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# A Case Study of Literature Discussions with Spanish-English Emergent Bilingual Children

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A CASE STUDY OF LITERATURE DISCUSSIONS WITH SPANISH-ENGLIGH

EMERGENT BILINGUAL CHILDREN




A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY


PROGRAM IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT



BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

Spanish-English emergent bilingual children's range of prior knowledge and experiences has typically gone unidentified and/or devalued in relation to the school curriculum. This classroom-based case study examines how emergent bilingual children in a second grade one-way immersion classroom draw on their cognitive, cultural-experiential, and linguistic resources to discuss and comprehend three texts with different levels of cultural relevance. Findings from the analysis of child discussion data and teacher interviews build a case for the intentional use of culturally relevant texts as part of the literacy curriculum. Opportunities to develop reading comprehension may increase when children can discuss complex texts with multiple points of connection within a linguistically flexible and skillfully facilitated discussion space. Additionally, teacher pedagogy and classroom conditions emerge as fundamental components for the achievement of high-level book discussions with Spanish-English emergent bilingual children.

CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Literature refers to Spanish-English emergent bilingual children as dual language learners (DLLs) (e.g., Fulgini, Hoff, Zepeda, & Mangione, 2014) and emergent bilinguals (García, 2009; Reyes, 2006). When citing research studies and reports, I use the terms employed by the authors. Otherwise, I use DLL and emergent bilingual to refer to young children growing up with varying amounts of exposure to and use of more than one language.

Many students assigned the category of English learner (EL) in public schools live in poverty and attend high poverty schools in urban areas, and the overwhelming majority of ELLs come from Spanish-speaking homes. According to the Administration of Children and Families (2013), in 2013 approximately 84% of the DLLs (ages 3 to 5 years) in Head Start and 91% of DLLs (ages 0 to 3 years) in Early Head Start came from Spanish-speaking homes (Fulgini et al., 2014, p. 2). Specifically in Illinois in 2016-2017, 10.7% of the student population was classified as ELs, whereas nearly 47% of students within Chicago Public Schools were categorized as ELs in 2017 (Lutton, 2017). The overwhelming majority, nearly 80% was Spanish-English bilingual students (ISBE, 2014). In addition, DLLs are more likely to be assigned "risk factors," including living in poverty and low maternal education levels, than are their monolingual English-speaking peers (Dual Language Learners: Research Informing Policy, 2013, p. 1). Students categorized as ELs are also more than five times more likely to attend high poverty than low poverty schools (p. 110).

1

Furthermore, analysis of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Class indicates that DLLs' reading and math skills are lower than those of their white European-American, monolingual peers (Gándara, 2010; Reardon & Galindo, 2009). The literacy skills at kindergarten entry of DLLs from Spanish-speaking homes is significantly lower than those of their monolingual English-speaking peers (Rumberger & Tran, 2006, as cited in Espinosa, 2013). While the gap narrows somewhat in the first two years of schooling, it plateaus around second grade (Gándara, 2010; Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Furthermore, children born in the United States to Mexican parents who have immigrated to the U.S. (children of Mexican-immigrant families) score significantly below national norms across all measures in the elementary years (Espinosa & López, 2007).

Thess gaps have generally been attributed to "family background and socioeconomic status, English proficiency, and school quality" (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Espinosa and López (2007) provides a possible explanation for the low performance of children of Mexican-immigrant families, as well. These children more frequently live in families experiencing high levels of poverty, and their parents often have the lowest levels of education when compared. Thus a defining characteristic of this student population is that they are typically considered at-risk for academic failure (Pérez, 2004; Slavin & Cheung, 2010). Research has also suggested that DLLs have less access to cognitively demanding content, thus contributing to the gap (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). In addition, many of these children are processing and responding to texts in a less familiar language, which may create additional demands on cognitive resources (Jongejan, Verhoeven, & Siegel, 2007; Lesaux, Lipka, & Siegel, 2006).

Another way to interpret these data is to suggest that schools have typically not found ways to meet the unique needs and potential of this diverse and growing population. Yet due to this pervasive, sustained gap in achievement, public debate and empirical research have tended to focus on what DLLs lack (Orellana & Gutiérrez, 2006). Education scholars, Orellana and Gutiérrez, however, propose alternative ways to conceptualize and investigate DLLs. They suggest examining closely what is already there, and ask: "What do [these] students know? What can they do? What are their skills, contributions, or experiences...? (p. 120). Likewise, they suggest investigating how schools can capitalize on DLLs' "social, cognitive, and linguistic skills for their own learning and development, as well as for the benefit of others" (p. 120). Other scholars have, as well (e.g., Rueda, 2011; Gutiérrez, Zepeda, & Castro, 2010).

Findings from empirical research have long indicated that what is already there—children's prior knowledge, including specific cultural knowledge—is associated with reading comprehension and recall (e.g., Adams, Bell, & Perfetti, 1995; Lipson, 1983). Empirical studies have also established a strong relationship between oral language skills and later reading comprehension (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Kendeou, van den Broek, White, & Lynch, 2009), Muter, Hulme, Snowling, & Stevenson, 2004) and between classroom discourse and reading comprehension (e.g., Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009). Hence, both robust prior knowledge and high-quality discourse contribute to reading comprehension development.

All children arrive at school with a diverse range of prior experiences and knowledge about their families, communities, and daily life, and all typically developing children use language as a tool to negotiate life in their homes and communities. Young bilinguals' range of

prior knowledge and experiences, however, typically go unidentified and/or devalued and untapped in relation to the school curriculum (Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Orellana & Reynolds, 2008).

Based on empirical findings, using culturally relevant texts (CRTs) with novice readers and comprehenders who are embarking on developing ways of thinking and talking about texts may yield opportunities for academic success. The integration of carefully selected CRTs as one part of literacy instruction may result in expanded opportunities for students already considered at-risk. DLLs may be capable of articulating more and deeper comprehension of a text—drawing key inferences and synthesizing events to identify the theme, for example—when they have ample prior knowledge of it.

Sociocultural theory proposes that facilitated talk about texts with more proficient peers and/or a teacher can facilitate the appropriation of comprehension strategies necessary for high-level comprehension (Miller, 2002). Through facilitated oral discussions, the novice reader gains exposure to and practice with connecting personal experiences with the experiences an author is representing in a text. Over time, from participating in literature discussions, young readers can internalize the academic discourse necessary for writing about complex texts. Utilizing texts that tap into the prior knowledge that young DLLs bring to the task of reading comprehension may facilitate this process.

Hence there is a need to investigate emergent bilingual children's oral responses to CRTs in light of what current research suggests about comprehension development. This study proposes to investigate whether culturally relevant texts can afford young Spanish-English bilingual children, typically considered at-risk for academic failure, opportunities to capitalize on

their prior knowledge and cultural experiences to develop reading comprehension and complex

discourse around texts.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Several questions must be addressed in order to understand how CRTs may be able to tap into DLLs' prior knowledge and experiences, and then how this process may support children's capacity for thinking and talking about texts.  This review begins by defining and discussing comprehension and prior knowledge in the context of children's reading development because a clear understanding of these two constructs is central to the study. The review then establishes the theoretical basis for CRTs and discuss key features that determine the cultural relevance of a text. This understanding is essential because it is hypothesized that these central features can tap into aspects of children's knowledge base in ways that may be able to facilitate reading comprehension.  An examination of key characteristics of the specific child population of the proposed study, Spanish-English emergent bilingual children, follows in order to identify some of the prior knowledge and experiences they bring to the task of reading comprehension. This helps establish how CRTs can tap into these children's prior knowledge and skills.

The review continues with a discussion of empirical research that investigates how a reader's prior knowledge for a text can influence aspects of reading comprehension for that text. As mentioned, findings suggest that prior knowledge, including cultural knowledge, can influence recall and comprehension, a basic premise of the study.  Key findings from empirical research on the influences of oral language and high-quality literature discussions on reading comprehension in English are highlighted.  The review concludes by examining a small body of

classroom-based empirical studies conducted specifically with Spanish-English bilingual children reading and discussing texts in Spanish and/or in English.  Key findings suggest that the children draw on their linguistic resources in both languages and on prior knowledge during discussions to construct meaning (e.g. Martínez-Roldán, 2005; López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013).

The review of literature indicates that there is an insufficient knowledge base about specifically whether and how CRTs can provide opportunities for Spanish-English DLLs to draw on their prior knowledge to comprehend and while participating in literature discussions. Furthermore, with a growing population of DLLs who are typically considered at risk for academic failure, there is a need to investigate how to capitalize on the rich range of prior knowledge they bring to the task of reading comprehension in their more proficient language.

### Reading Comprehension and Comprehension Strategies

Research prepared by The RAND Study Group (2002) for The Office of Education Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education defines comprehension as follows:

> [It is] the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language...Comprehension entails three elements:
>
> • The reader who is doing the comprehending
> • The text that is to be comprehended
> • The activity in which comprehension is a part…
>
> These three dimensions define a phenomenon that occurs within a larger sociocultural context…that shapes and is shaped by the reader and that interacts with each of the three elements… (p. 11)

This study examines how readers—young DLLs—comprehend texts that feature different levels of cultural relevance within the activity of literature discussions.

> To comprehend, a reader must have a wide range of capacities and abilities. These include cognitive capacities (e.g., attention, memory, critical analytic ability, inferencing, visualization ability), motivation (a purpose for reading, an interest in the content being read, self-efficacy as a reader), and various types of knowledge (vocabulary, domain and topic knowledge, linguistic and discourse knowledge, knowledge of specific comprehension strategies). Of course, the specific cognitive, motivational, and linguistic capacities and the knowledge base called on in any act of reading comprehension depend on the texts in use and the specific activity in which one is engaged. (p. 13)

Multiple aspects of this explanation relate to the proposed study. First, research indicates young DLLs demonstrate interest, a key component of motivation, in reading and responding to CRTs (e.g., Lohfink-Loya, 2010; López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013). Likewise, research indicates that young DLLs have topic and linguistic knowledge necessary to comprehend CRTs. Thus, the final sentence suggests that opportunities to read and discuss CRTs may effectively afford young DLLs the opportunity to work at the upper levels of their ZPDs when developing reading comprehension. A text written and read in a DLL's most proficient language, Spanish, and for which the child has strong prior knowledge, maximizes the opportunity for the child to practice and demonstrate higher-level comprehension. This text reduces the number of cognitive tasks required to comprehend it; the emergent reader does not have to simultaneously understand both the less familiar English language and vocabulary of the text, as well as the content. Similarly, the child does not have to make sense of unfamiliar relationships and situations in order to comprehend.

**Comprehension Strategies**

In *Reading with Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades,* educator Debbie Miller (2002) draws on research on expert readers (Pearson, Dole, Duffy, & Roehler, 1992) to identify key reading comprehension strategies for children. Miller (2002) cites specific scholars in her delineation of the following key strategies: activating prior knowledge or schema

(Anderson & Pearson, 1984); visualization (Pressley, 1976); drawing inferences (Hansen, 1981); asking questions (Raphael, 1984); determining important ideas and themes (Palinscar & Brown, 1984); and synthesizing what is read (Brown, Day & Jones, 1983) (p. 8). Reading experts, Keene and Zimmermann (2007) describe these as "metacognitive strategies (listening to the voice in your mind that speaks while you read)" (p. 14). The proposed study draws on these sources and strategies to identify evidence of comprehension in children's discussion responses.

Miller (2002) introduces the strategy of activating schema by explaining:

Thinking about what you already know is called using your schema, or using your background knowledge.  Schema is all the stuff that's already in our head, like the places you've been, things you've done, books you've read—all the experiences you've had that make up who you are and what you know and believe to be true.  When you use your schema, it helps you use what you know to better understand and interact with the text. (p. 57)

Herein lies a useful definition of prior knowledge and a helpful introduction to understanding the role that schema plays in making connections with texts.  Specifically, *text-to-self connections* occur when children use their schema to make a meaningful connection with a text, a connection that specifically helps the child comprehend. Children may connect with a character's feelings and motivations, for example, or connect with a recurring theme in a text.

*Text-to-text connections*, also referred to as intertextual connections (e.g., Soter et al., 2008) occur when children draw on schema related to another text while reading a new one. These connections can help children understand a current story better and/or make a prediction about what may happen next based on what they know from the prior text (Miller, 2002, p. 64) Keene and Zimmermann (2007) further explain that these connections may include specific "knowledge about text topics, themes, content, structure, and organization" (p. 101).

Likewise, *text-to-world connections* feature "specific knowledge about the topic; general world knowledge" (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007, p. 100). Children draw on schema they may have for current events or popular culture, for example. Miller (2002) recounts a child's connection to Eve Bunting's (1994) *Smoky Night*, a story of the Los Angeles race riots. The child related his knowledge of small riots that occurred after a sporting event to support his comprehension of aspects of *Smoky Night* (p. 66).

Proficient comprehenders use their schema to *draw inferences* in order to answer questions and generate meanings that are not explicitly found in a text (Miller, 2013). Schema activation requires first the retrieval and then the integration of key elements of prior knowledge with information read or heard, a process that allows readers to make inferences that consolidate and enhance comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). In addition, children may use their schema to predict what may occur next, to draw conclusions about events, and to generate unique and dynamic interpretations of texts, all of which require inferential thinking (Miller, 2013).

Miller (2013) draws on Rothstein and Santana (2011) to point to *questioning* as the most essential learning skill a child can develop (p. 143). Children ask questions about a text for a variety of reasons. They learn to determine if the answers to their questions are found explicitly in the text, if they need to infer the answer using the text and their prior knowledge (p. 147). Generating original questions, listening to the questions of others, and listening to peers' responses to questions can stimulate new interpretations and deepen comprehension (p. 151).

In conclusion, *synthesizing* is also a key comprehension strategy employed by expert readers. Retelling a text includes determining importance and which features to include and which to omit—getting or synthesizing the gist. In essence, children's

> summaries are spirited accounts of what they read, infused with details and emotions from their own lives. They very naturally add details from other texts, opinions, and bits of prior knowledge that can extend the meaning of the story for them. Through their retellings, they actually create new narratives—verbal or written syntheses.... (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007, p. 231)

Hence, retelling stories, smaller sections, and specific events are ways that children synthesize meaning (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007; Miller, 2002). Likewise, the synthesis of ideas is necessary for children to move from literal to inferential comprehension. Synthesis may be evident in a single response, across a series of exchanges, and/or throughout a discussion.

Another key construct of the proposed study is children's prior knowledge. As previously discussed, Miller (2002) describes schema as background knowledge, and explains that "it helps you use what you know to better understand and interact with the text'" (p. 57). A clear understanding of what might comprise a child's prior knowledge and how she is likely to draw on it in literature discussions is essential to the proposed study questions.

**Prior Knowledge and Reading Comprehension**

Literature from educational psychology provides a definition for prior knowledge (Dochy, 1994, as cited in Dochy, Segers, & Buehl, 1999). Based on their literature review of empirical studies about prior knowledge, Dochy et al. concluded that this term often goes explicitly undefined because its meaning is considered commonly understood. They suggest, however, that future research use a "more specific framework of terminology" around the term (p. 146). They define prior knowledge as "'the whole of a person's actual knowledge that: (a) is

available before a certain learning task, (b) is structured in schemata, (c) is declarative and procedural, (d) is partly explicit and partly tacit, (e) and is dynamic in nature and stored in the knowledge base" (Dochy, 1994, p. 4699, as cited in Dochy et al., 1999, p. 146). Prior knowledge can be procedural but does not have to be in primary reading comprehension.

Definitions of prior knowledge also include age-related developmental misconceptions children may have, and "the kind of knowledge that learners acquire because of their social roles, such as those connected with race, class, gender, and their culture and ethnic affiliations" (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000, pp. 72-73). This includes children's daily practices and experiences that are embedded in their home and community cultures (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rueda, 2011), as well as children's linguistic practices, such as the use of more than one language and dialect and code switching between them.

Children draw on prior knowledge during discussions in the form of oral stories (e.g., López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013). Juzwik, Nystrand, Kelly, and Sherry (2008) studied students' use of oral narratives in an embedded case study of literature discussions in a single classroom. Drawing on prior studies of oral narrative use in classrooms, the authors suggest that "oral narrative genres might be useful for inviting a wide range of students' and teachers' voices and previous experiences into the classroom, contributing to a 'permeable curriculum' (Dyson, 1993)" (Juzwik et al., 2008, p. 1118). Such a curriculum is one in which children's local experiences and language interact with those of the teacher to contribute to learning (Dyson, 1993).

Juzwik et al. (2008) categorize the types of narratives told by both middle-grade students and teacher in discussions as personal procedural, personal singular, vicarious, and hypothetical.

Personal procedural narratives are "narratives in which events represent repeating sequences of events over a period of time," and are typically "characterized by past perfect or subjunctive verb tenses" (p. 1133). An example follows.

> …I babysit um like three, four sons. And sometime my aunt's two. So, it's like five or six…"All right, you guys, clean up your mess, sit down, and I'll put on a movie. You guys, just watch. That's what I did… Like, whenever… when my auntie… they're going out or something like that? They just call me. (p. 1133)

Personal singular narratives are "once-occurrent narratives about one's own experience" that are typically "characterized by simple past tense or historical present tense" (Juzwik et al., 2008, p. 1133). For example, "One time we went down in the basement. She (babysitter) told the SCARiest story I ever remember. I was even scared for like a WEEK... this like STATue down in the basement. SO SCARY" (p. 1133). Personal procedural and singular narratives are examples of practices and experiences that constitute prior knowledge in a discussion.

In addition, the authors define vicarious narratives as ones "about experiences that happened to others" (Juzwik et al., 2008, p. 1133). For example, "'In Boston Public, like they… I don't know which it was, but these people…had a baby so they could get married because one of the parents didn't approve of it'" (p. 1133.) A vicarious narrative is similar to a connection to the world as it can reference popular culture or current events, for example.

Shared knowledge is a final type of prior knowledge based on shared classroom learning experiences (Soter et al., 2008), such as knowledge based on texts previously discussed and knowledge related to class field trips. Hence a text-to-text connection may be based on shared knowledge, indicating that a child is drawing on knowledge developed through classroom experiences shared with classmates.

