, which entailed a year of study and preparation in order to participate in and understand this important rite of passage in his

family's church. Having participated in this ritual with his family, his godparents, and myself and under the watch of the whole church community, Javier now considers himself a "real" member of the church community (not just a "little kid"). He proudly navigated the multiple components of this particular literacy practice, as evidenced by the invitations he wrote and then sent me and others in advance of the event and the way he continues to speak of this experience. Javier was the person of honor at the celebration following the communion and was gifted a rosary and his own bible for his accomplishments. Javier had in essence "arrived".

Javier's cultural literacy practices extend beyond his communion experience. He learns about his Mexican culture at home and in classes given by his family's church. Javier once interviewed Nina, with my help, for a homework assignment about family traditions. Further, Nina's active participation with the school's Latino parent organization recently provided an opportunity for Javier to engage in and demonstrate his Mexican cultural literacy practices for his peers and their families, in the form of wearing traditional Mexican dress and dancing a Mexican folk dance for the school audience. Confident and glowing at school, Javier was able to share his cultural literacy for a short moment with his peers and teachers.

In addition to cultural literacy, Javier also engages in what I'm calling kinesthetic literacy. Javier consistently participates in kinesthetic activities, like basketball, swimming, and soccer, his self-professed greatest love. Javier plays soccer on a daily basis, wears his cleats and favorite team jersey often, and watches matches on television with his father. He writes about soccer for pleasure and for school, and he once used soccer practice as an analogy for practicing "easy" books during our time together, illustrating his ability to use

the way he makes meaning with one literacy practice to inform the way he makes meaning in another literacy practice. Javier's embodiment of kinesthetic literacy is robust. He is confident in his ability to engage this sort of literacy with others.

Apart from these more social sorts of literacies, Javier also engages in literacy just for himself. He loves reading the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* book series, a set of graphic novel books written in the form of a diary. Javier has his own diary in which he tells me he writes his "secrets." This is his space to reflect in writing in the ways that make sense to him, about the topics that are important to him. This is literacy for Javier; there is no audience here. I see this literacy practice as a way for Javier to express and understand himself, as he relates to the character in his favorite series of books, who also keeps a diary.

Finally, there are other everyday literacies that Javier engages in including artistic literacy—when Javier sits down with his mother and siblings to make art—and other literacies when he participates in camps and classes, including chemistry, drama and nature trekking. Javier speaks enthusiastically about his involvement in these experiences. When Nina gets information on the various camps and classes that are available to the family, Javier pores over the choices with her and eagerly chooses which selections he would most enjoy. He often attends the same camps year after year and expands upon his practices. For example, in a nature trekking camp he spends time with other campers at a local river, learning about the ecosystem and local wildlife. He has expressed himself and communicated what he has learned in this camp through science experiments, scientific logs, creative writing, art, and drama.

Taken together, Javier's various literacy practices reveal a confident, passionate individual who brings his whole self to the contexts and relationships of which he is a part.

Javier does not participate half-way; he tends instead to throw himself into his literacy practices and enthusiastically share himself and what he's learned with others. Via these literacy practices, Javier invents and names himself, as big brother, church member, soccer player, etc. Finally, Javier uses his literacy practices as a means to grow and develop as a person. He exhibits self-awareness and self-confidence as he pursues various ways to grow and become, for example, a better soccer player, big brother, or steward of nature. He then brings these various identities as well as his passion for growth to his relationships with others, including with Nina and myself. In this way, Javier engages in his various literacy practices in order to "read the world" and make sense of himself within his world (Freire, 1970, p. 62).

How do Javier's relationships with his mother and the researcher shape, and become shaped by, his understanding of literacy?

Literacy and Relationships

Each and every one of Javier and Nina's literacy practices is employed in the service of interacting with an 'other,' or for the purpose of engaging in a relationship with oneself or an 'other.' Webster's defines "relationship" in the following way:

1. *the way in which two or more people, groups, countries, etc., talk to, behave toward, and deal with each other*
2. *a romantic or sexual friendship between two people*
3. *the way in which two or more people or things are connected (Merriam Webster, 2015).*

Literacy practices, thought about broadly in terms of multiple literacies, are integral to social relationships, and vice versa, because literacy practices comprise the ways in which

we “talk to, behave toward, and deal with each other.” They are the means by which we are “connected.” Solsken (1993) writes, “...each and every literacy transaction is a moment of self definition in which people take action within and upon their relations with other people” (p.8). Thus, it is via our literacy practices that we both name and define ourselves, in fluid and dynamic ways, in the service of connecting to an ‘other.’

For example, Nina cooks, and improves upon her recipes, in order to nourish and please her family, or in order to sell her desserts to make money for the family. Nina participates in the school’s Latino parent group in order to develop relationships with other Latino families, in order to relate to the community of the school, and to teach Javier, not only about his own culture, but also about how he and his cultural heritage can relate to and fit within the school context. We necessarily bring ourselves into these relations with others, and in fact we construct and define ourselves via our literacy practices, such that “...each literacy transaction is a moment of self definition” (Solsken, 1993, p. 8).

Javier practices soccer in order to build up his “fluency” with the “language” of the game in order to play soccer with his friends, but also to try on and develop the identity of “soccer player.” Javier has also developed interpersonal literacies—he uses kind words and gestures when he cares for Lee and his siblings, and he often chooses to put the needs of the younger ones above his own after “reading” the situation around him and judging that necessity. These behaviors demonstrate an emotional maturity and interest in others’ wellbeing. Javier may also engage in these interpersonal literacy practices in part to emulate his parents, to get positive reinforcement from them, and to establish himself within the family as a caring individual who can take responsibility for others. In this way, he defines himself and his position within his family community via his literacy practices.