These four categories are adapted to identify and describe evidence of prior knowledge in children's oral responses as personal singular statements or personal singular narratives, vicarious statements and statements of shared knowledge.  The prior knowledge that children bring to bear on their oral narrative responses can and does vary widely and will depend on the very local nature of each child's experiences. Texts that tap into the practices, beliefs, and knowledge that bilingual children bring to the classroom may provide them with opportunities to draw on this prior knowledge to make meaning of complex texts.  Thus a solid understanding of CRTs and of the specific features that make a text culturally relevant for a reader is necessary.

## Culturally Relevant Texts

The concept of culturally relevant texts is theoretically grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992; 1995), multicultural education (e.g., Banks, 1993; Nieto, 1995), and multicultural literature (e.g., Bishop, 1992; Yokota, 1993). Multicultural education emerged, in part, from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Banks, 1993).  It embraces an affirmation of pluralism and actively challenges racism (Nieto, 1995). Additionally, multicultural education emerged, in part, in response to the missing voices and faces of children of color in children's literature (Yokota, 1993).

Multicultural literature is that which "represents any distinct cultural group through accurate portrayal and rich detail" (Yokota, 1993, p. 157).  Such books reflect the racial, ethnic, linguistic, and class diversity present throughout both the student and general population in the U.S. and beyond (Fleming, Catapano, Thompson, & Carrillo, 2015). Importantly, CRTs differ fundamentally from multicultural literature in that a reader sees herself and her own family and community represented and affirmed in CRTs, rather than those of other cultures (p. 7).

Likewise, culturally relevant pedagogy also challenges the exclusion of non-white experiences and perspectives across school curricula.  Student culture becomes a source for both identity affirmation and knowledge generation in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 314). Gay (2000) characterizes culturally responsive teaching as instruction that "acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups…as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum" (p. 31); it connects abstract academic concepts to children's "lived sociocultural realities" (p. 32). Hence, a culturally responsive pedagogy demands instructional materials that facilitate connections between children's local culture and academic content.

In brief, CRTs have emerged from a pedagogical orientation that considers the diverse experiences and background knowledge that children bring to the classroom as valid and rich sources of knowledge and learning. CRTs are one vehicle for facilitating the connection between local and academic knowledge as portrayed by authors and artists from non-white communities because they invite children to draw on their own experiences and to utilize their own knowledge to develop literacy skills.  Thus, it is necessary to identify the text characteristics that can support children's use of local knowledge to develop ways of thinking and talking about complex texts.

Literature and theory about CRTs, as well as empirical studies that have employed culturally relevant reading material, inform the following selection of key features that can yield cultural relevance to a text. I draw significantly from Ebe's *The Cultural Relevance Rubric for Text Selection* (2003, 2010), designed for both teachers and students. This rubric comprises questions about eight key features of CRTs for consideration when determining the cultural relevance of texts for a particular student group.

Fleming et al. (2015) describe CRTs as "books in which the primary characters remind

students of themselves or people they know, or where the setting reflects their neighborhoods

and communities, or places they've lived" (p. 7). These texts tap into a child's specific cultural

knowledge, inviting her to make deep personal connections as she explores aspects of her

identity and culture reflected in the pages and/or illustrations or photos (p. 7). Likewise,

Bishop's (1990) characterizes books as "windows and mirrors" (p. 1). Windows invite children

into the "real or imagined worlds" of others, whereas "mirrors" reflect children's "own lives and

experiences as part of the larger human experience" (p. 1). Mirrors afford children whose

ethnicities and experiences have typically either been ignored or ridiculed in literature

opportunities to see "themselves portrayed visually and textually as realistically human" (Bishop,

2012, p. 9).

**Key Features of Culturally Relevant Texts**

First of all, is it a really good book? In addressing text selection of culturally relevant

urban children's literature, Fleming et al. (2015) remind readers that, "Children are smart; they

want to read *good* books!" (p. 105). The authors spend significant time outlining the

fundamental characteristics of any high quality realistic fiction picture book before introducing

key features of urban children's literature (p. 106). Escamilla and Nathenson-Mejía (2003) used

the following criteria to ensure the realistic fiction texts selected in their study were high-quality.

> a) strong, believable story lines, well crafted, not contrived or condescending; b)
> believable, well-written language; and c) quality illustrations that matched and supported
> the story…. translations (whether from Spanish to English or English to Spanish) that
> represented conceptual equivalents (Barrera, 1992; Escamilla, Andrade, Basurto, & Ruiz,
> 1996). We rejected books that we felt were stereotyping, condescending, or inaccurate.
> (p. 108)

A CRT must be appropriate for and interesting to its intended readers (Fleming et al., 2015).

In addition, a story that portrays characters of a specific culture cannot be considered

high quality if it misrepresents or fails to capture key cultural norms and values that members of that culture typically share. Leading scholars on cultural values and authenticity in picture books, Mo and Shen (2013) argue that both accuracy and authenticity are essential. Howard (1991) captures authenticity well—readers "from the culture will know that it is true, will identify, and be affirmed" (p. 92). Hence, experiences, values, and attitudes revealed in the text must resonate with a reader from the cultural group portrayed (Fleming et al., 2015).

While these abstract attributes can and do vary markedly among members of a specific cultural group, a CRT strives to represent essential values and norms that most members of a culture believe or hold (Mo & Shen, 2003). For example, Lohfink and Loya (2013) identified the importance of family as a significant cultural value among Mexican Americans; thus all stories selected for their study with Mexican American third graders reflected this overarching value. Similarly, Bell and Clark (1998) identified "a prominence of respect for elders and community role models" as an African American cultural theme or value to which the child-participants in their study could identify (p. 459).

**1. Shared ethnicities: "Do the characters really look like me and my family?"** This critical feature of CRTs emerged in response to the absence of believable and representative characters of color in children's literature. Seeing oneself and one's family and community in school sanctioned literature yields belonging and affirms one's identity. Bishop (2012) further articulates the need for high quality mirrors in her response to arguments that children of color as long as "do not necessarily need to see their physical selves" in books "as long as the characters are believable and the story rings true" (p. 9).

> Seeing themselves portrayed visually and textually as realistically human was essential to letting them know that they are valued in the social context in which they are growing up.

Near invisibility suggested that books and literature, while often pleasurable, were in some sense apart from them. (p. 9)

The first question in Ebe's, *The Cultural Relevance Rubric for Text Selection* (2003; 2010)—"Are the characters in the story like you and your family?"—is designed to address this fundamental feature (Ebe, 2010, p. 197). The CRTs selected for use in studies with and about Latino students feature Mexican, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, and Latino-Caribe characters, among other ethnic groups within broader Latino culture (Ebe, 2010; 2012; Nathenson-Mejía & Escamilla, 2003; Lohfink & Loya, 2010). Additionally, as mentioned, Bell and Clark (1998) specifically examined the influence of racial imagery—texts featuring Black or White characters—on African American children's reading comprehension and recall. Other aspects of observable similarities between characters and reader include age and gender, (Ebe, 2010; Garth-McCullough, 2008; Lohfink & Loya, 2010).

Bishop (2012) also discusses her research findings that outline the clear historical trend in 19th century and in the first two-thirds of 20th century children's literature of portraying African Americans in offensive stereotypical ways (p. 6). Additionally, she discusses two types of literature that emerged during the multicultural movement—texts that portrayed Black characters alongside White characters as equals and those texts that featured Black characters whose life experiences mirrored those of White middle-class children. While these texts may feature physical representation, they typically failed to capture key lived realities and deeply held cultural values that are essential to many African American children's experiences. This further reveals the complexity of and critical need for characters that are representative of children of color.

**2. Contemporary: "Could the situations and events in the story happen today?"**
Ebe's (2010) rubric also asks: "Could this story take place this year?" (p. 198). Escamilla and
Nathenson-Mejía (2003) stress that "contemporary literature based on people's lives" brings
critical, challenging issues that many Latino students negotiate daily to the classroom (p. 107).
Likewise, Fleming et al. (2015) suggest that "contemporary content" that reflects children's daily
life invites them to apply their everyday experiences and background knowledge to the task of
reading comprehension as they make meaningful personal connections with texts (p. 8). Hence,
texts that could take place today afford children opportunities to draw on schemata based on their
everyday experiences to make meaning.

**3. Familiar settings: "Is this place familiar to me?"** Similarly, Ebe (2010) asks: "Have
you ever lived in or visited places like those in the story?" to address the familiarity of setting (p.
107). Familiar settings invite children to use what they know about their own environments to
make meaning of texts. Lohfink and Loya (2010) selected books set in both Mexico and the
United States for their study because the child-participants were typically first-generation
Americans whose families had strong ties and made frequent trips to Mexico. Irvin Morris
(2011) points out that "narratives can be also be region or location-specific, such as the
narratives of street lit that reflect the daily lives of poor city communities…" (p. 21). Texts set in
authentic urban environments afford children of color additional opportunities to draw on their
knowledge and experiences grounded in daily city life (Fleming et al., 2015).

**4. Familiar situations and experiences: "Can I relate my everyday experiences and**
**prior knowledge to what is happening in the story?"** Empirical studies with and about
Spanish-English bilingual children employ CRTs that reflect contemporary experiences,

including moving within a city or across borders, serving as an interpreter for family members, and sharing living spaces with extended family (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejía, 2003; Lohfink & Loya, 2010; Heineke, 2014). When children can relate to and talk with some authority about situations in a text, they recognize that their local knowledge and experiences are useful resources for learning and for making meaningful connections with texts.  Jones and Clarke (2007) point out an important caveat to consider when teaching the comprehension strategy of making connections with a text.

> Given that the majority of early reading texts are written from perspectives that represent a "normal" life as one where (White) mothers, fathers, and children live comfortable existences in middle-class homes and neighborhoods… (e.g., Baker & Freebody, 1989; Jordan, 2005),… readers who live different lives may find themselves in the quandary of wanting to perform as a "good reader" who makes connections without having substantive autobiographical connections to make. (p. 101)

Mirror texts speak directly to the everyday experiences of a particular population.  When events and situations belong to their world, *they become the experts.*

**5. Linguistic characteristics:  "Do the characters in this story talk like me and my family?"**  Natural language, recognizable vocabulary, and culturally familiar ways of communicating are essential features of CRTs (Bell & Clark, 1998; Ebe, 2010; Fleming et al., 2015). Barrera and Quiroa (2003) caution that language used in inauthentic ways perpetuates stereotypes, just as stereotypical and offensive racial imagery does. Furthermore, authentic language is essential to support the types of connections with texts that can yield higher levels of comprehension and talk, especially for novice readers who connect print to oral language. (Fleming et al., 2015, p. 114). Rather than allocating cognitive resources to making sense of unfamiliar vocabulary or syntax, for example, a child can focus attention on drawing and explaining an inference.

In sum, there is a cumulative effect to these features. The CRTs most likely to capitalize on children's prior knowledge in ways that facilitate comprehension and high-quality discourse will integrate multiple features. CRTs should physically reflect children, their families, and communities, and represent familiar settings and typical experiences that members of the cultural community negotiate. Likewise, children should find relevance and meaning in the contemporary issues, situations, and events that unfold in the story. Additionally, CRTs should echo the dynamic linguistic practices that communicate love and discipline and humor within the cultural group depicted. Fleming et al. (2015) advise one to begin locally when determining the cultural relevance of a text. Local, for the purposes of this study, requires an examination of Spanish-English bilingual children. In order to identify texts that can tap into their specific cultural knowledge and experiences, one must establish what some of those experiences are likely to embody.

### Who Are Emergent Spanish-English Bilingual Children?

As previously mentioned, multiple scholars have adopted the terms, emergent bilingual (e.g., García, 2009; Reyes, 2006) and dual language learner (DLL) (e.g., Gutiérrez et al., 2010; Genesee, 2008) to describe children growing up with exposure to and use of more than one language. These terms position children's range of linguistic practices in both their home language and English as positive resources to be developed and utilized in the classroom rather than as limitations or deficiencies to be remediated (García, 2009). These terms also explicitly recognize that regardless of language allocation and formal instructional setting, these children are simultaneously developing two languages and drawing on both to various extents in order to negotiate meaning inside and outside the classroom.

**They are typically born in the U.S. and therefore are growing up with varying amounts of exposure to both Spanish and English.** Currently children born in the United States to an immigrant parent comprise approximately 75% of ELLs in elementary schools (Flannery, 2009), and specifically, the majority of Spanish-speaking ELLs are born in the U.S. (Goldenberg, 2008; Hernández, 2006). Thus, most DLLs experience a range of exposure to both Spanish and English and their multiple dialects and develop language and literacy skills on a bilingual continuum (Hornberger, 1989; Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2001). For example, many DLLs are developing as simultaneous bilinguals. Simultaneous bilinguals are children raised, typically from birth, in homes in which two languages are spoken (McLaughlin, 1978), whereas successive or sequential bilingual children are raised with one language in the home and typically encounter their new language at or after the age of three (McLaughlin, 1978). This sometimes happens during a child's first formal experiences within early childhood education settings, such as preschool. Within these two categories there is enormous variation, and children's conceptual knowledge and vocabulary is often distributed across the two languages and linked to specific contexts (Genesee, 2008).

Hence, a wide range of organic communication practices develop and shift as immigration patterns change, yielding various levels of simultaneous bilingualism. Code-switching or the mixing of languages intrasententially or intersententially is a natural adaptation to having access to more than one lexicon and is present at all stages of bilingualism (Escamilla & Hopewell, 2007). This practice is an adaptation to living in mixed language communities and/or to participating in cross-generational relationships (Zentella, 1997). Code-switching is not a sign of confusion, rather children strategically draw from both languages in order to

communicate and make meaning when speaking and writing (Escamilla & Hopewell, 2007). Furthermore, code-switching follows syntactic rules (MacSwan, 1999; Poplack, 1980), demonstrating syntactic understanding in more than one language.

Additionally, in the early years of schooling, some children may not have conventional literacy skills in Spanish yet have rich Spanish oral language skills and substantial conceptual knowledge encoded in Spanish. Likewise, many may develop conventional literacy skills in English at school yet continue to demonstrate greater oral language proficiency and conceptual knowledge in Spanish across many domains. Importantly, bilingual children develop a dynamic and integrative system in which two or more languages remain active in the brain, even when a specific language is not in use (García, 2009; Grosjean; 1989).

**They possess unique cognitive and linguistic skills that can support academic achievement.** Even though Spanish-English bilingual children are typically considered at risk for academic failure (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005; Reardon & Galindo, 2009) other scholars identify cognitive and academic capacity and potential. Empirical research suggests that children's knowledge learned in one language (e.g., in Spanish) can facilitate learning in the other (e.g., English) and that conceptual learning in one language transfers to the other (Gort, 2013; Sparrow, Butvilofsky, & Escamilla, 2012). M. Reyes (2001) uses the term, simultaneous biliteracy, to indicate that a child is acquiring literacy in two languages "without formal instruction in both languages" (p. 97). These findings are in line with Cummins (1981a) common underlying proficiency (CUP) model that suggests concepts learned in one language transfer to a new language.

In addition, empirical research studies from cognitive psychology indicate that

simultaneous bilingual children outperform monolingual peers on multiple executive function (EF) tasks, regardless of language pair (Barac & Bialystok, 2012), language pair and cultural background (Bialystok & Viswanathan, 2009), and family income level (Calvo & Bialystok, 2014; Carlson & Meltzoff, 2008). Additionally, studies have found various cognitive advantages associated with specific EF skills present among children from different age groups (e.g., Greenberg, Bellana, & Bialystok, 2013; Yang, Yang, & Lust, 2011).

Executive function skills comprise the foundation for all "higher thought, including control of attention, working memory, and switching" or cognitive flexibility (Bialystok, Barac, Blaye, Poulin-Dubois, 2010, p. 486). Inhibitory control or selective attention skills are necessary for sustaining focus and attention and resisting impulses; they are critical for the development of social skills and in resisting distractions and remaining persistent and engaged in tasks at school. Shifting, cognitive flexibility, or "switching gears" involves making small adjustments and revisions in the middle of a task and applying different rules according to context (Bialystok, 2011; Center on the Developing Child, 2011, p. 2). Think of the bilingual child who is interpreting the teacher's requests for a parent or peer, moving back-and-forth between languages. Positive differences in EF skills among bilingual children are attributed to their sustained experience attending to dual representations—two or more linguistic labels for a single item, nuances in vocabulary choice given the context, and sustained experience inhibiting one or the other language according to context, and shifting effectively between languages (Bialystok, 2011).

Calvo and Bialystok (2014) compared the performance of six- and seven-year old bilingual and monolingual children from working class and middle class backgrounds on a series

of language measures and measures of EF skills. Children attended the same schools in Toronto, Canada, and came from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. They found that all bilingual children demonstrated greater performance on EF tests than did their monolingual peers, and found no significant differences between performance on EF tests between working class and middle class bilingual children. Hence the authors suggest that the bilingual experience contributes uniquely and positively to aspects of cognitive development.

Bialystok's (2011) study of 32 monolingual and 31 bilingual 8-year-old children attending public schools in the same middle-class neighborhoods in Canada found that the bilingual children out-performed their monolingual peers on complex tasks that integrated all of the functions in the EF system. While distinctly observable and measurable in highly manipulated clinical trials, the three central functions of EF typically work in concert in real-life contexts, such as the busy primary grade classroom (Bialystok, 2011; Center on the Developing Child, 2011). Hence findings suggest that bilingual children may be able to recruit and employ all their EF skills more effectively than monolingual peers.

**Many DLLs live in urban areas and come from working class families and families experiencing poverty.** A large segment of English Learners (ELs) in public schools live in poverty and attend high poverty schools in urban areas, and the overwhelming majority of ELs are Spanish-English bilinguals (García & Kleifgen, 2010). De Cohen, Deterding, Clewel, and Chu (2005) found that close to 70% of students categorized as ELs are enrolled in just 10% of elementary schools, primarily in metropolitan areas (p. 4). García and Kleifgen (2010) explains "these schools are predominantly located in urban poor areas" (p. 16). In 2014-2015, the

percentage of the U.S. public school population categorized as ELs was generally higher in urbanized areas than non-urbanized areas (National Center for Education Statistics).

Furthermore, child data from 2014 indicate that 64% of Latino children under the age of six in the U.S. meet the federal guidelines for low income status. Low income is defined as a family of four earning less than $48,016 per year (National Center for Children in Poverty ACS 2014 in SOL Statistics on Latinos 2015, Latino Policy Forum).  Certainly not all children in Latino families are categorized as ELs in school; however nearly 80% of ELs in U.S. public schools were Spanish-English bilinguals in 2014-2015 (National Center for Education Statistics). These students are considered Latino.  In addition, the likely combination of experiencing poverty and limited access to early education further compromises opportunities for young emergent bilingual children to achieve academic success (Castro, Espinosa, & Páez, 2011).

## Features of Culturally Relevant Texts (CRTs) that can
## Facilitate Comprehension in Emergent Bilingual Children

In line with the principles of culturally responsive teaching, one first must believe that Spanish-English bilingual children have valuable knowledge and experiences that can positively support their reading comprehension and oral discussion responses. Then one must identify the local knowledge and experiences of the particular population, which are often related to the social class of their family. For example, stories set in working class urban communities may be particularly relevant. Likewise, their ethnic backgrounds and immigration histories may interact with social class experiences. For example, sharing living spaces with extended family members may result from both socio-economic demands and the immigration status of various family members. Living with extended family members can also yield shared care-giving practices.

Children may live with parents and with or very near a grandparent, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Adults and older youths in the extended family may share different child-rearing responsibilities,

such as school drop off and pick up and after-school care.

Linguistic portrayals that capture authentic Spanish and bilingual speech patterns are

critical. Spanish dialects vary greatly—locally, regionally, and nationally—as dialects of all

languages do. If a text is translated from English to Spanish, accuracy of the translation is

paramount.  Furthermore, Barrera and Quiroa (2003) posit that language and dialogue can be

thoughtfully employed to capture the nuances and sophistication of a bilingual repertoire.

Authentic use of code-switching is paramount. Code-switching is purposeful; bilinguals do not

randomly insert, translate, or repeat words in their other language.

It is hypothesized that high quality children's literature that includes multiple key

authentic and culturally relevant features can facilitate the reading comprehension of Spanish-

English bilingual children. This alignment or cultural congruence between text and child affords

the young reader an opportunity to draw on her local knowledge in ways that can enhance the

cognitive processes necessary for comprehension and discussion.  With an understanding of

CRTs established, how can the cultural factors influence the cognitive processes that underpin

reading comprehension and discourse?

**The Connection between Cultural Knowledge and Cognitive Factors in the**

**Development of Reading Comprehension**

Robert Rueda (2011) proposes that

"…while culturally compatible instruction and classroom settings may make students feel
better about being there, which is not a trivial consideration, these approaches may also
make tasks more comprehensible and amenable to connections with existing prior
knowledge. (p. 94)

He suggests that children's cultural knowledge can impact cognitive processes in ways that yield positive outcomes in reading comprehension and learning and calls this interaction *facilitative encoding* (Rueda, 2011, p. 93). This hypothesis suggests that children's prior cultural knowledge that supports comprehension frees cognitive space and resources that can then be allocated for other, more demanding aspects of a task. Rueda draws on fundamental principles of both schema theory and cognitive load theory to support this hypothesis.

**Schema Theory**

A schema is a specific set of organized knowledge that is already stored in one's long term memory (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Hence, a schema organizes disparate pieces of information into relationships and hierarchies in an easily retrievable and comprehensible way. A schema can be a learned set of academic information, such as a schema for individual letters or for decoding words. Sweller (1994) explains that the emergent reader typically learns individual letter sounds—each letter comprising its own schema—and must exert effortful control to connect the individual sounds in a word in order to read it.  The more skilled reader, however, has a well-established schema for words and various phrases; each word or phrase comprises its own schema, and the reader no longer has to attend to individual letters and clusters to slowly sound out a word.

A schema can also be knowledge acquired from one's daily and/or background experiences, such as an interpretation schema and a schema for family relationships.  A child may have developed a robust schema for interpreting for a parent who is less proficient in English.  For example, children understand they need to listen carefully to their parent and then summarize the gist of the idea to the monolingual English-speaker.  They also know they need to

listen carefully to the response of the English-speaker to determine whether s/he comprehended the message. Children who interpret know that they should not interpret words that are considered insults or curse words. Many of the children in this study have a schema for family that includes extended family members rather than immediate family members. Some of the children share living spaces with extended family members. Thus, a child's family may include brothers, sisters, parents, as well as a grandparent, aunt, uncle, and cousins. Godparents who may or may not be relatives may also be considered part of the child's family.

Schema theory proposes that text comprehension requires a reader to employ her knowledge base—her prior knowledge and experiences stored in long-term memory (LTM)—to construct meaning (Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2008). A schema accessed during reading, however, remains active in one's working memory (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Hence, a child holds a schema in mind while reading or listening to a text and integrates elements of the story into her schema to achieve comprehension.

Schema theorists, Anderson and Pearson (1984) write:

Whether we are aware of it or not, it is this interaction of new information with old knowledge that we mean when we use the term comprehension. To say that one has comprehended a text is to say that she has found a mental "home" for the information in the text, or else that she has modified an existing mental home in order to accommodate that new information. (p. 2)

The novice reader is initially an apprentice in this process of accommodating and integrating new and existing information. Prior knowledge for a text facilitates this process, freeing cognitive space and resources to focus on more complex aspects of comprehension, such as making and articulating key connections and inferences. The use of CRTs may support the novice reader as she learns how to use both her existing knowledge and the information from a text in order to

make meaning during literature discussions.

**How do schemas effectively free cognitive space and resources?**

**Cognitive Load Theory**

Rueda (2011) also draws on cognitive load theory to explain how effective schema activation can free limited cognitive resources that can then be allocated for more complex thinking. Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988; 1994) is an instructional design theory based on the limitations of the working memory system. It proposes that constraints on working memory can be reduced through the activation of robust schemata.

When one tries to hold in mind and consider several pieces of information simultaneously, this burdens the working memory system. Cognitive load increases, yielding learning more difficult. Holding a random string of items, such as a new 10-digit phone number in mind, is a difficult task for the limited working memory system because this system can typically only hold from four to nine discrete bits of information at once (Sweller, 1994). As mentioned, however, a robust schema can effectively increase the amount of information that one's working memory can hold at once by consolidating multiple individual pieces of information into a single, comprehensive idea or concept (Sweller, 1994, p. 299).

In sum, cognitive load theory proposes that a robust schema supports efficient processing of familiar aspects of a tasks. This efficient processing frees cognitive resources that can be allocated for processing unfamiliar features of a task, features that might otherwise be entirely too difficult (Sweller, 1994). Thus the absence of a robust schema for a text can compromise comprehension. The cognitive resources available in the limited working memory system may be spent trying to reconcile and connect very basic interactions and events in a text in order to

establish local, literal comprehension rather than making sense of complex relationships critical for achieving a higher level, global of comprehension. For the novice reader, several unfamiliar features of a text may result in increased cognitive load, thus yielding the task of deeply comprehending even a seemingly simple text quite difficult.

**What are the cognitive resources that can be allocated for more complex thinking and discourse?**

**Working Memory Capacity and Processing**

The working memory system both stores and processes information. Working memory storage capacity refers to the amount of information that can simultaneously be held accessible in the system (Daneman & Carpenter, 1980).  Likewise, processing speed indicates the speed with which working memory can accomplish tasks, such as retrieving the name for an image (Fry & Hale, 2000) or resolving a pronoun, effectively attaching it to the appropriate character in a story (Kintsch & Rawson, 2005).  In clinical research, a common measure of both working memory storage capacity and working memory processing speed that corresponds with the cognitive processes that underlie reading comprehension is reading span.  Reading span is measured using a task that requires a reader to maintain items in working memory while simultaneously processing new information (Daneman & Carpenter, 1980, as cited in Rawson & Kintsch, 2005). Empirical findings suggest that processing and storage features compete for cognitive resources in some way. In essence, attention recruited to process information while reading is attention that is not being allocated for quick recall and vice versa.

CRTs may provide opportunities for children to activate their schema for specific knowledge and experiences, such as negotiating life through two languages and/or living in a

large city, in order to facilitate comprehension and learning (Rueda, 2011). As mentioned, Rueda's *facilitative encoding hypothesis* suggests that children's prior cultural knowledge that is embedded in schema and that supports comprehension can free cognitive space and resources. He proposes that these cognitive resources can then be allocated for more demanding aspects of a task (p. 92.) A robust schema for a particular situation in a story allows a child to consolidate several pieces of information into a single coherent component, freeing cognitive space for more complex thinking and discourse. Hence, the facilitative encoding hypothesis provides a useful framework for examining whether children's culturally based schemata can free cognitive resources and yielding evidence of comprehension in discussions of a CRT.

As previously mentioned, empirical studies have found a relationship between aspects of prior knowledge, including specific cultural understandings, and reading comprehension. Thus, as schema and cognitive load theories propose, findings suggest that prior knowledge may ameliorate constraints on the working memory system, allowing limited cognitive resources to be allocated for higher level comprehension. In the following section, I highlight key findings from domain-expertise and cross-cultural studies that examine the association between prior knowledge and comprehension. I then examine classroom-based studies that employ culturally relevant texts to investigate this relationship.

## Empirical Research on the Relationship between Prior Knowledge and Specific Aspects of Reading Comprehension

### Empirical Studies Based on Prior Knowledge

Education psychologists have conducted novice-expert studies with middle grade students to examine the influence of prior knowledge on aspects of reading recall and

comprehension. These empirical studies employ a pre-test designed to measure participants' prior knowledge for passages read, and use a standardized measure of reading achievement to assess participants' reading aptitude prior to the study. Participants are categorized as high- or low-aptitude novices (those with very little prior knowledge for the reading topic) or high- or low-aptitude experts (those with high levels of prior knowledge for the reading passage topic). Then participants read a passage and complete a series of recall and comprehensions tasks.

Recht and Leslie (1988) found that strong domain knowledge for baseball can compensate for low reading ability in seventh and eighth graders when reading a text about baseball. The authors conclude that both strategy instruction and prior knowledge merit equal consideration in instructional design (p. 19). Additionally, Schneider, Korkel, and Weinert (1989) confirmed and extended these findings in two similar studies with several hundred middle grade students in Germany. Adams et al. (1995) describe these differences in comprehension performance as a "trading relationship between reading skill and domain knowledge" that can yield similar levels of comprehension (p. 307). Findings from their study with children in grades four to seven also suggested that high levels of domain knowledge could significantly compensate for low reading skill (p. 320). These findings suggest that prior knowledge can ameliorate constraints on working memory that may limit recall and comprehension of a text.

**Cross-Cultural Studies that Examine Prior Knowledge**

Furthermore, findings from cross-cultural research indicate that knowledge of specific cultural understandings can also have a positive impact on reading comprehension and recall. For example, Lipson (1983) draws on schema theory in her investigation of the impact of prior knowledge for a particular religion on the reading comprehension of expository texts. Catholic

and Jewish fourth, fifth, and sixth grade children from middle and upper middle class backgrounds read a passage determined "culturally neutral", followed by counterbalanced passages entitled, "Bah Mitzvah" and "First Communion" (p. 451). Children were much more likely to comprehend the passage for which they held a robust religious schema, and this robust schema seemed to limit their comprehension of the less familiar passage.

Other studies on the relationship between prior cultural knowledge and reading comprehension between distinct cultural groups have also employed quantitative methods and yielded similar findings, with U.S. American and Indian adult-participants (Steffensen, Joag-Dev, & Anderson, 1979), with U.S. American and Palauan 11th graders (Pritchard, 1990), and with African American and white eighth-graders (Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirrey, & Anderson, 1982). In addition, empirical studies that examined the relationship between culturally specific prior knowledge and aspects of reading comprehension with African American primary grade (Bell & Clark, 1998) and eighth grade (Garth-McCullough, 2008) students further confirmed the association between the two.

Hence, findings from novice-expert and cross-cultural studies suggest that strong prior knowledge, including culturally specific knowledge, can significantly enhance aspects of reading comprehension. This supports central principles of both schema and cognitive load theory—the activation of schema facilitated the integration of key elements of prior knowledge with information read or heard, effectively reducing cognitive load. Thus the novice reader can allocate cognitive resources toward more complex tasks, such as inferring a key theme.

**Spanish-English Bilingual Children and Culturally Relevant Texts**

Grounded in personal observations of how her Latino students read CRTs with greater proficiency than when reading non-CRTs, Ebe (2010, 2011) tested this hypothesis with nine third grade children classified as ELLs. The children were from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America and attended school in an urban Northeastern city (Ebe, 2010, p. 198). Each child read one story about a child who moved to the U.S. and had difficulty understanding his teacher (the CRT) and one fable about the wind and sun (the non-CRT).

The author designed and used the Cultural Relevance Rubric (Ebe, 2010) to measure children's perceptions of cultural relevance for each text. In-Depth Miscue Analysis Procedure (Goodman, Watson & Burke, 2005, as cited in Ebe, 2010) was employed to measure reading accuracy and to analyze children's errors and holistic retellings of the stories. Miscue analysis is designed to measure comprehension during reading, whereas the holistic retelling measures post-reading comprehension (Ebe, 2010). All texts were within children's independent (95%-100%) or instructional (90%-94%) reading range (Clay, 2002, as cited in Ebe, 2010, p. 202). The mean accuracy score for the non-CRT (96.7%) was slightly higher than for the CRT (95.6%), however the analysis of errors and holistic retellings revealed differences in comprehension.

All children made significantly more high-quality miscues when reading the CRT than when reading the non-CRT. High quality miscues are errors that are semantically and grammatically possible and that make sense within the sentence and story. In contrast, a reliance on graphic and sound similarity (similar to letter-sound correspondence) to read unknown or difficult words can yield a loss of meaning and indicate problems with comprehension. Furthermore, holistic retelling scores for the CRT were significantly higher. Additionally,

children rated the CRT significantly more culturally relevant than the non-CRT. Ebe (2012)

subsequently replicated these findings with four fourth-grade students in a similar study.

Clearly this study presents a small sample size, N=9, and the children only read two texts.

Additional issues, including questions about both language proficiency and reading proficiency

in Spanish and English, are necessary to further interpret findings. Results, however, suggest that

Latino children can demonstrate greater proficiency with comprehension when reading texts in

English for which they already have relevant schema.

Together, the findings from research conducted with children and youths from different

cultural, ethnic, religious, racial, national, and linguistic backgrounds indicate that prior

knowledge exerts significant influence on reading comprehension. Furthermore, these findings

suggest that children often considered at-risk may be very capable of demonstrating high levels

of comprehension when reading texts that tap into their prior knowledge and experiences.

Likewise, CRTs may be able to provide novice readers opportunities to engage in high-level

thinking and talking about complex stories that are beyond their independent reading levels.

This study proposes to examine DLLs' comprehension of CRTs in the context of

literature discussions in Spanish. Thus, it is necessary to identify key findings about the role that

prior knowledge may play in comprehending a text while also participating in high quality

literature discussions. Then an additional examination of studies conducted with young DLLs

and in Spanish is necessary to identify current understandings about how this child population

draws on prior knowledge in comprehending and discussing a text.

**Key Findings from Research on Oral Language Development,**

**Classroom Discourse, and Reading Comprehension**

Seminal longitudinal studies have indicated that various aspects of oral language development, such as vocabulary, listening comprehension, and expressive language, are significantly correlated with reading comprehension across time in the primary grades (e.g., Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Verhoeven & Van Leeuwe, 2008). This correlation has been established for Spanish, as well (Manis, Lindsey, & Bailey, 2004). Oral language skills in Spanish predicted later reading comprehension proficiency in Spanish in two longitudinal studies with Latino Spanish-speaking primary grade ELLs in transitional bilingual programs. Furthermore, literacy scholars caution against overlooking and/or underestimating the role that rich oral language development in the early primary grades plays in later reading comprehension (e.g., Duke & Carlisle, 2011; Kendeou et al., 2009; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

Empirical research on classroom discussions in English indicates that the quality of discourse in literature discussions is associated with increases in text comprehension and the amount of student talk (Murphy et al., 2009; Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2003). Likewise, several systematic approaches to literature discussions, including Literature Circles (Short & Pierce, 1990) and Instructional Conversations (Goldenberg, 1993), have been found to support literal and inferential comprehension of texts for both young children and adolescents (Murphy et al., 2009). Instructional Conversations (Goldenberg, 1993) has been particularly effective in facilitating literal comprehension of texts read in English with ELLs (Murphy et al., 2009; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2007). These findings are in line with sociocultural theory; children use language as a tool to mediate and develop comprehension of texts through active

participation in group discussions. Consistent opportunities to develop ways of thinking and talking about complex texts can facilitate reading comprehension.

**Empirical Studies of Literature Discussions with Spanish-English Bilingual Children**

Empirical studies of Spanish-English bilingual children reading and discussing texts in English and/or in Spanish have yielded somewhat similar findings. DLLs draw on their linguistic resources in both languages and on prior experiences during discussions to construct meaning (Lohfink & Loya, 2010; López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013; Martínez-Roldán, 2000, 2005; Worthy et al., 2013).

Lohfink and Loya (2010) investigated 20 third grade bilingual children's engagement with CRTs read aloud and discussed in English. They found that children's cultural backgrounds influenced the textual cues to which children connected and the ways in which they connected to cues. Thus, children made personal connections to and cited evidence about specific cultural aspects of texts in their oral and written responses, suggesting an association between cultural schema and interpretation of texts. The authors did not explicitly examine children's comprehension of CRTs, however; rather they specifically examined the nature of the children's engagement. The proposed study builds on these findings by specifically examining whether children draw on prior knowledge, including linguistic and cultural knowledge and experiences, specifically to comprehend texts during discussions.

The following three studies employ case study methodology and discourse analysis tools to investigate emergent bilingual children's oral responses in Spanish and English during literature discussions. Martínez-Roldán (2000) examined literature discussions in Spanish of texts read in Spanish in a second grade bilingual classroom, whereas her 2005 study focused on a

single second grade child's experiences reading and discussing texts in Spanish and English. Similarly, López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate (2013) explored how one second-grade bilingual child's personal experiences informed her interpretations of texts. The elevation of Spanish and the fostering of bilingualism for all students characterized study classrooms and discussions. The children were also allowed to listen to and discuss texts beyond their independent reading level, providing them opportunities to engage in more complex thinking and talk than might have been possible had they discussed texts at their independent levels. All studies found that the DLLs drew on their full linguistic repertories—their knowledge and skills in both Spanish and English—and on their personal experiences and cultural knowledge to make meaning and participate.