When Javier and I meet together, we talk about his interests, hopes and fears, and his goals for himself for the future. He shares with me his uncertainties and his doubts about himself as a reader and a writer. I use what I learn about him to share books I think he might enjoy, and he chooses books that he is motivated to read and discuss with me. In turn, he writes about himself and his experiences with feeling and creativity, in ways that reveal a thoughtful, charismatic, and intelligent kid. Javier and I read *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and he relates to the social world of older kids through this book. It is possible that he also uses his reading of the text as a means of making sense of himself as an actual or potential member of that world. He cherishes and uses the diary I bought for him, and it's evident that this practice makes him feel important—he has precious secrets to write down that are only for him. He studies the teachings of the Catholic church in order to establish his membership within his family in terms of the way they practice religion, as well as within the greater community of his family's Catholic church, and he proudly shares that part of himself with me when he gives me a handmade invitation to his special day and includes my son and me in his communion celebration. Javier is a soccer player, a fan of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, a member of the Catholic church, a caring member of his family. The way he engages with me, his mother, and others in various contexts helps him to define and name himself, and in doing so, continuously make meaning of himself and his relationships with others.

In each of these examples, Javier, Nina, and I bring our own personal contexts, including but not limited to our histories, cultures, intentions, wishes, and fears, to our relationships. Hawkins (2013) writes,

The languages and literacies that people command are ... shaped by where individuals come from and their trajectories through life—who they are

and have been—and they shape who people are able to be, and how they perceive themselves and others (p. 2-3).

For example, when Nina interacts with Javier in the context of doing homework for school, she brings her own history as a child and student in Mexico. She brings her immigration to the United States, and everything she gave up to be here. She brings her intense commitment to the idea of the American Dream, and to education being key to achieving that dream. She also brings her desires as a mother to do everything possible to ensure Javier's success in school and life in this country. Her practices with Javier provide a context for her both to live out those aspects of herself, to grow and change as a person, and to co-construct what literacy means for Javier. I, in turn, do the same when I excitedly share a series of books that I loved as a kid and that I think Javier will love, too. We laugh together in the same places and share stories about our own lives that connect to the stories we are reading together. In this way, Javier gives me the privilege of sharing myself, and my love of reading and writing, with him.

In this process, Javier, Nina, and I adapt and extend our literacy practices, or the specific strategies we use to be “heard, understood, and taken seriously” among other members of a particular community (Carter, 2006, p. 105) via our relationships with one another. For example, Nina works to improve upon her English skills in order to better help Javier with his homework. Javier learns a new soccer strategy in order to play well against a particular friend who is tough to beat. He learns to use and understand new ideas and symbolic gestures in order to participate in communion at church. I learn to be a better teacher as Javier teaches me about himself and what he's ready to do in reading and writing contexts. I, too, adapt and change according to what Nina wants for her son, and according to what I feel I can offer my relationship with Javier. Thus, the self and the other

who exist in relationship together both influence and allow themselves to be influenced. We undergo this constant negotiation using language, whether it be the language of a family community, the language of soccer, or the language of the Catholic church, etc.

These “languages and literacies that people command are artifacts of their positioning within specific communities, and enable them to claim (or cause them to be denied) membership within them” (Masny, 2013, p. 2). It is therefore via his literacy practices that Javier both defines himself and establishes a connection, or relationship, with others. He establishes himself as belonging in particular communities--of soccer players, of his family, of his church community, for example. However, literacy practices are also the grounds for exclusion from specific communities. Schooling, and the way it privileges a very particular narrow definition of literacy, not only excludes Javier’s full self (and his full array of literacy practices) but also encroaches upon his relationships with Nina and myself. In the next section, I will explore how school’s definition of literacy narrows how Javier defines himself. In addition, I will discuss how Javier’s relationships with his mother and myself change based on the way school defines literacy.

How does school define literacy and what literacy practices are valued in school?

Central to this study have been the tensions inherent in competing definitions of literacy. The cognitive, or autonomous, model of literacy and literacy learning – the way of doing things in most traditional public schools today – maintains that literacy is a set of skills located in the individual (Luke, 2003; Street, 2003). Teaching children to read and write is one of the fundamental aims of public education. Underlying that goal is the idea that the ability to read and write will enable students both to fully participate in society as well as to climb the social and economic ladder to improve their individual circumstances

(Street, 2003). In this way, schooling and literacy learning are deemed neutral, individual and universally beneficial to students. This view is embraced by Nina in many ways. She hopes that Javier will master academic reading and writing and use these skills to access greater privileges in order to make a “better life” for himself. She wants Javier to master the system in order to climb within the system.

However, the institution of schooling is not neutral, nor is the practice of teaching children to read and write (Delgado-Gaitain, 1991; Giroux, 2001; Luke, 2003). Traditional public schooling is a process of assimilation to a social, cultural, and economic norm of “mainstream,” white, middle-class practices (Heath, 1994). Difference from this norm within the institution of schooling is looked upon as a deficit to be remedied (Gutierrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda, 1999). Language and literacy practices within and connected to public schooling are fundamental sites for this assimilation. Street (1995) writes, “...School as an institution finds its main form of expression through a particular form of language, in evidence not only in the speech of teachers and the text of the written materials but in the classroom, on the walls, and in the stream of bureaucratic paperwork through which it constantly signifies and reproduces itself. The language of the teacher and of the text positions the subject...pins them to their seats, and locates them in a socially and authoritatively constructed space” (p. 120). In other words, school, as an institution, defines and reproduces its culture through its language. The institution of schooling positions students such that learning the forms of both language and literacy that school privileges is essential for them if they hope to be successful within the school context.

To go to public school, then, is to be consistently confronted, if not saturated, by the white, middle-class cultural norms that are taught there, both explicitly and implicitly.