In her year-long case study of a second grade classroom, Martínez-Roldán (2000) found that overall, children drew on "their knowledge of real life" to access and comprehend stories read (p. 322). More than a third of children's literary responses during discussions were connected to personal life experiences, and they also made frequent intertextual (text-to-text) connections to construct meaning and participate. Children also made more personal connections with texts that were realistic fiction than with historical fiction (p. 281). Likewise, the single case study child drew on her knowledge of both Spanish and English and on "storytelling as part of her home's funds of knowledge" to make meaning of texts (p. 1518). The child drew more frequently on personal narratives when discussing texts in groups that were more Spanish-dominant, suggesting that group members' language dominance affected the quality of her participation.

López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate (2013) employed Cultural Hybridity and Third

Space as a conceptual framework in which local knowledge grounded in family, neighborhood, and life experiences interact with academic content in the classroom (p. 47). Similar to Martínez-Roldán (2000, 2005), they found that the child drew on her home language (Spanish) and culture to share personal oral narratives, thus connecting her home and school life in ways that contributed to her meaning making of Spanish texts. Multiple texts employed in the study were culturally relevant for the child, providing her with opportunities to make strong personal connections that demonstrated her complex thinking and comprehension.  The authors cite Gutiérrez, Larson, and Kreuter (1995) in recognizing that "making meaning in and of texts that are personal and relevant is necessary for effective literacy learning" (p. 52). The authors conclude that young Spanish-English bilingual children

> …are capable of and entitled to an education that pushes their thinking and although their first language is not English, and their idea of literacy and manner of becoming literate may not be consistent with that of the American public school system, this in no way signifies they are deficient. (López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013, p. 53)

These studies did not explicitly examine the texts for cultural relevance and did not focus on whether and how children drew on prior knowledge specifically in relation to culturally relevant texts in order to comprehend. Martínez-Roldán (2000) identified both a quantitative and qualitative difference in children's responses to realistic versus historical fiction texts.  López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate (2013) focused on the hybrid space created when the child could draw on her linguistic and cultural knowledge to make meaning of texts and did not examine the child-participant's responses specifically in relation to CRTs. Findings from this small body of research, however, demonstrate that bilingual children draw on linguistic and cultural knowledge to make meaning of texts. In addition, there seems to be an association between the cultural

relevance of a text and the types of oral responses children generate to make meaning during the text discussions.

The proposed study builds on these bodies of research by investigating whether and how bilingual children draw on their prior knowledge and experiences to comprehend when discussing texts with different levels of cultural relevance. Do children draw on prior knowledge more frequently in comprehending and discussing a CRT than they do when discussing texts with less cultural relevance? Can a text with several culturally relevant features, in turn, facilitate the use of comprehension strategies during discussions? Furthermore and drawing on López-Robertson's and Schramm-Pate's conclusion (2013), this study explores whether CRTs can provide opportunities for emergent bilingual children both to push their thinking and to demonstrate that they are capable of high level thinking during discussions.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

As this proposed study will investigate the ways in which bilingual children draw on prior knowledge to comprehend in classroom discussions of CRTs, the theoretical framework must embody all aspects of this interaction. As discussed in detail in the previous section, I draw on schema theory and cognitive load theory in the context of Rueda's (2011) theoretical work as one framework for the study design and data analysis. Rueda's facilitative encoding hypothesis posits that a child's cultural schema that supports comprehension of a task reduces the cognitive load of the task. Children can process information in a story more efficiently when the situations and events maps onto their prior knowledge and experiences. Efficient processing of information frees cognitive resources to focus on higher-level comprehension, such as drawing inferences and determining character motivation. In contrast, when children have few or no

points of connection with a text, they must recruit cognitive resources to make sense of

unfamiliar vocabulary, situations, and/or relationships to support literal comprehension. Fewer

cognitive resources are free to take on the task of inferring meaning and synthesizing key parts.

According to the facilitative encoding hypothesis, which is grounded in schema theory and

cognitive load theory, texts with high cultural relevance can facilitate reading comprehension by

reducing the cognitive load required to make meaning.

I also draw on sociocultural theory in order to understand first, how children come to

develop prior knowledge. McVee, Dunsmore, and Gavalek (2005) explain, "Sociocultural

theorists argue that schemas emerge from the social interactions between an individual and his

environment" (p. 547). Over time and through interactions with family and others within the

home and community, children's prior knowledge and experiences become organized within

emerging schemata. Furthermore, sociocultural theory explains how purposeful classroom

discourse around texts is essential for comprehension development. Facilitated talk about texts

in cooperation with one's peers and/or a teacher can augment the appropriation of

comprehension strategies necessary for high-level comprehension (Miller, 2013). Through

participation in literature discussions across time young readers come to internalize the ways of

thinking and talking about texts that are essential to academic success.

Finally, I employ third space theory (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Gutiérrez,

Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999) and translanguaging theory (García, 2009) to specifically

frame the linguistic and cultural population of the study. When children actively draw on

knowledge and experiences that typically go unidentified and/or devalued to make meaning of

school curriculum, a third or hybrid space is created. Translanguaging theory proposes that

children need access to all of their language skills in order to maximize learning. Aspects of each of the theories underpin the questions and study design and will frame the data analysis in the proposed investigation as discussed below.

Cultural knowledge, experiences, and ways of participating and communicating are fundamental to Rueda's (2011) facilitative encoding hypothesis. "…The cultural schemas some students bring to classroom learning activities advantage them in ways that reduce cognitive load and thus make learning more efficient" (p. 94). Thus it is critical to reconcile the intra-psychologically based "in-the-head phenomenon" of schema theory with sociocultural theory, which locates schema within one's "social and cultural communities" (McVee et al., 2005, p. 532). Literacy scholars, McVee, et al. point out that while experience is considered a cornerstone of individual comprehension, the social and cultural nature of individual experience is for the most part negligible throughout articulations of schema theory (p. 538). They draw on Vygotskyan theory and propose that "schemas are cultural historical constructions that emerge only within the individual through transactions with others" (p. 541).

**Sociocultural Theory**

Leading sociocultural discourse scholar, Neil Mercer (2004) explains that sociocultural theorists take the position that thinking, learning, and communication are related processes shaped by culture (p. 138). "The nature of human activity is that knowledge is shared and that people jointly construct understandings of shared experience" (pp. 138-139). Joint construction through social interaction, in turn, leads to internalization of understanding.

Likewise, according to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory:

> …an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate

only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. (p. 35)

Discussions in which children can draw on their prior knowledge to make meaning can set "in motion a variety of developmental processes," including processes that underpin high levels of reading comprehension (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 35). Asking questions that guide children's thinking, and rephrasing and extending children's responses as they draw on prior knowledge and collaborate to interpret texts can contribute to their internalization of key comprehension strategies. An important implication of the research and theory reviewed thus far is that emergent bilingual children may be more capable of demonstrating high levels of comprehension in literature discussions than educators might expect. This, in turn, suggests that teachers may not be working within the upper levels of these children's zones of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) when teaching key aspects of reading comprehension.

In sum, language serves as a specific meditational tool in the proposed study; through oral discussion, children negotiate the meaning of texts. Furthermore, the children in the study have access to their more proficient language, Spanish, as a meditational tool, which can serve to amplify the discussions. The schemata that children bring to the classroom have been generated through social interactions between the child and her social and cultural environment. Likewise, the subsequent construction of schemas necessary for thinking, talking, and writing about complex texts in academic settings can develop, in part, through the child's social interactions with peers and teacher in literature discussions.

**Hybrid and Third Space Theory**

When children can draw on their prior knowledge and everyday experiences and simultaneously use their full linguistic repertoire to participate in literature discussions, a third or hybrid space is created.  In education research, hybridity and third space theory are often attributed to Bhabha (1991), and/or Gutiérrez et al., (1995) and Gutiérrez et al. (1999).  I focus on work by Gutiérrez and her colleagues because their work with third space theory has developed specifically within the context of educating diverse groups of Spanish-English bilingual children, youths, and young adults.

Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López and Tejeda (1999) originally conceptualized the third space as one in which new learning and meaning are generated from the negotiation between both "official scripts and counterscripts" (pp. 286-287).  Official scripts can refer to teacher-directed, traditional, school sanctioned discourse and topics of study, whereas counterscripts include children's local knowledge, experiences, and expertise, and their linguistic means of expression, all of which are not typically valued and utilized in the classroom.

> A "third space" 'reveals the potential for the classroom to become a site where no cultural discourses are secondary. Acknowledging the inherent cognitive and sociocultural benefits that come from the multiple discourses is of particular importance, especially in classrooms populated…by African American, Latino, and mixed-race students. (Gutiérrez, 1993, as cited in Gutiérrez, Rymes & Larson, 1995, p. 447)

Hence, hybrid spaces were characterized as those in which children could use dialects and languages other than and in addition to Standard English to link important but historically devalued personal and unofficial experiences (e.g., from family and communities) with official school values, expectations, and knowledge (Gutiérrez et al., 1995, 1999).

More recently, Gutiérrez (2008) explicitly conceptualizes the third space as zones of

proximal development. Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland, and Pierce (2011) examine the third space in the context of an after-school program in which bilingual children engage in imaginative hybrid language practices and literacies. The children experiment in cross-age groups with academic and vernacular English and Spanish, writing "in ways that were not possible in traditional academic settings where language experimentation was regulated" (p. 245). They also engage in dialogue around the value of multilingualism and draw on cultural experiences and aspects of popular culture to experiment with their less familiar language, English. In essence, third space theory proposes that children are working within their actual zones of proximal development when they are able to use their full range of linguistic and cultural resources to collaborate and generate meaning. This framework is useful for examining how children draw on their linguistic and cultural knowledge to scaffold comprehension and talk during literature discussions in the classroom.

**Translanguaging Theory and Pedagogy**

Particularly relevant to understanding emergent bilinguals and how they use language and prior knowledge as tools for comprehension development is the concept of translanguaging. Translanguaging originally referred to a pedagogical practice in which bilingual children read a text in one language (English) and discussed it in another language (Welsh) (Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012, p. 3). García (2009) and García & Kleifgen (2010) have recently expanded the term as a means to better articulate how bilingual and emerging biliterate children and youths negotiate their experiences and world.

> Translanguaging includes code-switching, the shift between two languages in context, and it also includes translation; however it differs from both of these simple practices in that it refers to the process by which bilingual students perform bilingually in the myriad ways of classrooms – reading, writing, taking notes, discussing, signing etc.

> Translanguaging is not only a way to 'scaffold' instruction, to make sense of learning and language; rather, translanguaging is part of the metadiscursive regimes that students in the twenty-first century must perform... (García & Kleifgen, 2010, p. 147)

For example, at any time in the classroom, children growing up with exposure to more than one language may be translating and interpreting silently to clarify understanding. They may be using the phonology and/or syntax from one language to scaffold their speech and writing in another, and drawing on vocabulary from both languages to express ideas, for example.

Translanguaging has evolved into an emerging bilingual learning theory (García & Wei, 2014). It draws on Cummins (1981a) common underlying proficiency theory—that conceptual learning in one language facilitates learning in the other language. Additionally, translanguaging theory operates from the position that bilingual children develop a dynamic and integrative system in which two or more languages and dialects remain active in the brain, even when a specific language or dialect is not in use (García, 2009; Grosjean, 1989). Importantly, it proposes that bilingual and multilingual children maximize their learning when they are able to draw on their full linguistic repertoire across two or more languages rather than being constrained to using only one, which is typically English when in the classroom (Hornberger, 2005, p. 607).

Translanguaging theory moves beyond using the home language to scaffold English language and content development. It in no way suggests that children should not attain high levels of proficiency in English or in any other language. Rather, it proposes that children who need to draw on two or more languages to negotiate daily life should also be afforded time and space to draw on all of their linguistic skills in order to make meaning and demonstrate comprehension. When knowledge is distributed across two languages in young children, they

need opportunities to bring them together in order to maximize learning and engagement.

These theories underpin the proposed study design and questions and will frame the data analysis. Drawing on schema and cognitive load theory, Rueda's (2011) facilitative encoding hypothesis describes the influence that culture can have on cognition.  This type of facilitative interaction can happen in third spaces in which children draw on prior knowledge and use language as a tool to negotiate meaning through literature discussions.

Based on the review of literature and theoretical frameworks, it is hypothesized first that the emergent bilingual children in the proposed study will draw more frequently on prior knowledge in comprehending texts during literature discussions.  Secondly, it is hypothesized that drawing on prior knowledge will contribute to the quality and depth of children's talk as evidenced by the comprehension strategies they employ during literature discussions.

Together, these theories frame the study questions and ground the interpretation of child data.  Children develop prior knowledge through social interaction within their homes and communities.  They bring this knowledge grounded in their daily interactions cultural experiences to the reading comprehension process.  Through facilitated interaction within the classroom, children can use their prior experiences to connect with the texts and practice talking about texts in ways that support comprehension development.  Schema theory and sociocultural theory form a key piece the theoretical basis in which evidence of prior knowledge and comprehension are examined.  The teacher, children, and culturally relevant text, together can create a third space in which children can bring their everyday experiences to the task of negotiating meaning

Furthermore, Spanish-English emergent bilingual children need access to all of their mental tools, including all of their linguistic skills, in order to maximize their comprehension and participation. In the translanguaging classroom, the discussion space allows for children to use primarily Spanish or a combination of Spanish and English, including code-mixing, to express ideas and generate meaning. When discussing CRTs within this space, children can draw on both their full linguistic repertoire and on their cultural knowledge and daily experiences that may typically go unidentified in order to make meaning. Hence translanguaging theory and third space theory provide a theoretical basis for the use of non-standard Spanish and English and the mixing of languages in the classroom in the service of reading developing comprehension.

A highly culturally relevant text may facilitate the creation of a third space in which children can bring their everyday experiences and dialects to the task of negotiating meaning.

## Research Questions

These hypotheses have yielded the following research questions.

1. Can culturally relevant texts afford second-grade Spanish-English bilingual children primarily from working class backgrounds opportunities to draw on prior knowledge in comprehending a text during literature discussions?

    a. What evidence of prior knowledge is present in children's oral responses during discussions?

    b. How frequently do children draw on prior knowledge in discussions?

    c. What evidence of comprehension is present in children's oral responses in discussions?

2. How does drawing on prior knowledge contribute to the quality and depth of children's talk as evidenced by comprehension strategies they employ in literature discussions?

    a. How are incidences of prior knowledge connected with evidence of comprehension in discussions?

    b. Is there a relationship between children's perceptions of the cultural relevance of a text and the frequency and quality of their oral responses during discussions of that text?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

**Participants and Context**

**School**

Purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) guided the selection of a school for the study. Hence the study school was selected because it served Spanish-English emergent bilingual children who came from working class families. Furthermore, the school had a Spanish-English dual language program which indicated children learned literacy skills in both languages.

The school selected is located within a large urban school district. The student population includes a significant number of Spanish-English bilingual children who also qualify for free or reduced lunch, indicating that they come from primarily working class families. Additionally, the school features a Spanish-English dual-language strand, indicating that literacy instruction occurs in Spanish in the dual-language classrooms. The study was conducted in Spanish, thus literacy instruction in Spanish was a clear criteria for inclusion.

This research study required first, Loyola University's Internal Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) approval and then school district's Research Review Board (RRB) approval before I could begin. Loyola's IRB required a letter of agreement from the school principal. The principal received a detailed outline of the research project that included the study questions, the informed consent process, the timeline, and research goals. The

principal crafted and signed a letter of cooperation (see Appendix A) which was included in the IRB application. After receiving approval from Loyola's IRB, the research proposal, Loyola's IRB approval letter, and the principal's signed letter of cooperation were submitted to the school district's RRB. I received approval from the school district's RRB in November of 2016.

The study was designed with the flexibility to be conducted within any model of dual language or bilingual classroom. The Center for Applied Linguistics defines two-way immersion (TWI) as "[a] dual language program in which both native English speakers and native speakers of the partner language are enrolled, with neither group making up more than two-thirds of the student population." In contrast, in a one-way dual language program "students from predominantly one language group receive instruction in both English and a partner language. One-way dual language programs may serve predominantly ELs (also known as developmental or maintenance bilingual programs)" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. viii). This model, one-way immersion or developmental bilingual, characterizes the dual language strand of the research site. Hence, the teacher informed me that English was the second or additional langauge for all students except one. She described all children as emergent bilinguals who were also developing biliteracy and with varying levels of English proficiency.

Language is a key aspect for accessing prior experience as much of what children will reference regarding prior knowledge is encoded in language. In order for Spanish-English bilingual children to work at their highest potential when developing reading comprehension, they need access to all of their linguistic resources and opportunities to discuss and read texts in their most proficient langauge. Interpreting and discussing complex texts read in Spanish means that chlidren are not faced with the twin task of making sense of a less familiar language and

vocabulary while simultaneously processing the meaning of the text (Fleming et al., 2015). I have been a Spanish-English dual langauge teacher for 13 years, and I have a bilingual endorsement from the Illinois State Board of Education. Thus, I have demonstrated proficiency in Spanish on a state-administered standardized test of Spanish literacy and langauge proficiency.

**Teacher Selection**

I explained to the teacher that informed consent was an ongoing process and that she could pull out of the study at any time or request that I not attend on any day and at any time during the study with absolutely no penalties or repercussions (see Appendix B). I explained to her that I would check in with her each week regarding this agreement. In addition, when I checked in with her each week, I made sure that she had every opportunity to ask questions about the study and/or about her role in the study at any time. I quietly checked in with her each time I visited the classroom to seek verbal consent to observe and record that particular day. I also provided my contact information and made sure she understood that she was free to communicate with me at any time to ask questions and/or clarify information about any aspect of the study.

**Children**

I employed nonprobability purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to select the child participants. The children were not selected randomly; they were selected with a clear purpose. Purposeful sampling indicates that one has very intentionally selected a sample "from which the most can be learned" in order to address the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). Purposive samples are the cornerstones of

"information-rich cases" (Patton, 2015, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and criteria are determined before data are collected. Because the questions seek to understand how primary grade children comprehend and talk about different texts read aloud, the criteria of membership in a first or second grade bilingual or dual language classroom was established before the research study was implemented.

The next criterion called for the children to be Spanish-English bilinguals who were considered by their teacher to be more proficient in Spanish than in English. The fifteen children selected for the study sample included one trilingual child who spoke Portuguese and some English and Spanish in the home.

I relied on the teacher's 20 years of experience as a bilingual and dual language teacher and her six months of knowledge of and experiences with teaching the children in her classroom and working with their families to help determine the children's language proficiency in both languages. Specifically, the teacher planned and implemented leveled guided reading groups and literacy assessments in Spanish English with all of her students. She also knew their WIDA English language development (ELD) levels and used these levels to plan instruction. Hence, her assessment of children's language proficiency and bilingual development is grounded in standardized evaluations (e.g., WIDA ACCESS scores that yield children's English proficiency level, Text and Reading Comprehendion (TRC) scores in Spanish), and her ongoing formative assessments. Her thorough knowledge of her students, coupled with her access to and understanding of their language and reading levels affirmed that children met the Spanish language criterion.

Another criterion established for the children is that they come primarily from working class families.  The demographic and statistical data provided by the school district indicated that 91.3% of the students were from low-income families.  Additionally, the teacher's knowledge of her students and their families allowed her to confirm anecdotally that each year her students came from working class and lower socio-economic status backgrounds.

A final criterion was child-participants would have prior experience participating in literature discussions and reading comprehension related activities with a range of texts, including CRTs and non-CRTs.

There were 26 students, 16 girls and 10 boys in the study classroom.  I did not receive informed consent from three boys, leaving 16 girls and seven boys.  I informed the teacher of my criteria and she suggested a group of 15 child participants, 12 girls and four boys. I wanted to achieve a balance of girls and boys that more closely reflected the ratio of the classroom.  The teacher had recommended the boys who were more likely to participate, and I asked her to recommend two boys who were quiet.  All of the remaining boys whose families had given informed consent were quiet, and the teacher added two boys to the list and removed two girls. Thus the study sample comprised 10 girls and five boys.

**Informed Consent Process**

I sought informed consent from the parents or guardians of all students in the classroom, even though I focusued analysis on the contributions of 15 children who met the criteria mentioned above (Spanish-English bilingual second graders with greater proficiency in Spanish and from working class backgrounds) (see Appendices C and D).  I also sought informed assent

orally from the children whose parents or guardians had given informed consent for their child's participation.

I explained to the teacher that I would make myself available to parents before and after school for two to three days before the study began in order to answer any questions family members had about the study and to provide any additional information in the informed consent process. The teacher informed me that this was not necessary. Family members typically drop off and pick up the children each day, and the teacher speaks to family members each morning and afternoon. She explained the study to family members when she was collecting informed consent forms.

I sought consent to audio-record and video-record all children in the classroom so that I would have documentation of whole-group discussions (see Appendix E). I did not directly analyze and code the oral contributions of children who were not part of the sample; however, I analyzed the sample children's responses to and exchanges with children outside of the sample.

I neither received approval nor was denied approval from the school district's Research Review Board (CPS RRB) to seek consent from child-participants' families to access their (i) reading levels in all languages possible as measured by the Text Reading and Comprehension test (TRC); and (ii) their WIDA English Language Proficiency levels in reading, writing, speaking, listening measured on the WIDA-ACCESS test. After I received approval to conduct the study from the RRB, I sumbitted a separate application to request consent for the the aforementioned individual assessment results. When I had not received a response at the end of January, two months after submitting the request, I inquired about my application via email. I received a bulk email on February 2, 2017 describing a processing delay with RRB application

submission fees.  The teacher had already collected the informed consent forms, and data

collection was scheduled to begin in mid-February. At this point I decided to conduct the study

without accessing the specified assessment results.  As previously mentioned, the teacher had a

thorough understanding of her children's language and reading comprehension development, and

she provided rich insight into these aspects of the  children through conversations and interviews.

**Teacher Background**

During the study, Mrs. León was in her twentieth year of teaching.  She has an early

childhood degree and has taught in Spanish-English dual language settings for 17 of the 20 years.

At the time in which the study was conducted, she was in her fourth year at the school when this

study took place.

Mrs. León recalls her first year at the first dual language school in which she worked.

> … I knew I believed in dual [language learning] and I knew I wanted it for my own
> children.  So that's when I knew I was always going to be… a dual language teacher.
> That's definitely who I am.

She continued to describe her tenure at a particular dual language school in which she

described her growth as a teacher.

> … [this is where] I established my philosophy.  I knew that's the kind of teacher I wanted
> to be… I learned a lot about holistic teaching and the whole child and social justice, and I
> was always a cooperative learning person…I got to do [cooperative learning] and
> continue to do that.  (Personal communication, January 20, 2017)

The teacher's belief in and value of developing reading comprehension skills in

two languages, Spanish and English, is fundamental to the study.

**Classroom Context**

As mentioned, the classroom teacher had a student teacher for the duration of the study.

The student teacher was teaching an integrated Spanish language arts and science unit that had

begun in late January, the beginning of the third quarter. The unit was a non-fiction inquiry into weather. The reading standards focused on asking questions about key details and identifying the main idea in a text in order to promote comprehension. Thus the children were experiencing parallel goals for reading literature and non-fiction. In addition, Mrs. León had noticed that several of her students were generating superficial questions in their daily reading response logs. Thus she teacher suggested that rather than trying to connect the texts to a particular theme, she could focus on teaching questioning and ask the children to try to identify the author's message of three realistic fiction texts. Likewise, as the children had been reading primarily non-fiction texts during formal Spanish language arts instruction for the six weeks prior to the study, the teacher wanted to provide them with an opportunity to practice generating authentic questions with fiction texts, as well.

Each morning from approximately 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., the children participated in a 90-minute Spanish literacy block. They completed three rounds of a self-selected reading activity with a specific focus for 25 minutes. During this time, the teacher, student teacher, and special education teacher worked with small groups and individual children, facilitating guided reading lessons and/or providing targeted literacy instruction. The teachers typically conducted whole group literacy instruction, such as reading aloud and discussing texts, either during or immediately following this literacy block.

## Research Design

The study employs a case study design using quantitative and qualitative methods to describe and examine children's discourse in group facilitated book discussion activities. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) draw on Stake (2005) to explain that a "defining characteristic of

case study research lies" in demarcating "the object of study: the case…a bounded system (Smith, 1978), a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries.  You can 'fence in' what you are going to study" (p. 38). The topic of study for this investigation is bounded by and limited to how a specific group of students in a single classroom orally articulate their thinking about three separate texts. The case is a particular classroom of emergent bilingual learners as they engage in thee literature discussion activities of three texts for a total of nine facilitated by their teacher.

In addition, Yin (2014) defines case study as an investigation of a "contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16).  Examining the phenomenon of children's use of prior knowledge to make meaning of texts during book discussions is integrally tied to the context.  In this investigation, the phenomenon in question cannot be separated from the classroom book discussions.  Additionally, other empirical studies have employed case study methodology to investigate classroom discourse in the context of literature discussions (e.g., Hadijoannou, 2007; Hadijoannou & Townsend, 2015; Juzwik et al., 2008; Martínez-Roldán, 2005, 2000).

The research design affords close description and analysis of the oral responses of a group of 23 children as they engaged in book discussion activities facilitated by their teacher. The design allowed me to identify and interpret the 15 sample children's use of prior knowledge and experiences, and their use of several comprehension strategies during discussions.  This allowed me to examine any potential relationship between children's use of prior knowledge and comprehension when discussing three texts with different levels of cultural relevance for this

particular group of children.  It also afforded exploration of the teacher's perceptions of and

connections with the three texts, as well as her interpretations of the children's oral responses in

the context of discussing and making sense of complex texts.

Data collection methods for this research includes the following:  observational field

notes, audio recordings, video recordings, and transcriptions of book discussion activities; semi-

structured teacher interviews; cultural relevance rubrics completed by the children and teacher

for each text; and my own analytic memos.

**Audio Recordings and Transcripts**

The primary data sources for the research are the audio recordings and transcripts of the

nine book discussion activities.  The duration of each discussion activity was between

approximately 20 and 54 minutes with a mean length of 35 minutes.  I transcribed all literature

discussions.  Basic transcription conventions from the Jefferson Transcription System (2004) that

is commonly used in conversation analysis (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013, pp. 57-76) was used.  I

provided word for word transcriptions; and inaudible words were marked ( ) and inaudible

phrases were marked (    ).

I chose to complete the transcriptions because the process of listening to and transcribing

the literature discussions was critical to ongoing data analysis.  In addition, by listening to audio

recordings of a single discussion multiple times, I was able to capture different children's voices

during cross-talk and the responses from children who spoke more quietly and/or who were

seated farthest from the microphone.  Moreover, I knew the children and was much more likely

to be able to accurately identify an unnamed speaker by using my field notes and knowledge of

the children.

**Video Recordings**

The video recordings of the first reading of and conversation during reading of the three texts served as a secondary source of data collection. They served to confirm or clarify my observations collected through audio, transcriptions, and observational field notes. The student teacher in the classroom had already recorded multiple lessons, and I set up the camera and kept it on the table next to the carpet on which the discussion activities primarily occurred before beginning data collection. Thus the children were familiar with a video camera and it was less intrusive.

**Observational Field Notes**

"Observation is the best technique to use when an activity, event, or situation can be observed first hand" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I took hand-written observational field notes during each discussion in order to capture the gist of as many children's responses as possible and to describe non-verbal behaviors that audio recordings could not collect. Field notes and written narratives of filed notes served to contextualize the quantitative data generated in data tables. The observational protocol included basic demographic information—the time, place, and date of observation, the number of participants [children, teachers(s), and researcher] present, and the physical setting of the classroom and discussion (see Appendix F). I used pencil and blank paper and drew a line vertically to divide the paper such that three-fourths of the paper on the left side was used to record: (a) the discussion structures, routines, and protocols; (b) key moments and key exchanges in the discussion; and (c) non-verbal behaviors. On the right and narrower side, I had planned to record my own reflections, my own behavior and interactions with participants, and if and how they responded to me, as recommended by Creswell (2014) and

Merriam and Tisdell (2015, pp. 141-142). I rarely made comments in this column because I was very focused on capturing the children's dialogue.

I listened for and documented the teacher's and children's exchanges by denoting who is speaking—a T indicated the teacher and C1, C2, C3, etc. for each child. I paraphrased exchanges, using key words and phrases to capture the gist. I will also observe for child behaviors that may indicate engagement and/or a lack of engagement, as engagement is associated with comprehension (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). For example, I documented behaviors, such as body language and comments that suggested interest, joy, and persistence, as well as behaviors and responses associated with boredom and misunderstanding.

I had planned to prioritize observing and describing non-verbal behaviors during the discussions that were not video-recorded. After listening to the audio from the first discussion, I realized I would need to take careful notes of the children's responses in case the recording did not capture them or they were inaudible. Some children spoke very quietly while others spoke less clearly and/or with a lower voice. The children sat in rows on the carpet, and I sat to the right side of the children. My role was that of observer-participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This indicates that my primary role was that of an observer

I typed these notes into a formal document after observations. I also recorded some initial reactions after some interviews in order to try to capture my initial impression. I used my field notes and recorded dictations to type a full narrative of the discussion. I used the data from these field notes and the corresponding typed formal narratives to provide thick description of information displayed in the frequency and data tables.

**Teacher Interviews**

I conducted five semi-structured interviews in person with the teacher during the study. The duration of each interview was between 28 to 60 minutes. Before data collection began in the classroom, I conducted an interview at a location that was convenient for the teacher. The purpose of this initial interview was: (i) to gather general background information about her; (ii) to gain insight into her experiences using culturally relevant texts with her students; and (iii) to collect information about the curriculum. Specifically, I asked questions that explored: (i) her teaching history and pedagogy; (ii) her experiences selecting and using CRTs; (ii) her general perceptions of these texts; and how she develops discussion questions around a text.

I also conducted three semi-structured interviews with the teacher about the books and discussion activities that took place during and after data collection in the classroom. I conducted the first of these three interviews one month after data collection had begun and after the final reading of the second text. In this interview, I asked the teacher to describe how the first two texts read fit into her curriculum and to provide her impressions of how the children responded to the discussion activities for each text.

The second of the three interviews occurred after the final reading of the third text. In this interview, I provided the teacher with transcribed excerpts from the discussion activities of the first two texts. Rather than following the questions from the protocol, I asked her to read the excerpts and respond to them. The third interview took place a week later. In this interview I asked the teacher how the final text fit into the curriculum. I also provided her with excerpts from the transcribed literature discussion activities from the final text and asked her to read them and share her impressions and interpretations. Data collected from these three interviews

allowed me to gain an understanding of how the teacher interpreted the children's oral responses during the discussions. These data were critical in confirming and clarifying my interpretations of children's responses.

I conducted a final semi-structured interview during the data analysis stage of the study in order to check for missing information and accuracy and to support the validity of preliminary findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stake, 2010). I provided the teacher with three one-page excerpts of literature discussion dialogue with brief analysis and a one-page summary of preliminary findings. This interview took place in person and lasted 45 minutes.

**Cultural Relevance Rubrics**

In addition, the teacher distributed the Cultural Relevance Rubric (Ebe, 2013) to the children after the final discussion of each text. The rubric was designed for use with students and teachers (Ebe, 2010) (see Appendices G and H).

At the end of data collection I had nine transcribed literature discussions, approximately five hours of transcribed audio. I had nine sets of observational field notes and nine corresponding typed narratives, as well as four transcribed teacher interviews, approximately three hours of interview audio. Finally, I had 48 Cultural Relevance Rubrics (Ebe, 2010), one completed by each of the 15 sample students for each of the three texts, and the 3 rubrics completed by the teacher.

<div align="center">

**Procedure**

</div>

Data collection took place in January and continued through April, 2017. Data were collected from classroom literature discussion activities in a second grade classroom across seven weeks. I observed and recorded a total of nine literature discussion activities in the same

classroom at nine time points across seven weeks during the study. Table 1 below outlines the timeline of research activities. The teacher facilitated three discussions of three different texts as part of her literacy curriculum that focused on asking questions during the reading process. Text #1 had six culturally relevant features specific to the classroom children, text #2 had four culturally relevant features, and text #3 had two culturally relevant features. Furthermore, the children rated each text on the Cultural Relevance Rubric (Ebe, 2010) after the final discussion for the corresponding text. Text selection and features are discussed subsequently.

I warmly greeted the teacher and children each visit. I set up the video or audio equipment, and then sat quietly at a desk next to the rug on which the children sat during the discussion activities. I focused on listening, observing, and taking detailed field notes of children's responses during the discussion. I video recorded the first reading and discussion of the first text. While video recording, I took detailed observational field notes of the discussion activity. I returned to the classroom the following day or in a few days to audio record the second literature discussion of the same text and also take field notes during the discussion. I returned to the classroom on the day of the final discussion of the same text in order to audio record the discussion and to take observational field notes. Field notes were typed into formal narratives after observations.

Table 1. Timeline of Data Collection

| Dates | Research Activity |
|---|---|
| **December and February** | **First Phase of Study**<br>**Introductions and Data Collection** |
| • December | • Introduce to students<br>• Volunteer in classroom for day<br>• Distribute consent forms with support of teacher |
| • January | • Conduct initial semi-structured interview with teacher<br>• Collect consent forms with support of teacher |
| • February | • Practice setting up and using video and audio equipment in classroom<br>• Collect final consent forms with support of teacher |
| **February and March** | **Second Phase of Study**<br>• **Data collection**<br>• **Transcribing and On-going data analysis** |
| **February** | **Text 1: *Mi propio cuartito* (*My Very Own Room*)** |
| • February | • Video record first literature discussion activity<br>• Take observational field notes of discussion activity |
| • February | • Audio record second literature discussion activity<br>• Take observational field notes of discussion activity |
| • February | • Audio record third literature discussion activity<br>• Take observational field notes of discussion activity<br>• Begin transcribing the three recorded discussions from text 1 |
| **March** | **Text 2: *El pollo de los domingos* (*Chicken Sunday*)** |
| • March | • Video record first literature discussion activity<br>• Take observational field notes of discussion activity |
| • March | • Audio record second literature discussion activity<br>• Take observational field notes of discussion activity |
| • March | • Audio record third literature discussion activity<br>• Take observational field notes of discussion activity<br>• Begin transcribing the three recorded discussions from text 2 |
| • March | • Semi-structured interview with teacher about context of texts 1 and 2 |
| **March and April** | **Text 3: *El camino de Amelia* (*My Very Own Room*)** |
| • March | • Video record first literature discussion activity<br>• Take observational field notes of discussion activity |
| • March | • Audio record second literature discussion activity<br>• Take observational field notes of discussion activity |
| • March | • Audio record third literature discussion activity<br>• Take observational field notes of discussion activity<br>• Begin transcribing and the three recorded discussions from Text 3 |
| • April | • Semi-structured interview with teacher about transcribed excerpts from texts 1 and 2 |
| • April | • Semi-structured interview with teacher about context and transcribed excerpts from text 3 |
| • August | • Final semi-structured interview with teacher |

In addition, the teacher distributed the Cultural Relevance Rubric (Ebe, 2013) to the children after the final discussion of each text. She collected them after the children rate the text and give them to me. Children's names were removed from the rubrics and replaced with their assigned codes. I assigned each child a number from 1 to 23, and labeled the rubrics with the child's corresponding code before cutting off the top of the rubric where the children had written

their names.  I followed this procedure twice more with the other two texts.  I transcribed all

video and audio recordings of the discussions.

**Text Selection**

Three high-quality realistic fiction books were used in this study.  Table 2 summarizes

the culturally relevant features of each book as relevant to this population of children.