Throughout the course of this study, the purpose of Javier’s literacy schooling experience—as represented by his homework as well as Nina’s meetings with Javier’s teachers about his academic deficiencies—has been to speak, read, and write in English with academic proficiency—as defined by a cognitive, individual model of literacy—and to perform this proficiency on standardized tests. For Javier, this doesn’t just entail literally learning a language—English—that is different from the one he speaks at home. It involves learning the culture of public schooling, including the ideas that achievement and success are important, individual endeavors, that social and economic climbing are possible based on one’s academic merit, and that the dominant, “school-way” of thinking, doing, and speaking is the right way (Gutierrez, et al, 1999). It further involves learning the very specific cognitive literacy practices that are valued in public school (Luke, 2003; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Street, 1995).

Thus, there are three relevant elements—distinct but connected—at work in Javier’s public schooling experience. First, the school espouses an autonomous model of literacy learning, defining literacy as the individual, cognitive ability to read and write. Second, the school requires students to demonstrate this learning on high-stakes standardized tests that are arguably biased against non-white, non-middle class, non-English speaking children (Zwick, 1999). Finally, the larger school culture perpetuates an ethos of authority over children, positioning them in a hierarchy that values social climbing and achievement, based on individual meritocracy. This culture considers itself (if it considers itself at all) neutral, right, and beyond reprimand.

For children and families who already identify with the culture of public schooling, adherence to these cultural norms is likely to be additive. That is, based on the similarities

between these students' home cultures and the culture of schools, students' literacy practices in each context validate and support their practices in the other context (Street, 1995, p. 117). For students from non-dominant backgrounds such as Javier, however, this process is subtractive (Valenzuela, 2010). Traditional public school contexts tend not to value difference in literacy practices, nor do they endeavor to bring students' funds of knowledge from the home into the classroom as a foundation for the curriculum (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). The literacy practices that Javier eloquently engages at home find little space in school.

Instead of bringing students' funds of knowledge into the classroom, many schools hold parent literacy workshops, during which the school teaches families about what schools expect from students in terms of literacy performance, and about what families can do at home to support school literacy instruction. In essence, these workshops tell parents how they can bring school literacy---the valued literacy-- into their homes. These workshops are sometimes translated into Spanish for Spanish-speaking parents (Cassidy, 2004; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Osterling & Garza, 2004; Shanahan, 1995). Nina has attended workshops or "literacy nights" like these at Javier's school, some of which were geared toward all parents but had Spanish-speaking translators, and some of which were catered to Spanish-speaking families and were thus entirely in Spanish.

Educators who hold these workshops seek to assimilate diverse families into the literacy culture of schools so that all students will have access to literacy (or, the ability to read, write, and speak) in English (Cassidy, 2004; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Osterling & Garza, 2004; Shanahan, 1995). The logic is that access to literacy in English provides access to the dominant discourse, or the set of assumptions and practices that the elite in our

society hold, and that this access provides students with the opportunity to be successful in our society (Delpit, 1988, Janks, 2000; Kostogriz, 2011). The vast majority of family outreach programs instruct families in how to conform their at-home literacy behaviors to the white, middle-class norms of public schooling (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012; Lopez, 2001; Ortiz, 2009).

A negative consequence of this pressure to assimilate is that schools and school literacy tasks become culturally contested spaces for non-dominant communities such as Latino families because they must negotiate between their own home cultures and languages and assimilating to the dominant culture (Giroux, 1998; Luke, 2003; Macedo, 2000). In this way, Javier and Nina are subjected to a narrow definition of literacy within an authoritative school culture that sees their difference from the norm as a deficit. The following section details the impact of this reality, both on Javier's understanding of literacy and on his relationship with his mother and myself.

How does school literacy shape Javier's understanding of literacy and impact his relationship with his mother and the researcher?

“Doing School”

Nina is very aware of the expectations school has for Javier and for her, and she expends every last effort to meet those expectations. Of her own accord as well as in response to what Javier's teachers have suggested during family literacy workshops, Nina has obtained close to one hundred books for Javier and his siblings to read at home. She has set up the dining room table as an organized space for completing homework, and she designates the time when the children return home from school as a time for school work. Nina saves piles of Javier's work from school, as well as his report cards and assessment

results, in large, organized binders. She has set up literacy tutoring for Javier, and she is working herself to become more fluent in English so that she can better help Javier with homework. She makes sure Javier reads at home, and she reads with him as often as is possible, though this process is difficult for both of them due to the language barrier, especially for Nina. She has shared with Javier countless times her personal belief in the potential impact of his schooling: “Yo sé que la educación lo es todo ... si consigue una educación, que va a vivir mejor. (I know that education is everything. If he gets an education, he’s going to live better).”

Though she has lamented to me the difference between school in Mexico and school here in the United States, “En México , hay muchas maneras de demostrar lo que sabe. En este caso, sólo hay una manera correcta. (In Mexico, there are many ways to show what you know. Here, there is just one right way,”) Nina has learned and continues to learn to navigate U.S. public schooling for the sake of her son. Even her stance on the culture of public schooling reflects not an ignorance or concession, but rather a keen ability to recognize the power structures in her family’s world and to navigate them by whatever means she can: Nina says to me, “Sé que cada niño es diferente y que necesito aprender a su manera, a su propio ritmo. Pero, todavía tiene que ser en un cierto nivel. Él tiene que estar con el resto. No me gusta, pero es la manera que es. (I know that every kid is different, and they need to learn in their own way, their own pace. But, he still needs to be on a certain level. He needs to be with the rest. I don’t like it, but it’s the way it is.)” It is not naiveté, but an acute understanding of the way schooling operates that engenders her attitude. She wants better for her son, and she’ll do whatever is in her power to get it. To this end, Nina makes sense of Javier’s homework, report cards, and progress reports. She

pushes him to complete school tasks that don't always make sense either to her or to Javier, or represent a genuine interaction with the world—"Esto es importante , dice, para su future. (This is important, she says, for your future.)" She requests meetings with Javier's teachers and attends other school functions, including family literacy workshops, parent conferences, IEP meetings, and non-academic social functions.

Furthermore, Nina's decisions about homework assignments are strategic; that is, they represent Nina helping Javier to navigate the terrain of school literacy contexts in very particular ways that respond to how these contexts are difficult for Javier and Nina. For example, as described in Chapter Four, she once guided Javier in researching Martin Luther King, Jr. online, and she then had him copy words she had written into a report format. Though I got the impression Javier had participated minimally in the actual research process, Nina wanted him to copy her words down and prepare to present them. This decision may appear detrimental, or at least not helpful, to Javier's learning. However, when considered from Nina's perspective, it is a strategic and purposeful means of helping Javier survive the public school system. Knowing Javier would not be able to independently complete the report in a week's time at home, and wanting him to be able to give a presentation on par with his classmates, she scaffolded the process for him. She did this, knowing it wasn't the ideal learning situation for Javier, but also knowing that she wanted to assist him in functioning within an imperfect system.

This particular occasion demonstrates Nina compromising her standards for Javier's schoolwork—she usually requires that he do his own work that she then checks—in order to “make do” as well as possible in a difficult situation. Seen in this way, her actions demonstrate an intentional navigating of the system of schooling, in the form of skirting

around the rules, in order for her son to “be successful” within the parameters of school. They also reveal what is lost when Nina and Javier have to navigate what is sometimes an impossible terrain. When it occurs, this navigation, this “playing the game” eclipses the possibility that Javier might engage authentically with school literacy tasks. He is no longer participating in a genuine literacy task for a “real” purpose—his only task is to navigate school.

In this way, Nina’s and Javier’s “doing U.S. public school” literacy practices are developed and refined, in very particular ways, while Javier’s opportunities to engage in academic literacy practices are compromised. In this case, for example, Javier missed out on an opportunity to research and write about a famous figure who genuinely meant something to him because of the way school assigned the task (in a way that would be impossible for Javier to complete). Instead, Nina and Javier employed their ability to “do school,” which in this case means that they actually almost entirely avoided the task school had set before them.

As they reduce this literacy task, Javier potentially learns that literacy is a hoop to get through in whatever means necessary; that is, literacy is not necessarily something that is engaged in for an authentic purpose that is connected to his life. It also provides a stark contrast in Javier and Nina’s relationship. Having watched them engage in talking about their cultural history before, I saw them motivated and eager—Javier peppering his mother with questions and his mother clearly reveling in sharing her own history and childhood with her son. Here, on the other hand, I witnessed Nina quickly and gruffly give Javier directions about how to complete the assignment, checking in occasionally only to correct

his mistakes and remind him to write neatly. It simply wasn't a context for general engagement; it was a checkpoint to pass through.

However, this “doing school” is an important literacy practice in and of itself. In her work, Yosso (2005) examines the way Critical Race Theory centers the experiences of people of color and unveils spaces where people of color can be “empowered by transformative resistance” (p. 70). In particular, she highlights several forms of cultural capital that various researchers have identified individuals of non-dominant status to hold—forms of capital that may not be privileged or even acknowledged by mainstream culture, but that help to think about how counterstories of the experiences of people of color might help set a foundation for those ‘othered’ by the dominant system to theorize *themselves* in the face of being so often theorized in deficit terms by dominant institutions.

These forms of capital include: (a) aspirational capital, or “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers;” (b) linguistic capital, or “the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” of speaking; (c) familial capital, or “those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community, history, memory and cultural intuition;” (d) social capital, or “networks of people and community resources;” (e) navigational capital, or “skills of maneuvering through social institutions...[often] not created with Communities of Color in mind;” and (f) resistant capital, or “those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (p. 77-81).

Yosso’s conception of these various kinds of community cultural wealth gives theoretical form to a range of qualities that Nina and Javier possess in abundance. Nina and

Javier both, as outsiders within a system that does not appear to be willing or able to acknowledge them for who they are, must use what they know to navigate the culture of schooling. Nina very clearly displays several of these forms of capital in her day-to-day life. Her history and her commitment to her family's future despite how she has struggled, demonstrate her aspirational capital. In service of her aspirations for Javier and her other children, Nina exhibits linguistic, social, and navigational capital, in the way she exhausts every last opportunity to support her children in a city that doesn't speak her home language. Nina talks to neighbors and friends to find camps and classes for her kids, she obtains tutors for Javier, she requests and attends parent-teacher meetings at school, and during these meetings she is a strong advocate for Javier. She also works with him at home not only on his school literacy tasks, but also on other forms of literacy practices such as art, music, and dance.

For Javier, trying to navigate the culture of schooling sometimes means resistance: he often fights with Nina to allow him to skip doing homework at all. When he does his homework, he displays evidences of short cuts, such as bending the rules to read less than he is supposed to, or simply using the first topic sentence of a paragraph in place of the main idea of the paragraph. His efforts to resist the school literacy tasks are often quite clever. He also exhibits linguistic capital in how he is able to speak Spanish at home, and in more formal contexts such as church, and then speak, read, and write in English for school purposes. He displays familial capital, in how he is developing his social-emotional intelligence by caring for others, a 'tending' that in many ways mimics the way he sees his mother parenting. In this way, he both honors his family and establishes himself in a particular way in his family, as a responsible, big brother.