Table 2. Culturally Relevant Features of Each Text

| Feature | Text # 1 *Mi propio cuartito/My Very Own Room* | Text #2 *El camino de Amelia/Amelia's Road* | Text #3 *El pollo de los domingos/ Chicken Sunday* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shared ethnicities: "Do the characters really look like me and my family?" | Yes | Yes | No |
| Contemporary: "Could the situations and events in the story happen today?" | Yes | Yes | No |
| Familiar settings: "Is this place familiar to me?" | No* | No* | No* |
| Familiar situations and experiences: "Can I relate my everyday experiences and prior knowledge to what is happening in the story?" | Yes | No | No* |
| Linguistic characteristics: "Do the characters in this story sound like me and my family?" | Yes | Yes | No |
| Gender:  Are there girl characters for girls and boy characters for boys? | Yes | No | Yes |
| Age:  Are the characters about the same age as me? | Yes | Yes | Yes |

The author of text #1, *My Very Own Room/Mi propio cuartito,* is a bilingual Mexican-

American, and she wrote the text in both English and Spanish.  The story is about an event from

the author's own childhood.  The book begins by informing the reader that the main character

shared a bedroom with her five brothers.  The story shows how her family worked together to

clear a small closet in their home so that she could have her very own room. Her uncle, who is returning to Mexico, delivers his bed, and the family fill their coupon book to buy a lamp for the sister's new room. At the end the sister invites her brother to her new room for a bedtime story.

The author of text #2, *Amelia's Road/El camino de Amelia*, is Linda Jacobs Altman. The text was translated into Spanish by Daniel Santacruz. Both *My Very Own Room* and *Amelia's Road,* received awards from their publishing company. The story depicts the experiences of a young girl who is a migrant farmworker. She longs for her permanent home and a life in which she no longer has to work so hard. In the beginning of the story, she cries each time her father pulls out a roadmap because this means her family is about to move again. During the story she finds a special tree, a place to call her own. At the end of the story, she does not cry when her father pull out the map.

The author of text #3, Chicken Sunday/El pollo de los domingos, is Patricia Polacco. The text was translated into Spanish by Alejandra López Varela. The story depicts events from the author's childhood and features intergenerational and interracial relationships. The author attends mass each week with the boys next door and their grandmother. A shopkeeper who emigrated from Russia accuses the boys and girl of throwing eggs at his store. The children paint Russian Easter eggs for him to demonstrate that they care about him and did not harm his store.

The three texts featured similar levels of text complexity. Information was collected from booksource.com, Scholastic.com, leeandlow.com to evaluate the text complexity for each book. Table 3 presents the with Lexile, Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading, and Accelerated Reading levels for each text.

Table 3. Lexile and Guided Reading Levels for Each Text

| Text | Lexile Level | Guided Reading Level | Accelerated Reading Level |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Text #1**<br>*Mi propio cuartito/My Very Own Room* | 700 | L, O | 3.9 |
| **Text #2**<br>*El camino de Amelia/Amelia's Road* | 780 | M, P | 4.1 |
| **Text #3**<br>*El pollos de los domingos/ Chicken Sunday* | 650 | N | 3.7 |

Notably, the publishers of *My Very Own Room/Mi propio cuartito* and *Amelia's Road/El camino de Amelia*, Lee and Low Books, assigned these texts guided reading levels of O and P, respectively. Booksource assigned them levels L and M, respectively. Scholastic.com assigned *Amelia's Road/El camino de Amelia* and *Chicken Sunday/El pollo de los domingos* the guided reading levels M and N, respectively.

**Planned Discussion Activities for Each Text**

The format for the discussion of each text followed a pattern. During the first activity for each text the teacher read aloud the entire story. Each read aloud was very interactive with both the children and teacher interjecting comments throughout. The teacher paused frequently to ask both literal and inferential questions about events and characters in each text, while children responded chorally and individually at different times throughout the reading aloud.

The way in which the teacher introduced each text differed, however. The teacher conducted a pre-reading activity for Text #1, *For My Very Own Room,* in which she explicitly asked the children to talk with a partner about their sleeping spaces at home. Before reading Text #2, *Chicken Sunday,* she briefly reviewed main events with the children and reminded them

to listen for important events in the text. She also asked them to make a prediction of an important event that might occur in the text. Before reading Text #3, *Amelia's Road*, the teacher engaged the children in talking about the cover illustration and making predictions about what the character, Amelia, was doing in the illustration and why.

The teacher selected an activity called the "hot seat" to implement during the second discussion activity for each text. This activity supported the generation of authentic questions during and after the reading process, a key comprehension strategy and objective for the discussion activities of each text. For the "hot seat," children generate questions to ask one or more characters in a text. Then different children take turns in the "hot seat" in which a child chooses one character from the text and respond to peers' questions from the point of view of the chosen character. The children had experience generating questions for texts read, but they had never participated in the hot seat activity before data collection began. As previously mentioned, the teacher also planned to ask the children to determine the author's message for each text. Thus the second and third discussions for each text would feature the "hot seat" activity and some discussion around the author's message.

**Differences in Discussion Activities for Each Text**

Table 4 displays the duration of each discussion activity and the total duration of discussions for each text. The length of discussion activities for each text is one key factor that affected the opportunities that children had to draw on prior knowledge and comprehension during each discussion and across the three discussions for each text. Additional differences among discussion activities for each text are discussed below.

Table 4. Length of Audio Recordings for Each Discussion

| Text | Discussion Activity 1 | Discussion Activity 2 | Discussion Activity 3 | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Text #1** *Mi propio cuartito/My Very Own Room* | 42:40 | 54:27 | 25:37 | 2:02:44 |
| **Text #2** *El camino de Amelia/Amelia's Road* | 27:07 | 45:31 | 33:45 | 1:46:23 |
| **Text #3** *El pollo de los domingos/ Chicken Sunday* | 35:37 | 21:33 | 30 | 1:27:10 |
| Total | | | | 5:16:17 |

## Text #1: My Very Own Room

Below is an excerpt from the second interview conducted with the teacher in which she described how this book fit within the curriculum and a bit about her text selection.

…this book is about family and family is something that they can connect to… they have siblings and sometimes they may even have problems with their siblings so it's nice for them to see…a role model in the fact of how these kids interacted with each other, how they made the best of their situations, and how they were so close. [T]hey might either relate to the characters or they might learn from those characters that even if they live in a cramped apartment or they don't have a lot of space they can still nurture and take care of each other... They have to see how books can actually relate to them or teach them something and so part of classroom community but even beyond classroom community. How does your family fit in that context of responsibility…or respect?... I think that certain stories lend themselves to the hot seat because the characters—it's not just the main character—it's about the people around her and how they interact with her or…either help her or hurt her…I think that it just lends itself nicely because…there were a lot of characters that you could ask questions of, not just the girl….[T]he story is complex.  It has layers because characters that you think are secondary are sort of central to the theme so I thought that it's perfect for questioning because there are lots of characters and there are lots of questions so the well won't run dry. (Personal communication, March 17, 2017)

As described above, the pre-reading activity for each text differed, but the read aloud for each text featured similar opportunities for interaction. There were more significant differences among the second and third discussion activities for each text. As five days passed between the initial reading of Text #1, *My Very Own Room,* and the second discussion, the teacher spent significant time rereading and reviewing key parts of the text with the children during the second discussion in order to prepare them for the hot seat activity. Then in pairs the children generated questions for one of the characters in the text. After the children had generated and shared several questions, the teacher introduced the hot seat. She had planned to model the hot seat activity for the children but decided in the moment that they were ready to begin without her demonstration.

In the third discussion activity for *My Very Own Room*, the teacher asked the children to talk about the author's message with a partner, and both the teacher and children talked about the message. The teacher then asked the children a series of questions about why the child wanted her own room and whether or not they agreed that she should have her own space.

**Text #3: Chicken Sunday**

Below is an excerpt from the second interview conducted with the teacher in which she described how this book fit within the curriculum and a bit about her text selection.

> I want to expose kids to books that they normally wouldn't choose and they normally wouldn't think are relatable to them at all. I mean even though I had to call out the elephant in the room because none of them pointed out—they're black and she's white and none of them y pointed it out… So I want to make sure that they are exposed to books other than what they might normally gravitate towards. And it is again another piece of realistic fiction and there are multiple messages that you can get from that book… They [the classroom students] go to [a] school that's very multicultural and there are kids from other countries and there are kids who are different from them, and they could see that—I could have a friend who's not necessarily the same race as me, you

know?... . But hopefully [the story] does encourage them to think about the other kids at [their school] that are not Mexican or Latino that could be good friends, but it's hard… I think if you're going to teach author's message or questioning…you can use books with characters that the kids can relate to, and the kids can, and if they don't relate to them, they can ask those questions… (Personal communication, March 17, 2017)

The teacher paused frequently while reading aloud *Chicken Sunday* to ask open-ended and literal questions about events and characters. The discussion activities for *Chicken Sunday* occurred on three consecutive days.  Although the teacher had planned to implement the hot seat for the second discussion activity of *Chicken Sunday*, the second of three texts in the study, the format changed somewhat.  The teacher spent significant time discussing the importance of comprehension and generating authentic questions before the children began generating questions with a partner.  The physical education teacher entered the room after approximately 15 minutes while the children were reporting on the questions their partners had generated.  The physical education class schedule had changed due to testing in the upper grades, and the teacher was going to conduct the class earlier than usual.  The teacher asked him to wait a few minutes and finished the question generation and sharing part of the activity.  Due to the change in schedule, the children finished the "hot seat" during the final discussion of this text.

In the third discussion of *Chicken Sunday*, the teacher quickly reviewed key parts of the text and a few questions the children had generated the previous day.  Then the children participated in the hot seat activity.  At the end of the observation they children shared their interpretations of the author's message with a partner.  Unlike the final discussion for *My Very Own Room* and *Amelia's Road*, the teacher and children did not have sufficient time to explore additional questions for *Chicken Sunday*.

**Text #2: Amelia's Road**

Below is an excerpt from the fourth interview conducted with the teacher in which she

described how this book fit within the curriculum and her purpose for selecting it.

> I felt that the Amelia book was a good [book for] building prior knowledge and
> background for [the students] because when they do see that unit [about César Chávez] in
> fourth grade, hopefully they'll remember that book or have some connections to that
> book….The topic will at least be vaguely familiar to them because [the students] are not
> farmworkers, they don't live in California, but I could tell some of them shared with their
> parents because they would come back and talk about how hard their parents worked….
> So in that way, it was somewhat culturally relevant… books like Ruby Bridges or Amelia
> lend themselves so beautifully to questioning and justice and…why does she have to
> work, why does she have to transfer schools. Some of the kids made comments about
> [how] she shouldn't have to work, she's a kid, she should be in school. And so it starts to
> awaken an awareness even in their little minds that there are unjust things happening in
> the world and just people who look like them and maybe not to them directly….maybe
> their parents experience that. I think it's important to start planting that seed at their
> level, you know? (Personal communication, April 11, 2017)
>
> I: The main goal you had in mind—it was asking questions during the reading process,
> right? And then to expose them to something—
>
> T: That's got a social justice theme.

The teacher often paused during the reading aloud of *Amelia's Road* to ask children open-

ended and literal questions about events and characters. The second discussion activity for this

text followed the same format as the second activity of *My Very Own Room*; the teacher

reviewed key parts of the story, the children generated questions, and then they participated in

the hot seat activity. The teacher also asked the children to share the author's message in pairs at

the end of the second discussion. She decided to collapse the author's message with the "hot

seat" so that the children would have more opportunities to respond to the questions they had

generated in the final discussion. In the final discussion activity of *Amelia's Road*, the teacher

reviewed the questions the children had generated for Amelia during the hot seat activity

conducted the previous week.  The children then shared responses to different questions with a partner and reported on their partner's and their own responses.

Hence, while the objectives for each discussion activity of each text were very similar, the formats for each discussion varied somewhat.  In addition, the length of each discussion activity and combined length of the three discussions varied.  It is important to document these variations because they affected the opportunities children had to draw on prior knowledge and comprehension when discussing each text.

**The "Hot Seat"**

The "hot seat" discussion activity clearly lends itself to the generation of multiple questions about characters in a text. The children frequently generated "why" questions that required the child in the hot seat to draw an inference in order to respond.  For example, Carolina asked the child in the hot seat, Gaby, why she liked books so much. Gaby's response was "because I can learn a lot from them." Occasionally children generated questions that required the child in the hot seat to draw explicitly on evidence in the text to respond.  For example, Enrique asked Bety, the child interpreting the mother in *My Very Own Room*, why she did not let her daughter have the room in the beginning of the story.  Bety drew directly on the text and responded that the room was being used to store several things.  The comprehension codes I selected to describe children's comprehension evident in oral responses did not include literal comprehension, when the child draws directly on evidence explicitly stated in the text.  Hence when children cited and paraphrased evidence from the text in order to respond to a question, this type of oral response was not included in the frequency counts of comprehension.

**Data Analysis**

To address the study questions, the primary unit of analysis is the oral responses of each child within the study sample. Children's oral responses were either the direct oral responses of a child participant or the oral responses of a child participant as reported by another child or on occasion, the teacher. When part of a child's oral response was inaudible, if I was able to clearly determine the gist based on the audible words in the response and on the context, I coded it. Likewise, when parts of a child's oral response was inaudible but the teacher repeated or rephrased the response, I also coded the response as necessary.

There were multiple occasions in which a child or children pointed out to the teacher that her rephrasing of a child's response was inaccurate. This demonstrated that the teacher's rephrasing could be relied upon to be accurate unless otherwise objected by the child who was speaking and possibly by her peers. In addition, children were quick to point out when a peer did not report her response accurately; however, this occurred very infrequently. This also demonstrated that children almost always provided an accurate oral rendering of their partner's ideas.

In order to capture the most accurate frequency with which children's oral responses featured evidence of prior knowledge and/or of a comprehension strategy in relation to total responses, I used the following procedure. First, I counted all teacher and student talk-turns. A talk turn is defined as any utterance, including *um, oh, hmm, yeah,* and *wow*, and cross-talk in which two or more children responded chorally or simultaneously, for example. I then omitted all single utterances similar to those listed above. All single-word responses, such as, "yes", "what?/*¿qué*?", "wow," and choral responses of "yes/*sí*" and "no" were omitted. All responses

that reflected the contributions of children not included in the study sample, and all responses from an unidentified speaker were also omitted.

When children's cross-talk was discernible and relevant to the discussion, I included it as a talk-turn. For example, on several occasions the teacher paused during reading aloud a text to quickly check for comprehension. She asked questions, such as, "how does the character feel now?" to which the group responded chorally, "*triste*/sad" or "*feliz*/happy." I counted these one-word responses because they were relevant to the discussion. When children participated in a pair share, I counted that as a single talk turn. There were frequent pair shares throughout the discussions, which suggests that the amount of child talk that included evidence of both prior knowledge and comprehension presented in the tables is under-reported.

Other types of responses omitted from the frequency count include the following:

(i)     when a child asked the teacher if she could share because her partner did not want to share her ideas;
(ii)    when a child uttered an incomplete one- or two-word response such as, "where um";
(iii)   extraneous talk such as, "there's room next to me," [for a peer to sit]';
(iv)    all procedural talk, such as each time a child in the hot seat called on a peer to ask a question and each time the teacher called a child's name to respond to a question.

Importantly, children's responses that demonstrated literal comprehension only were not assigned a comprehension code. As mentioned, the read aloud and discussion activities were very interactive, and featured a great deal of audible and relevant cross-talk and interjections from the children the demonstrated literal comprehension and basic inferences based on illustrations. All of these responses were included in the total number of oral responses during the discussion activities in order to capture the dynamic and interactive nature of the discussion activity context. All of the oral responses are directly related to the events, themes, and

characters in the story and are representative of children's comprehension and engagement. Certainly literal comprehension is both important and necessary in order for children to draw logical conclusions and synthesize key events and themes in text, for example. The purpose of this study, however, is to identify and document children's higher-level comprehension as described in the codebook.

The raw data collected in this study are comprised of hand-written field notes, audio and video recordings of book discussion activities and the audio recordings of interviews. In order to analyze these raw data, I converted field notes into expanded narratives and transcribed all discussion activities and interviews. The methods of data analysis in this study focus primarily on words in the form of children's and teacher's oral responses; hence the data are found in the words of the children and teacher (Miles et al., 2014).

**Research Questions and Data**

Table 5 summarizes the research questions investigated in the study and the data collected to address question #1. Can culturally relevant texts afford second-grade Spanish-English bilingual children primarily from working class backgrounds opportunities to draw on prior knowledge in comprehending a text during literature discussions?

Table 5. Sub-Questions and Data Collection for Question #1

| Sub-Question | Data Sources | Method of Qualitative Analysis | Method of Quantitative Analysis | Data Sources for Triangulation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. What evidence of prior knowledge is present in children's oral responses during discussions? | • Transcribed Book Discussion Activities | • Provisional and Descriptive Coding for Prior Knowledge | | • Observational Field Notes<br>• Field Notes Narratives<br>• Transcribed Teacher Interviews<br>• Video recordings |
| b. How frequently do children draw on prior knowledge in discussions? | • Transcribed Book Discussion Activities | | • Frequency Counts of Prior Knowledge Codes | • Observational Field Notes<br>• Field Notes Narratives<br>• Transcribed Teacher Interviews<br>• Video Recordings |
| c. What evidence of comprehension is present in children's oral responses in discussions? | • Transcribed Book Discussion Activities | • Provisional Coding for Comprehension | | • Observational Field Notes<br>• Field Notes Narratives<br>• Transcribed Teacher Interviews<br>• Video Recordings |

**Phase One of Data Analysis**

The first phase of data analysis began during data collection. "[T]he much preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 197). Each of the following analytic strategies is explained in detail below. I carefully read the interview transcripts, discussion transcripts, field notes and corresponding typed narratives of the notes. I also examined observational field notes for evidence of verbal exchanges and non-verbal behaviors that suggested or seemed to refute comprehension. I employed two sets of codes to begin preliminary analysis of these data. One set of codes was used to identify and describe evidence of prior knowledge, whereas the other set identified and

described evidence of comprehension. I engaged in the ongoing and careful cross checking of

the different sources of data to verify, disconfirm, and/or revise the coding of the transcribed

book discussion activity data.

I transcribed all discussions and teacher interviews, and I typed my field notes into

formal narratives. I provided word for word transcriptions of discussions, and inaudible words

were marked ( ) and inaudible phrases were marked (     ). When I could discern part of a word

or infer the word from the context of the response, I typed the word followed by a question mark

within parentheses [e.g., (route?)].

I chose to complete the transcriptions rather than contract a professional transcriptionist

because the process of listening to and transcribing the literature discussions was critical to initial

ongoing data analysis. The transcription process allowed me to listen closely to each discussion

and to particular sections of each discussion several times. While listening to each individual

response carefully and often multiple times as I transcribed each response, I was able to gain

what Saldaña (2011) refers to as "cognitive ownership" of my data (p. 90).

> Analysis is accelerated as you take cognitive ownership of your data. By reading and
> rereading the corpus, you gain intimate familiarity with its contents and begin to notice
> significant details as well as make new insights about their meanings. Patterns,
> categories, and their interrelationships become more evident the more you know the
> subtleties of the database. (p. 95)

Listening to discussion activities multiple times and transcribing the children's responses

played a critical role in the development of "data intimacy" (Saldaña, 2011). In addition, by

listening to audio recordings of a single discussion multiple times, I was able to capture different

children's voices during cross-talk and the responses from children who spoke more quietly

and/or who were seated farthest from the microphone. Moreover, I knew the children and was

much more likely to be able to accurately identify an unnamed speaker by using my field notes and my knowledge of the children.

I chose not to remove stutters, pauses, giggles, and repeated words from the children's responses. This reflects a naturalized approach to transcription (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). I chose this approach because my experience teaching and working with emergent bilingual children has demonstrated to me that children often use words such as "um" and may repeat words and phrases because they are processing their thoughts as they are speaking. Repetition and ums can serve as strategies that provide time for children to formulate and articulate their thoughts. In addition, "[t]alk is peppered with verbal and non-verbal signals that can change the tenor of conversations and meaning" (p. 1274). For example, children's laughter at appropriate moments during a text read aloud can suggest general comprehension and engagement. I removed repeated words and removed phrases such as, "like," "you know" from the teacher's responses in order to present her observations and interpretations as clearly as possible.

Likewise, I transcribed the five interviews with the teacher-participant. "Rather than hiring someone, transcribing your own interview is another means of generating insights and hunches about what is going on in your data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 200). I also included in field note reflections about the data that helped explore and synthesize key phenomena and conclusions about the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, pp. 95-96).

In addition, during data collection and after data collection while I was continuing to transcribe, listen to, and revise the transcriptions, I practiced using the provisional codes from the

codebook to conduct preliminary analyses.  I also recorded emerging patterns and themes that I noticed.

**Phase Two of Data Analysis**

When all data were collected, and all interviews and discussions were transcribed, I removed all personal identifiers from the transcripts.  I then employed ATLAS.ti qualitative software to store and organize these data.  To investigate the research questions, I employed qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods.  Miles et al. (2014) suggest that if researchers are going to use computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), they "should select one that seems compatible with your research needs and personal ways of working" (p. 48).  I used ATLAS.ti qualitative software while working on a previous project.  I found it an effective data organization and management system, and I found its tools very intuitive to use during data analysis. In addition, while this is primarily a qualitative study, I also conducted quantitative analysis by creating data tables and calculating percentages of key codes and responses.  Atlas.ti supports the creation of these tables that can then be exported to Microsoft excel.

During phase two of analysis, I examined the field notes, interview transcripts, and discussion transcripts for emerging patterns and themes and looked for what may be surprising and/or missing.  I coded each transcribed discussion using the codebook that is described in detail below. I also created new descriptive codes that emerged directly from the data.

I used data collected from children's and the teacher's ratings of each text on Ebe's (2010) Cultural Relevance Rubric to calculate the mean rating of cultural relevance for each text. I used these ratings, as well as data from field notes, interview transcripts, and analytic-memos,

to confirm, clarify, challenge, and extend my understandings and interpretations of evidence of prior knowledge and comprehension in children's responses in the discussion transcripts.

**Phase Three of Data Analysis**

In the final phase of analysis, I used the qualitative software to generate a series of frequency reports and data tables for each discussion and for each text. I moved back and forth between and among the data in order verify, clarify, and revise my thinking and coding during each phase of analysis. Thus, I used multiple sources of data to cross-check and corroborate my coding of the discussion transcripts. Triangulating the data in this way will lead to more valid identification of comprehension strategies and prior knowledge in the discussions more valid.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

In order to address the first primary question of the study—Can culturally relevant texts afford second-grade Spanish-English bilingual children primarily from working class backgrounds opportunities to draw on prior knowledge in comprehending a text during literature discussions?—I needed to address three sub-questions.

> a. What evidence of prior knowledge is present in children's oral responses during discussions?
> b. How frequently do children draw on prior knowledge in discussions?
> c. What evidence of comprehension is present in children's oral responses in discussions?

In order to determine what evidence of prior knowledge was present in children's oral responses, I first employed qualitative coding. I first generated a list of provisional codes for evidence of prior knowledge derived from Juzwik et al. (2008), whose embedded case study examined the relationship between oral narrative and discussion in a middle school classroom. Drawing on prior studies of oral narrative use in classrooms Juzwik et al. suggest that "oral

narrative genres might be useful for inviting a wide range of students' and teachers' voices and previous experiences into the classroom, contributing to a 'permeable curriculum' (Dyson, 1993) (Juzwik, 2008, p. 1118). Such a curriculum is one in which children's local experiences and language interact with those of the teacher to contribute to learning (Dyson, 1993). I selected the four of prior-knowledge based oral narratives employed in by Juzwik et al. (2008) as a way to describe evidence of prior knowledge children's oral responses during discussion activities. I anticipated that both the teacher and children would share a few experiences in this simple narrative form among the book discussions.

In order to address question 1a. and *identify evidence of prior knowledge present in children's oral responses during discussions* I used the coding protocol to assign descriptive codes to oral responses that featured evidence of a child's prior knowledge and experience. I employed the coding protocol described in the data analysis section of the previous chapter. Table 6 below reviews each prior knowledge-related code.

In order to address question 1b. and identify *how frequently children drew on prior knowledge in discussions*—I employed the qualitative software to generate data tables. The qualitative software allowed me to examine the types of children's oral responses featuring evidence of prior knowledge organized by discussion activity, by text, and by type of prior knowledge. This allowed me to identify and then describe evidence of prior knowledge present in children's responses during each discussion activity and for each text. Table 6 describes the evidence of and frequency with which prior knowledge was present in children's responses during each discussion activity for each text. This process also allowed me to count the frequency with which children drew on prior knowledge within oral responses.

In order to describe children's oral responses in discussions, I applied two sets of provisional codes to the transcribed discussion data (see Appendix I).  As previously discussed provisional codes serve as a "'start list' of researcher-generated codes," derived from the literature and study questions (Miles et al., 2014, p. 77).  In qualitative research, investigators typically revise and expand the list to incorporate new codes that emerge from the data.   The additional codes that emerged from the data served as descriptive codes or labels assigned to responses that summarize in a single word or short phrase the type or topic of the child's response (p. 74).

**The Development of a Codebook**

Creswell (2014) suggests assembling a codebook when applying a set of codes to describe segments of data. A codebook includes the following criteria: (i) a definition of each code; (ii) examples of data that fits the code definition; (iii) specific guidance for when and when not to use the code; and (iv) examples from the study data after coding has begun (Creswell, 2014; MacQueen, McLellan, Kay & Milstein, 1998). Thus I employed these criteria to develop one codebook for comprehension codes, and one codebook for prior knowledge codes to support the coding of transcribed data. I entered the codebooks into the qualitative data analysis software.

**Set of Prior Knowledge Provisional Codes**

The four provisional codes employed to identify and describe prior knowledge derived from empirical work in the field of language and literacy education (Juzwik et al., 2003; Soter et al., 2008), and are grounded in both schema and sociocultural theory.  I employed these codes to identify and label evidence of the following:

(i)     *personal singular narratives*, defined as "once-occurrent narratives about one's own experience" (Juzwik et al., 2008, p. 1133);

(ii)    (ii) *personal singular statements*, defined as a statement about one's own experience;

(iii)   (iii) *vicarious narratives or statements*, ones "about experiences that happened to others" (Juzwik et al., 2008, p. 1133); and

(iv)    *shared knowledge narratives and statements* (Soter et al., 2008) that reference knowledge and/or experiences related to shared classroom experiences, such as a prior text and discussion or a field trip.  Additionally, within these four broad descriptive codes, patterns, themes, and relationships regarding narrative topics may emerge from the data.

Table 6. Prior Knowledge Codes

| Code | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Personal Singular Narrative | Personal singular narratives are "once-occurrent narratives about one's own experience" or the experiences of a family member that are shared with a child that are typically "characterized by simple past tense or historical present tense" (Juzwik, et al., 2008, p. 1133). | *A mi no me gusta mi hermanito chiquito, no, que va a la casa porque la otra vez yo necesitaba quedar a las en el domingo yo necesitaba quedar a las 3 de la mañana porque se duerme tarde.*<br>I don't like my little brother, no, that he comes to the house because the other time I had to stay until—on Sunday I had to stay [up] [until] 3 in the morning because he falls asleep late. |
| Personal Singular Statement | Personal singular statements are statements about one's own experiences or the experiences of a family member that is shared with the child. | *Y también cuando mi mama se va a dormir como estos días lleva trabajar y con mi tía um s—ellas se levantan a las 4.* And also when my mom goes to sleep like those days that she works and with my aunt um s—they get up at 4. |
| Vicarious Statement | Vicarious statements are ones "about experiences that happened to others" and are similar to text-to-world connections (Juzwik et al., 2008, p. 1133). | *O maybe ellos viven en México y allí no hay mucho dinero por eso—*<br>Or maybe they live in Mexico and over there there isn't much money [and] for that reason— (therefore, that's why) |
| Shared Knowledge Statement | Shared knowledge is a final type of prior knowledge based on shared classroom learning experiences (Soter et al., 2008), such as knowledge based on texts previously discussed and knowledge related to class field trips. | *Que ellas dos tuvieron su propio sueño.*<br>That they both had their own dream.<br>(Referring to what main characters from two different texts shared in common) |

Labov (1972) defines an oral narrative within a body of discourse data as two temporally sequenced clauses linked by causality (Juzwik, 2006b, p. 16).  An example from a discussion activity follows.  "También mi papá se vino acá porque allá necesitaba [trabajar] en el mecánico con su papá." [*Also my father came here because over there he needed [to work] at the mechanic shop with his dad*.]  This child's father came to the U.S. because he had to work in his country of origin.  The assumption underlying this brief narrative is that the father came to the U.S. because he was unable to earn sufficient money working with his father in his country of origin.  A

statement is less complex than a narrative and typically includes fewer words.  For example, *"Mi mama se levanta a las 4 [a.m.]"* [My mom gets up at 4 [a.m.]

**Set of Provisional Comprehension Codes**

This study employed five reading comprehension strategy codes related to evidence of comprehension. The five comprehension codes were derived from Miller (2002) and Keene and Zimmermann (2007) and based on work by Pearson et al. (1992) that identifies strategies that proficient and expert readers and comprehenders employ. The comprehension codes are:

(i)     activating schema—text-to-self connections;
(ii)    activating schema—text-to-text connections;
(iii)   activating schema—text-to-world connections;
(iv)    questioning;
(v)     drawing inferences;
(vi)    synthesizing, as outlined in the review of literature.

I employed the coding protocol described in the data analysis section of the previous chapter.  Table 7 describes each comprehension-related code in detail.  This coding process allowed me to identify and describe the types of comprehension strategies on which children drew when responding during discussions.

A *text-to-self connection* occurs when children use their schema to make a meaningful and relevant connection from the text to themselves.  A *text-to-text connection* occurs when children draw on relevant schema related to another text while reading a new one and do so in a meaningful way.  Likewise, a *text-to-world* connection occurs when children draw on their knowledge of the world (e.g., current events) to make a meaningful and relevant connection to the text.  *Drawing an inference* is evidenced when children "create a meaning that is neither stated explicitly in the text nor shown in the illustrations" (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007, p. 167). Asking a question is evidenced when children generate an original question about the text.

*Synthesizing* is evidenced when children restate or retell smaller sections and/or events of a story

in an original way that communicates the gist of that section or event (Miller, 2013).

Table 7. Types of Children's Oral Responses Featuring Evidence of Comprehension

| Comprehension Codes | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Activating Schema—Text-to-Self Connection | A *text-to-self connection* occurs when children use their schema to make a meaningful and relevant connection from the text to themselves. | *También mi papá se vino acá porque allá necesitaba [trabajar] en el mecánico con su papá.* My dad also came here because over there he had to work at the mechanic [shop] with his dad. |
| Activating Schema—Text-to-Text Connection | A *text-to-text connection* occurs when children draw on relevant schema related to another text while reading a new one and do so in a meaningful way. | *Que ellas dos tuvieron su propio sueño.* That they both had their own dream. (Referring to what main characters from two different texts shared in common) |
| Activating Schema—Text-to-World Connection | A *text-to-world* connection occurs when children draw on their knowledge of the world (e.g. current events) to make a meaningful and relevant connection to the text. | *O maybe ellos viven en Mexico y allí no hay mucho dinero por eso—* Or maybe they live in Mexico and over there there is not much money. |
| Drawing an inference | *Drawing an inference* is evidenced when children "create a meaning that is neither stated explicitly in the text nor shown in the illustrations" (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007, p. 167), including predictions | *(¿Por qué subiste la cama  gustan mucho los huevos que te pintaron los niños? )* *Porque son de mi país y los extraño.* (Why do you like the eggs the children painted so much?) Because they are from my country and I miss them. |
| Asking a Question | *Asking a question* is evidenced when children generate an original question about an aspect of the text | *[Amelia,]¿Por qué necesitan ayudar a sus papas?* [Amelia,]Why did you need to help your parents? |
| Synthesizing | *Synthesizing* is evidenced when children restate or retell smaller sections and/or events of a story in an original way that communicates the gist of that section or event Synthesis is about what happened and the reader's evolving understanding about the big ideas in the book. (Miller, 2002, p. 185). | (Why did you let [the] brothers in?) *Porque me ayudaron a hacer mi cuarto y yo quería leerles un cuento.* Because they helped me make my room and I wanted to read them a story. |

**Observational Field Notes**

As previously mentioned, I took observational field notes during each discussion. Field

notes and written narratives of notes served to contextualize the quantitative data generated in

data tables. Two examples of how observational field notes and narratives supported data

analysis follow.  When observing the discussion activities, I frequently counted how many hands

were raised to respond to questions and invitations to share one's ideas and participate.  When

analyzing the quantity and quality of the children's responses during the discussion of *El camino*

*de Amelia/Amelia's Road*, I used my observational field notes and narratives to confirm and elaborate on my interpretation that the children had a very difficult time understanding key events and character motivation in the story. In the following excerpt, I observed a child's body language and eye movement that suggested both effort and uncertainty.

> The teacher asks for a student who has never been in the hot seat and selects Yesenia. (OC [Observer comment]: Yesenia is kind of quiet in general.) She pauses a while before responding, [to her peers' questions] too. She leans forward in her seat, and responds, "no sé" [I don't know] to the question about why she [as the character, Amelia] has to get up so early. She looked around and to the teacher after she said no sé. She is really trying, though. She is learning forward in the seat. The teacher says it's difficult—she [the teacher] acknowledges that it is difficult to understand why Amelia would have to get up so early [each morning to work before going to school at 8 a.m.]. (Observational field notes narrative, March 24, 2017)

Yesenia leans forward rather than sitting straight and comfortably in the chair just before she states that she does not know the answer for the question. This body language suggests that she is not comfortable and confident, which mirrors her response. She looked to the teacher either to seek help or to see the teacher's reaction. The teacher's warm and understanding relationships with her students suggest that Yesenia looked to the teacher for support.

In addition, I made observer comments in the field note narratives to record interpretations and to synthesize observations. For example, I recorded the following in a field note narrative for text #2, *Amelia's Road*.

> T [The teacher] seemed to relate more to Cuartito and Amelia. T had more connections with both. She had more experiences and personal stories that related to the themes and key events of both texts. Children's capacity to draw on their own prior knowledge seems to mirror the teacher's capacity. The children drew on their prior knowledge and experiences the most when reading and discussing Mi propio cuartito. The teacher's deep understanding of her students' home and community lives and experiences shaped the pre-reading pair share. During discussions, her modeling of her own personal connections prompted children to reflect on their family experiences that related to the family in the text. (Observational field notes narrative, March 24, 2017)

This type of brief reflection allowed me to synthesize and document general perceptions based on the field notes that I had taken.

**Video Recordings**

Video recordings were also useful in capturing non-verbal behaviors, such as gestures. During the read aloud of Text #1, *My Very Own Room*, video captured Yesenia gesturing with her hands for emphasis as she responded to a question. Her gesture and response together suggested that she had expertise with the topic of the question. Video captured other non-verbal behaviors associated with comprehension, including when Beto raised his hands in the air to cheer during a key part of one of the texts.

**Teacher Interviews**

Questions for teacher interviews derived from the study questions and literature review. For example, I asked the teacher several questions about her experiences using CRTs, including how she knows when she has found a good CRT—a text that seems like a good cultural match for her students. I also asked her describe and interpret excerpts of children's oral responses during discussions. This allowed me to collect information about the teacher's interpretations of evidence of prior knowledge and/or comprehension. The teacher's interpretations also served to corroborate or challenge my interpretations of the data. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix J.

In summary, in order to describe children's oral responses in discussions, I applied two sets of codes to the transcribed discussion data in the proposed study. I coded each transcribed literature discussion first for evidence of prior knowledge and then for evidence of comprehension before beginning to code another transcribed discussion. Coding each discussion

for prior knowledge and then for comprehension before moving to another transcribed discussion allowed me to consider each discussion more holistically. I also used these two coding schemes as a lens to examine the observational field notes of the discussions and the transcribed teacher interviews. This allowed me to challenge, clarify, and confirm my interpretations of the children's responses during discussions.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

For question 1, in order to determine *what evidence of prior knowledge is present in children's oral responses* and *how frequently children draw on prior knowledge in discussions*, I also employed quantitative data analysis. The software allowed me to generate descriptive data tables to demonstrate the types and frequency of incidents of prior knowledge evident within each discussion and each text. Likewise, in order to determine *what evidence of comprehension is present in children's oral responses*, data tables are employed to indicate the types and frequency of comprehension strategies evident within each discussion and each text.