“Struggling Reader:” How School Names and Positions Javier

In contrast, by the school’s standards, Javier is failing. His report cards and standardized assessment results indicate that he is reading at least two years below his grade level, which at the end of this study meant that he was a third grader reading at a “first grade level.” He has qualified for an Individual Education Program and Exceptional Children services based on standardized testing results that indicate that he is unable to comprehend what he reads. Furthermore, his teachers tell Nina that their biggest worry for Javier, based on both informal and formal assessments, is that his growth in reading and writing over the past three years has been very slow and at times stagnant. He is, they say, a “struggling reader,” and he continues to struggle, despite being pulled out of his regular classroom for focused, small group instruction by his English as a Second Language (ESL) and Exceptional Children (EC) teachers.

Javier’s teachers, in an effort to understand Javier’s “struggle,” rely on their observations that Javier is failing to perform the way “he should be,” based on Common Core standards and standardized assessments, in classroom activities and assessments. His performance in these contexts continues to be “low” and his growth “slow.” Nina, in turn, relies upon Javier’s teachers as experts in children’s learning and development. She has even taken Javier to a medical doctor to inquire about his overall development. She has appealed to these professionals to help her understand what exactly is “wrong” with Javier and what she can do to help remedy the “deficiency.” In every respect, the situation is one of crisis, and the problem is situated squarely on Javier and, by proxy, Nina.

I propose that in Javier’s case, school as an institution is set up—actually designed—to fail to see Javier and his literacy practices and as a result name and define him in deficit

terms. Willis and Harris argue, “...when mainstream literacy assumptions continue to dominate school literacy contexts, nonmainstream students will continue to be unsuccessful in school literacy contexts” (in Triplett, 2007, p. 106). This issue is systemic, and occurs despite Javier’s teachers’ genuine desires and efforts to have Javier succeed in school. Javier’s teachers, Javier, and Nina are operating within a system of public schooling that forms the rules, which they must follow in order to be recognized as belonging within the school community. This is a powerful thing, because “Language is not only a means of representing ... social life to ourselves, but more profoundly it is a way of helping to define what constitutes social reality in the first place: language does not just reflect a pre-existing social reality, but helps to constitute that reality (Street, 1995, p. 4). In this way, the culture of schooling defines and positions literacy, school achievement, and Javier as a student.

Considered within a relationships framework of literacy practices, school has removed the ‘other’ from Javier’s potentially authentic literacy practices and replaced it with an omnipresent ‘SCHOOL.’ That is, rather than being a context in which Javier can learn and develop various literacy practices for his relationships with others, school seems to be often removing the possibility for those genuine literacy relationships to occur. Outside of school, Javier uses reading and writing for personal purposes, such as learning to play soccer or journaling about his life in his diary. He uses these literacy practices in order to relate to others—or to himself—in ways that are meaningful to him. In the school context, however, it seems that literacy practices are narrowed, not just in the sense that they only refer to a very specific, academic reading and writing of text, but also in that, because school is so insular and school tasks so unrelated to Javier’s personal interests or outside

community, the only 'other' to whom Javier may relate via his school literacy practices, is school itself. As school grows to be more and more about standardized exams, even the sorts of relationships he was able to develop with his teachers in the early grades grow few and far between (his apparently strong relationship with his ESL teacher is an exception).

Javier does his school-related reading and writing homework in order to get a grade from his teacher and perform on standardized tests, which he is told will define his future, and which now in fact threaten to hold him back another year in third grade (thus, the power of these literacy tests within the high-stakes culture of school is very significant and immediate for Javier). He is told by his teachers—and his mother—that his performance in school is the most important way he can make a good life for himself. The threat, again, is vivid, as Nina has shared with Javier that poor performance in school may lead to him working double shifts at manual labor jobs like his father and others in his community.

But, while Javier is told that his school literacy practices relate to his life in these grand, very threatening ways, the actual day-to-day opportunities to build literacy do not provide venues for Javier to authentically relate to anyone or anything, other than school itself. This is so pervasive, that even when Javier travels to Washington DC with his family, it doesn't occur to him to share that experience with his teacher or to bring that experience into his school reading or writing. It's almost as though he knows implicitly that meaningful literacy practices don't have a place within the school context. Moje and colleagues (2004) similarly found that, though their Latino middle-school participants held a wide variety of funds of knowledge (which I could call home 'literacy practices' here) they did not make their everyday knowledge part of the "official scripts" of their classrooms.

Javier does not see himself in the culture of school. Finding no place for himself there, he defers to the identity that school has created for him: “struggling reader.” Javier is plagued with self-doubt with regard to his identity as a student. He has shared with me that he believes he is not a good reader or writer, and that he isn’t as smart as the other kids in his class. Nina relates that, though his self-confidence as a student has suffered for years, ever since it became clear that Javier was in danger of being retained in third grade, Javier cries often, telling his mom that he doesn’t understand why he is working so hard but he still isn’t succeeding.

By Javier’s and Nina’s account of Javier’s schooling experiences, the language of individual achievement and responsibility, as well as the necessity for individuals to meet “standards” or norms of performance, are particularly salient within the discourse of school for Javier. Based on Javier and Nina’s retelling of Javier’s literacy experiences in school, and my experiences working with Javier on his homework, it appears that Javier almost never has the opportunity to read text that is on his independent or instructional level – that is, text that Javier can actually decode. In this way, school constructs Javier as a “struggling reader,” for how could he do anything but struggle when he is consistently given work that is too hard for him.

In her study, Triplett (2007) found the same paradoxical teaching practices taking place with students who were labeled as “struggling readers.” She found that these “at-risk” students were often simply asked to do “what everyone else [in the class] were doing” (p. 168), thus ensuring they would be handed tasks they were not ready to be successful in completing. In contrast, with his Exceptional Children teacher, Javier shares with me completed work and assignments that indicate that he and other students in his group

work on phonics drills. While these could potentially be helpful for Javier if used in the context of reading meaningful literature, he does not actually have opportunities to apply his phonics skills in that group, and the particular skills the group focused on during the last year are competences Javier already had at the beginning of the year. In this context, Javier learns that school literacy tasks are not connected to abilities, his life outside of school, or his interests.

Javier works with a tutor once a week for an hour, and during this time his tutor helps him with his homework, which contains grade-level literacy activities, including reading with comprehension questions and prompts to write about his silent reading book. Thus, Javier's tutor also spends most of their time together helping Javier get through material that is very difficult for him. As I expressed in the previous chapter, I myself have struggled to determine the best use of my time with Javier. My professional opinion as a literacy teacher is that what Javier needs most are opportunities to read text that not just interest him but that he can read with fluency. This is what we have spent the majority of our time together doing.

Still, though at the end of this study Javier and I still spent time during each session reading decodable text that Javier chose, the pressure of standardized testing in school was so great that I acquiesced to working with Javier on test preparation as well. Seeing Javier and Nina struggle within the context of school literacy practices, I felt that, in order to truly *be with* them and supportive of them, I needed to work with Javier in ways that helped them navigate the context of school as it was being imposed upon them. I also felt it was important to honor Nina's wishes for my time with Javier. As I discussed in the previous

chapter, I chose at times to push back on Nina's wishes, while at other times, I conceded. In this way, school consistently permeated my relationship with Javier.

Even considering our time reading together, it appears that very little that was presented to Javier as schoolwork during this study was actually doable for him. In this way, Javier especially, but also Nina, are set up to fail in the context of school. Javier's schooling, as represented by his well-meaning teachers and his assigned schoolwork, homework, and required assessments, has constructed Javier as a "struggling reader" by continuously "pinning" Javier in situations where he cannot possibly succeed, and then attributing his failure to him as an individual and to his family as his primary influence. This positioning of non-dominant students as "struggling" in a context in which they could not feasibly succeed has been documented by other researchers (Alverman, 2001; Triplett, 2007), who furthermore lament that standardized tests made influential and ubiquitous by the No Child Left Behind Act create "contexts of struggle for the very students meant to be helped by the NCLB legislation" (Triplett, 2007, p. 120).

Cummins (in Hawkins, 2013) further describes how Emerging Bilingual students like Javier are referred for special education services based on their performance on standardized tests, despite the fact that the prevailing research on English Learners illustrates that it takes at least five years for a student learning the language to develop proficiency in academic discourse (p. 18). Guitierrez and colleagues (in Tejada et al, 2000) refer to this "norming of America" via the ubiquitous use of standardized tests and high-stakes testing discourse as a crisis in Latino education, "The homogenization of U.S. youth ensures the perpetuation of static views of U.S. culture and a resistance toward diversity and a changing America" (p. 215).

Thus, as I have clarified previously in this chapter, it is not cognitive literacy alone that causes Javier to be labeled in deficit terms in school; rather, it is the combination of an individualized, cognitive model of literacy learning, along with a culture of schooling that privileges individual achievement on high-stakes standardized tests, that leads to Javier's "failure" in the school system. Then, by assigning the responsibility for school failure to individual students and families, the institution of schooling succeeds in perpetuating its values of homogeneity, thereby making it even easier to maintain such values, and so on (López, in Ybarra & Lopez, 2004).

Recall that Nina is doing everything in her power in service of Javier's general literacy development and school literacy development in particular. She requests parent-teacher meetings and attends all required and optional school academic functions, including formal parent-teacher conferences, IEP meetings, parent literacy workshops, and other informal school functions, such as the Latino cultural event where she organized and performed a traditional Mexican dance. She enrolls Javier in a wide variety of camps and classes to enrich his experience of the world and nurture his school and personal literacy practices. She obtains tutoring for Javier and helps him, to the extent she can, with his homework and nightly reading, though she is at the same time working to keep all three kids fed, clothed, rested, and loved.

Nina has gathered a large collection of books for the children to read in English. She takes the kids to the library regularly, and she reads with them in Spanish as well. She tries to read the books and discuss them in ways that Javier's teachers have recommended will help Javier do better in school. Nina is essentially doing every last thing that research indicates, and the school tells her personally, she should be doing, and yet it isn't leading to

success in school for Javier. Furthermore, it teaches Javier that literacy is a hoop to get through, a skill to be used as currency, rather than something that is genuinely connected to his life. It also strains his relationship with his mother, often reducing their interactions to tense battles over the night's homework.

It is school that creates and perpetuates these problems, rather than any deficiency on the part of Javier or Nina. The model of traditional schooling, constructed around the cognitive "autonomous" literacy model and the high-stakes culture of standardized testing, doesn't allow for Javier's difference from the norm to be respected as anything other than a deficit. Moreover, schooling does this with the intention of providing students with "access" to literacy practices privileged by the dominant, white middle-class. In other words, the way that the institution of schooling sets standards for appropriate and acceptable language and literacy practices does not serve to arm students from non-dominant backgrounds with tools of power. Rather, school's manner of operating separates those who are 'other' than the norm, and further names these 'others' as deficient because of their difference.

This problem is systemic; it occurs despite the good intentions of individual teachers and others in the school system. There are several glimpses of authentic, caring relationships and genuine literacy tasks throughout Javier's school history. He bonded deeply with his Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers, and he shares that he has a close and trusting relationship with the ESL teacher who has worked with him since Kindergarten. Occasionally Javier is assigned school tasks that are about him and life outside of school, such as the time in second grade his teacher assigned him the task of interviewing his mother about their family's culture and history. Nina even participates in

a school program where Spanish-speaking parents teach teachers Spanish and teachers teaching Spanish-speaking parents English on alternating weeks. Clearly, there are moments of genuine efforts to connect to children and families in ways that are not deficit-based.

Still, these moments are exceptions to the norm. So, to what is Javier being granted access via his schooling experience? By privileging a normed definition of a successful student and using high-stakes standardized assessments in order to legitimate the superior status of this norm, school is both explicitly and implicitly teaching Javier, first, that school is the primary and omnipresent ‘other’ to which he must relate, and that all other potential ways he might use literacy practices to relate to others in meaningful ways are secondary or simply unimportant.

Second, school teaches Javier to perceive the world around him as being unwilling to embrace anything about him that differs from that norm. Javier is absolutely being granted access to the culture of power, in the worst way. He is being taught to define himself with respect to the dominant norm—as a “struggling reader”—and to place himself on a social hierarchy based on that definition. He is furthermore being taught that his status (or lack thereof) is due to his own individual shortcomings, and that it is up to him personally to change the way he is named and positioned.

Finally, while Nina goes above and beyond to support Javier’s literacy development, in many ways typifying school’s definition of an ideal parent, neither her nor Javier’s actions are able to permeate the way school has defined both of them. In short, school as an institution requires Javier and Nina to make sense of the culture of schooling without attempting to make sense of them in any way other than deficit terms. It further eliminates

opportunities for Javier to engage in genuine literacy tasks, thus straining Javier's relationship with his mother and myself and teaching Javier that literacy is a hoop, or a form of currency, rather than a practice that is authentically related to his life.

Limitations and Implications

This study has several limitations. Because my only participants were Javier and Nina, I am only able to speak to their experiences and how their experiences suggest school is defining them and literacy practices. Without speaking to Javier's teachers or other school representatives, I am not able to provide any response that they might have to Nina's, Javier's, or my depiction of the way school operates in Nina's and Javier's world as I have illustrated it. Furthermore, I want to be clear that, while I am critical of the cognitive, autonomous model of literacy and literacy learning, my findings do not suggest that this alone is to blame for the way Javier has been 'othered' and defined as a "struggling reader" in his school context.

My findings suggest, rather, that it is a complicated combination of the autonomous literacy model of literacy learning and teaching, the high-stakes standardized tests on which students must perform their literacy "skills," and the overall culture of schooling: a white, middle-class neoliberal discourse that privileges competition and meritocracy while defining difference from this norm in deficit terms, that position Javier as a failure. My goal in this presentation of my findings is to illustrate, first how relationships shape and are shaped by literacy practices, and then how Javier and Nina's experience of schooling suggests that school sabotages potential opportunities for engaging in meaningful literacy practices while it defines and strains the relationship between them. School manages to do this, all the while remaining blind to the vast funds of knowledge both Javier and Nina do

possess. While Javier and Nina revealed themselves to me to be intelligent, kind, and complex individuals with libraries of vibrant and multifaceted literacy practices in their repertoire, Javier's school seemed not to be able to see them in anything other than deficit terms.

These findings have important implications for educational researchers and practitioners. First, Nina defies the stereotypical labels researchers explicitly or implicitly use to construct minority, immigrant, working-class parents, as uneducated, unable to contribute valuable capital to their children's schooling experiences, and in need of instruction on how to parent (Ortiz & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005). While she has primarily worked low-wage, low-skill jobs in this country, Nina possesses many professional skills, along with a past career in the pharmaceutical industry. It is her illegal status that prevents her from continuing to pursue this career in the United States. Nina finds ways to make sure Javier and his siblings have access to a wide array of different extracurricular activities. She is, moreover, very involved in Javier's schooling. She has constructed a very school-friendly environment at home, with many books and learning materials, and she makes her children know that school is important by designating quiet time each night for homework, taking her children to the library regularly, and reading with them and helping with homework as much as possible.

Despite all of this, it seems that school still holds Javier and Nina responsible for Javier's apparent failure. Street (1995) writes,

...the explanation [for this apparent failure of children with non-dominant status] does not so much lie at either the school end or the home end, but rather in the dynamic of the relationship between them. It is this dynamic and micro accounts of ways with words in which children engage, that can explain the link between social factors and school success: we would do better not to ignore either but rather to

explore the link between the two in terms of communicative practices. It is this dynamic relationship between communicative practices, that language in education can address, combining research and pedagogy to provide a fruitful way forward... (p. 3-4).

My findings support the argument that there is a breakdown in the relationship between school and home (Reese & Gallimore, 2000). Specifically, Javier and Nina's experiences of schooling point to the necessity that school be a willing member in an actual relationship with students and families, rather than to be an authoritarian arbiter of the supposed requirements Javier and Nina must meet in order to be granted access to the benefits of the community of white, middle-class, mainstream culture.

In order for this to occur, schools must be willing to be open, receptive, and malleable. They must be willing to do more to embrace the whole child and family, to engage with parents and view them as experts. This is exemplified when Javier's teacher provides school work that is focused on Javier interviewing his mother about his family's culture and history, and by the way Javier's school creates spaces for Spanish-speaking families to teach teachers Spanish while teachers teach Spanish-speaking families English. Part of embracing students and families also means recognizing the multiplicity of literacy and honoring the ways in which children and their parents use varying texts to make meaning of themselves and others. Doing this would enrich public school classrooms and make learning experiences in schools more authentic.

As a teacher myself, I recognize how difficult it is to become a learner about the families represented in the classroom and to build trusting relationships with students and families. It is likewise difficult to differentiate learning experiences for a classroom full of diverse students. However, these opportunities are too few and far between in Javier's school life. They must become a priority for schools, and beyond the individual level.

Schooling as an institution must make a systemic effort to develop trusting, reciprocal relationships with students and families.

My behaviors and actions in this study point to implications for teachers as well as researchers. As a teacher with a good deal of relevant coursework and a decade of experience helping Emerging Bilingual learn to read, as well as a rather anti-establishment stance in terms of public education, I still found that I was unable to avoid the school's reach throughout my work with Javier. I chose at times to set aside my own teaching values and instead do what I thought was best in the moment in order to support Javier and Nina as they navigated the system of public schooling. Our relationship and literacy practices, at these times, just like Javier's and Nina's relationship and literacy practices, became geared toward "doing school" rather than about engaging in authentic literacy practices in meaningful ways.

Thus, our time together, necessarily became less about reading and writing than it could have been, and more about the narrow forms of reading and writing *for school*. For example, I helped Javier complete a report that I believed to be composed primarily by Nina, so that he could present "his" work along with the other kids in his class. I gave up some of our reading time together in order to help prepare Javier to take the End of Grade tests, and I even found myself believing for a moment in the power of his "just mastering the system" by succeeding on the standardized test. In retrospect, I now find myself questioning, if a teacher with my point of view and my experience cannot hold up against the system, by maintaining a pure engagement with authentic literacy tasks as my practice with Javier, how could I expect younger and lesser experienced teachers I teach as undergraduates to do the same?

I can't provide a clear-cut answer to this question, but because I am continuing my work with Javier and Nina beyond the close of this research, the implications of what I have learned throughout this study are immediately critical for me to consider personally, as well. I am committed both to engage in authentic literacy practices around school literacy tasks with Javier and to help them "do school," which may sometimes mean "doing literacy" in a way that is less than ideal for me and for Javier. I will take with me a greater understanding of the complexities of trying to enact a critical literacy framework within or beside a traditional, authoritative culture of public schooling. I will further take an awareness of what is lost when we give up opportunities to engage authentically with literacy tasks in ways that connect to our lives. This awareness will help me continue to push back and continuously look for spaces to call upon school to recognize Javier and allow him in, in ways that don't seem to be happening now.

I will, for example, reach out to Javier's ESL teacher and work to build a partnership with her, as I know she has built a strong relationship with Javier over the years and will continue to work with him throughout elementary school. Perhaps if the two of us work together, we can help to create spaces for connection between Javier's school life and his home life. I could likewise partner with Javier's teacher to differentiate his homework assignments so that he is more often given tasks that are possible for him to complete and that connect to his life. I can also, for example, explicitly help Javier bring his home literacy practices into his school life in how I structure our homework time together. When Javier goes on a trip, or participates in something outside of school that he is enthusiastic about, I can help adapt his homework assignments to include reading and writing about those experiences.

These are not just ways I can personally help Javier—they are also ways that other teachers, students, and parents can work to find spaces within the system of public schooling where small changes can be made. For example, stories that work toward a richer understanding of the experiences of those, like Javier and Nina, who are ‘othered’ by the institution schooling and its narrow definition of literacy, could potentially be the bases for discussions in teacher education classrooms. I do not know if these small changes can or will lead to systemic, structural changes to the institution of schooling as a whole. But I do have faith in the possibility that the way I, and others, enact small, dynamic changes, can affect Javier’s life—and potentially other students’ lives—in positive and meaningful ways. It is enough for me, right now, to consider the possibility that making small changes in whatever spaces I can find available will help to construct a home-school life for Javier that not just allows, but encourages him to bring himself fully to life, to wholly engage in ‘reading the word and the world’ in ways that inspire him and make sense to him.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Initial Parent Interview Script

The Interview Script contains questions I will ask the parent during our first interview. However, I will remain open throughout the interview process to ask follow-up questions that may not be included here. Topics for subsequent interviews will depend largely on how previous interviews ended; however, I will be focusing on several major areas of interest:

- History - The family's general history, their immigration to the US, their education history (formal/academic or informal/non-academic)
- General US culture - The family's experiences in the US – do they wish to assimilate? Resist assimilation? What were their jobs in their first home country and what are their jobs now? What challenges have they faced in this culture?
- Literacy – What are the parents' views on literacy? How do they define literacy? What is the importance of school? What do they want their children to get out of school? Do they want their children to learn English? Do they want to learn English?
- Schooling – What were schools like in their first home culture? What are the schools like in the US? What are the similarities/differences? What do they think about the schools their children are attending? What do they think about the teachers? What challenges do they face with regard to schooling? What do they like most about their children's school(s)? What do they wish they could change about their children's school(s)?

The initial interview will center on the student and school. As we become more comfortable with each other, I will move on to more personal questions about history and personal experiences. Interviews will be conducted by me in Spanish. However, I will have a bilingual native Spanish speaker with me during interviews to help translate anything I may not understand or may not be able to communicate well.

1. So, how is school going for (student)?
2. What is (student's) teacher like?
3. What are your favorite/least favorite things about your child's school and teacher?
4. What do you think about homework?
5. What is (student's) favorite subject?
6. When did (student) begin school? What was that like? What were the challenges for you?
7. What do want (student) to get out of school? What are your hopes and dreams for (student), regarding school or not regarding school?
8. How important or not important is it for (student) to learn English?
9. How would you define literacy?
10. Is there anything more you'd like to say about what we talked about today, that I haven't already asked about?

Appendix B: Initial Child Interview Questionnaire Script

The Interview Script contains questions I will ask the child during our first interview. However, I will remain open throughout the interview process to ask follow-up questions that may not be included here.

1. So, how is school going?
2. What is your teacher like?
3. What are your favorite/least favorite things about school and your teacher?
4. What do you think about homework?
5. What is your favorite/least favorite subject?
6. What do you want to get out of school? What are your hopes and dreams?
7. What do you want to be when you grow up?
8. How is reading and writing going?
9. How is testing going? How are you feeling about next year (progressing or not progressing to the next grade level based on testing).
10. Is there anything more you'd like to say about what we talked about today, that I haven't already asked about?

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