For question 2, I also generated tables to identify the co-occurrence and contingent uses of prior knowledge and comprehension codes within the same discussion. These tables examined *how incidences of prior knowledge are connected with evidence of comprehension in discussions*. I searched for and described patterns and relationships between evidence of prior knowledge and comprehension strategies within discussions and across the different texts. In addition, I examined the relationship between specific variables, such as what particular type of prior knowledge, if any, was associated positively or negatively with a particular comprehension strategy.

Finally, I used the children's, teacher's and researcher's ratings of cultural relevance for each text collected from the Cultural Relevance Rubric (Ebe, 2010) to generate a descriptive table that displays the mean rating for each text and for each feature of cultural relevance for each text. These data allow me to compare children's and teacher's impressions of a text's cultural relevance to the frequency of evidence of comprehension strategies and prior knowledge present in each discussion and across discussions of each text.  These data can reveal whether there is a relationship between children's perceptions of the cultural relevance of a text and the frequency and quality of their oral responses during discussion of that text.

**Triangulation of Data**

This study employs data source triangulation.  "Stripped to its basics, triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that at least three independent measures of it agree with it, or at least, do not contradict it" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 299).  Data triangulation in this study was established with observational field notes of all discussion activities, video recordings of three discussions, audio recordings of six discussions, and transcribed and analyzed transcripts of all discussions. I also conducted interviews about the discussions with the teacher who facilitated them.  Thus findings can be confirmed through data collected from multiple sources regarding the same phenomenon, the literature discussion activities.

Furthermore, I checked the consistency of findings that emerged from different methods of data collection (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2014).  I used quantitative data from the rubric ratings (Ebe, 2010), and descriptive quantitative data from the frequency tables to examine the cultural relevance of texts and to interpret oral responses. I also used qualitative data collected from observational field notes, audio and video recorded discussions, and teacher interviews to

analyze and characterize oral responses. These methods of triangulation can yield corroboration of findings.

In addition, I carefully monitored different ways to interpret the data collected. For example, when I noticed that children made inferences more frequently when discussing one of the texts, I carefully reread the transcripts and field notes to closely analyze the questions the teacher asked during the discussions.  I also asked the teacher for her insights.

**Direct Quotations and Counting**

I used direct quotations from the child discussion data and the teacher interview data. Using a child's own words to illustrate when she draws on prior knowledge to comprehend in a discussion exchange, for example, lends validity to findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Likewise, "counting," through the use of data tables also helped keep me "analytically honest" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 282).  The frequency counts of evidence that children drew on prior knowledge when using comprehension strategies can also lend validity to conclusions.

**Participant Feedback**

Finally, I collected feedback from the teacher-participant during the post-discussion interviews.  I also conducted an interview with the teacher-participant in which she provided feedback on some of the preliminary findings so that I was able to check for accuracy of interpretations and descriptions.  This feedback can corroborate later key findings.

## Reliability

Coding reliability was established by having a second bilingual teaching professional code 16% of the transcripts.  Intercoder reliability is considered a "measure of the degree to which the coding of two or more equally qualified coders match when everyone's coding is done

in isolation from the rest without negotiation" (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013, pp. 305-306). The former colleague was a bilingual kindergarten, second, and third grade teacher in Spanish-English dual language schools. He was also a bilingual literacy coach in a dual language elementary school for six years. He was not familiar with my proposed research topic or study but had extensive knowledge around reading comprehension and literature discussions. As the sole author of the codebook, it was important to recruit a less biased coder to determine reliability.

Miles et al. (2014) suggest that intercoder agreement fall within the range of 85% to 90% (p. 85), whereas other social scientists have suggested adequate intercoder correlations from 70% to 94% (Fahy, 2001, as cited in Campbell et al., 2013, p. 310). Campbell et al. draw on Miles and Huberman (1984) to determine the level of reliability for individual codes; I follow their protocol. I divide the number of agreements for each code by the number of agreements and disagreements combined (Campbell et al., 2013) to determine the level of intercoder reliability for individual codes. I employ the same method to determine overall intercoder reliability for all double-coded codes. For example, there are 69 instances in which my colleague and/or I assigned the inference code to a child's response. There were 10 incidences among the 69 where we did not agree. The level of reliability for the inference code was 59/69 or 85.5 percent (Campbell et al., 2013, p. 309).

Of the 118 oral responses double-coded, 86 percent were in agreement. Table 8 displays the agreement for the two most salient prior knowledge codes, the most salient comprehension code, and the comprehension code with the lowest agreement.

Table 8. Inter-coder Reliability

| Code | Number of Coded Responses in Agreement | Percentage of Coded Responses in Agreement |
|---|---|---|
| Prior Knowledge—Personal Singular Narrative | 7/8 | 87.50% |
| Prior Knowledge—Personal Singular Statement | 16/17 | 94.12% |
| Comprehension—Inference | 59/69 | 85.51% |
| Comprehension—Synthesis | 5/10 | 50% |
| All codes | 102/118 | 86.44% |

Notably, the other coder denoted that five of the 10 incidences of disagreement for the inference code were evidence of literal comprehension. These five incidences derived from discussions of *Amelia's Road*. The reader coded the other five disagreements as synthesis. The lack of agreement on children's statements that were coded as evidence of synthesis stems from the similarity between the definitions. Restating part of a story in an original way and that represents "the reader's evolving understanding about the big ideas in the book" typically requires a reader to make an inference (Miller, 2002, p. 185). For all five disagreements, the other coder assigned an inference code where I had assigned a synthesis code.

This chapter provided detailed discussion of the study's design and procedures for data analysis. The next chapter moves to the analysis of the data collected.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents description, analysis and discussion of the research findings. The overarching questions of the study include: Can culturally relevant texts afford second-grade Spanish-English bilingual children primarily from working class backgrounds opportunities to draw on prior knowledge in comprehending a text during literature discussions? How does drawing on prior knowledge contribute to the quality and depth of children's talk as evidenced by comprehension strategies they employ in literature discussions? The first section of the chapter addresses the three first sub-questions by discussing the *evidence of prior knowledge present in children's oral responses*, *how frequently children draw it,* and *evidence of comprehension present in children's oral responses in discussions*. Descriptive data tables will indicate the types and frequency of incidents of prior knowledge evident within each discussion and each text. Data tables also outline the types and frequency of comprehension strategies evident within each discussion and each text.

As described in the discussion of methodology and data analysis in Chapter 3, I employed provisional and descriptive codes to analyze the primary unit of analysis, children's oral responses during book discussion activities. In order to address the first question, *whether culturally relevant texts can afford second-grade Spanish-English bilingual children primarily from working class backgrounds opportunities to draw on prior knowledge in comprehending a text during literature discussions,* I needed to address the following three sub-questions.

96

d. What evidence of prior knowledge is present in children's oral responses during discussions?

e. How frequently do children draw on prior knowledge in discussions?

f. What evidence of comprehension is present in children's oral responses in discussions?

Data in Table 9 yield four key findings regarding the identification of and frequency with which children drew on prior knowledge during discussions of texts with different levels of cultural relevance.

**Prior Knowledge**

Table 9. Data on Prior Knowledge in Book Discussions

| Text | Discus-sion Activity | *Personal Singular Narrative* | *Personal Singular State-ment* | *Vicarious Statement* | *Shared Know-ledge* | *Total* | *Total Number of Oral Responses* | *Percentage of PK responses* | *Number of sample children who drew on PK* | *Percentage of sample children who drew on PK* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mi propio cuartito | First | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 71 | 21.13% | 11 | 66.67% |
| | Second | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 112 | 1% | 1 | 6.67% |
| *(My Very Own Room)* | Third | 6 | 9 | 0 | 3 | 17 | 68 | 25% | 9 | 60% |
| | Total | 11 | 19 | 0 | 3 | **33** | **251** | **13.15%** | **14** | **86.66%** |
| El camino de Amelia | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 104 | 3.85% | 3 | 20% |
| | 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 119 | 3.36% | 2 | 13.33% |
| | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 54 | 7.41% | 2 | 13.33% |
| *(Amelia's Road)* | Total | 1 | 6 | 2 | 3 | **12** | **280** | **4.29%** | **5** | **33.33%** |
| El pollo de los domingos | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 7 | 83 | 8.4% | 7 | 46.67% |
| | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 31 | 0% | 1 | 6.67% |
| | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 70 | 2.9% | 3 | 20% |
| *(Chicken Sundays)* | Total | 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 | **9** | **184** | **4.89%** | **8** | **53.33%** |
| Total Across All discussions | | 15 | 22 | 2 | 9 | 54 | 715 | 7.55% | 15 | 100% |

First, evidence of children's prior knowledge and experiences in oral responses during discussion activities most frequently took the form of personal statements and narratives. Secondly, evidence of prior knowledge was present in children's oral contributions most

frequently during discussions of the text with the highest cultural relevance, Text #1, *My Very Own Room*, in particular during the third discussion. All but one child contributed responses in which evidence of prior knowledge was present during the discussion of this text.

Third, child data indicate that children's oral responses presented evidence of prior knowledge with approximately the same frequency during the discussions of *Amelia's Road*, the text with the middle level of cultural relevance discussions of *Chicken Sunday*, the text with the weakest cultural relevance. Fourth, more children contributed responses that presented evidence of prior knowledge during discussions of *Chicken Sunday* than did during discussions for *Amelia's Road*. A final finding indicates minimal or no evidence of prior knowledge in children's responses during the second discussion activity for each text. Each of these findings are examined below.

- Evidence of children's prior knowledge and experiences in oral responses during discussion activities most frequently took the form of personal statements and narratives.

Child data indicate that evidence of prior knowledge most frequently took the form of personal singular statements and narratives. Ninety-one percent of the prior knowledge-related responses for *My Very Own Room*, the text with the highest level of cultural relevance were assigned codes of personal singular statement or narrative (30 of 33). Seventy-five percent (9 of 12) of the prior knowledge-related responses for *Amelia's Road*, the text with the middle level of cultural relevance were assigned codes of personal singular statement or narrative. Sixty-six percent (6 of 9) of the prior knowledge-related responses for *Chicken Sunday*, the text with the weakest level of cultural relevance were assigned codes of personal singular statement or narrative.

Children's personal singular statements and narratives were frequently related to: (i) everyday practices and events involving family and extended family members; and (ii) aspects of the social class of children's families and/or to their ethnicities (e.g., Mexican-American and Central American). In addition, children's oral responses frequently featured evidence of prior knowledge and experiences that were related to the teacher's own personal stories about events and characters in a text. For example, in the following excerpt from a discussion of *My Very Own Room* the teacher asks the children why it was so important for the character to have her own room. Beto's response was coded as a personal singular narrative [PSN].

**Transcription and Code**

Evelyn: Porque, porque quería su, su proprio (lugar?) y estaba muy apretada.

T: Sí, mm-hmm. ¿Qué más Beto?

Beto: Um, um, ahorita, cuando, es que (luego?) también (necesito?) apachurrar con mi papá porque ahorita mi tío y mi tía están durmiendo ahí porque no tienen un lugar. Entonces, yo siempre necesito quedarme allí, a veces cuando voy a la casa de mi tía por eso (ni quiero?) dormir porque ahí están todo apachurrada y siempre cuando voy allá hay unos sillones y luego lo juntan para que allí me duerma (    ). **[PSN]**

**Translation and Code**

Evelyn: Because, because she wanted her, her own (room?) and it was crowded.

T: Yes, mm-hmm. What else, Beto?

Beto: Um, um, now when, it's that (later?) also (I need?) to crowd in with my dad because now my uncle and aunt are sleeping there because they don't have a place [to stay/sleep]. So I always need to stay there. Sometimes when I go to my aunt's house for this reason (I don't want to?) sleep because everything is cramped and always when I go, over there, there are some big chairs and later they put them together and I sleep there (inaudible phrase). **[PSN]**

Beto was born in the U.S., and he shared that his father came to the U.S. from Mexico to find better work. Beto's brief narrative describes two situations regarding the negotiation of

sleeping spaces with extended family members. The teacher described his living situation in an interview; he lives with his father and spends time at an older sister's house and with extended family at times. This brief narrative about sharing living spaces with extended family members reflects his families' working class and immigration-related background.

- Data indicate that evidence of prior knowledge was present in children's oral contributions most frequently during discussions of the text with the highest cultural relevance, My Very Own Room, and in particular during the third discussion.

Child data specify that 13.5% of children's responses across all discussions for *My Very Own Room* presented evidence of prior knowledge and experiences. 21.13 percent of oral contributions during the first discussion, and 25 percent of responses in the third discussion presented evidence of prior knowledge. Additionally, more study children contributed responses in which evidence of prior knowledge was present during the discussion of this text than for discussions of the text with the middle-level and the weakest cultural relevance. Data indicated that 14 of 15 children contributed prior knowledge-related responses. This is an unanticipated key finding.

The first and third discussion activities for *My Very Own Room,* in particular, afforded children multiple opportunities to draw on personal knowledge and experiences. This can be attributed, in part, to the teacher's pre-reading activity in the first discussion in which she explicitly asked the children to share their experiences about their own sleeping spaces. Likewise, in the final discussion activity the teacher's line of questioning supported children to draw on their own experiences and to build on one another's ideas to generate explanations for why the main character wanted her own room and space.

Table 10 below outlines the differences in length of discussion activities for each text.

Table 10. Length of Audio Recordings for Each Discussion

| Text | Discussion Activity 1 | Discussion Activity 2 | Discussion Activity 3 | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Mi propio cuartito/My Very Own Room* | 42:40 | 54:27 | 25:37 | 2:02:44 |
| *El camino de Amelia/Amelia's Road* | 27:07 | 45:31 | 33:45 | 1:46:23 |
| *El pollo de los domingos/Chicken Sunday* | 35:37 | 21:33 | 30 | 1:27:10 |
| Total | 1:45:24 | 2:01:31 | 1:29:22 | 5:16:17 |

The length of the three discussions of *My Very Own Room* was 2:02:44, approximately 36 minutes and 17 minutes longer than the three discussion activities for *Chicken Sunday* and *Amelia's Road*, respectively. Hence the longer discussion activities for *Mi propio cuartito/My Very Own Room* likely contributed to the increased frequency with which children drew on prior knowledge for this text.

A final factor that may have contributed to the differences in the frequency with which children drew on prior knowledge in oral responses during discussion activities is that the text served as a mirror for both the teacher and many of the children. The characters and situations in the story were similar to both the teacher's and many of the children's families and daily experiences. Thus at different times throughout the discussion activities the teacher prompted the children to think about similarities they shared with the characters in the text. In addition, when the teacher shared her connections with a character or event, the children frequently identified their own similar experiences and made multiple connections. For example, during the third discussion of *My Very Own Room* the teacher shared a personal narrative in which her dad arrived home very tired from working in a factory and demanded that his children be quiet so

that he could sleep. This personal connection prompted responses from five different children in which each contributed a statement or brief narrative about a parent who works in a factory or who arrives from or leaves early for work.

The teacher shared one detailed personal narrative related to the family in *My Very Own Room* during the second discussion and two particularly detailed personal narratives during the third discussion. She shared no personal narratives related to events and characters in *Chicken Sunday*. In the third discussion of Amelia's Road, the teacher shared two personal narratives, and the second narrative prompted two children to share their connections.

- Data indicate that children's oral responses presented evidence of prior knowledge with approximately the same frequency during the discussions of Amelia's Road, the text with the middle level of cultural relevance, as in discussions of Chicken Sunday, the text with the weakest cultural relevance.

The experiences of the main character in *Amelia's Road*, text with the middle level of cultural relevance, were both extreme and very different from those of the children in the study. Five of 15 study children contributed response in which evidence of prior knowledge was present during discussions of *Amelia's Road*, and eight of 15 contributed prior knowledge-related responses for the discussions of *Chicken Sunday*. The features of cultural relevance identified for this *Amelia's Road*—shared ethnicity, shared language, a main character the same age as the children, and contemporary events—afforded the children with minimal opportunities to draw on their prior knowledge and personal experiences during discussion activities. Rather, the teacher effectively prompted the children to contrast their daily experiences with those of Amelia in order to help them better understand her circumstances.

While I anticipated that some of the children might have prior knowledge about migrant farm work gleaned from the conversations of adults in their families, I did not include similar

situations and experiences as a culturally relevant feature for this text. During the third

discussion activity, Beto suggested that Amelia's family lived in Mexico because "*allí no hay*

*mucho dinero por eso*— […over there there isn't much money [and] for that reason—]." Beto

drew on prior knowledge related to his father's immigration experiences twice during the

discussion. He also contributed the two vicarious statements in the discussion, both of which

seemed related to knowledge of life in rural Mexico.

Thus even within a group of children that shares many key sociocultural features, such as

growing up in working class families and in the same neighborhood, sharing the same or similar

ethnicities, sharing the same languages and being bi- or multilingual, and having direct or

indirect experiences with immigration to the U.S., there is clearly great diversity. The range of

individual familial experiences can yield certain features of a text more or less relevant to one's

daily experiences and prior knowledge. In addition, the children's contributions during the

discussion activities of the texts in this study suggest that certain features of cultural relevance,

such as shared experiences, may be more salient and therefore elicit more prior knowledge and

experiences than features such as shared language and ethnicity. This is examined in chapter 5.

- Child data indicate minimal or no evidence of prior knowledge in children's
  responses during the second discussion activity for each text.

As described in Chapter III, the children participated in the hot seat activity during the

second discussion for each text. The hot seat activity asks children to respond from the point of

view of a character in a text, which explains the minimal evidence of prior knowledge present in

the second discussion activity for each text.

In summary, data from Table 9 yield somewhat contradictory results. The findings

suggest that *My Very Own Room* featured key elements of cultural relevance that may have

affected the quality and quantity of children's oral responses in this classroom. Data also indicate

that children did not draw on prior knowledge more frequently during discussions of the text

with the middle-level of cultural relevance than during discussions of the text with the weakest

cultural relevance.  Moreover, fewer sample children contributed prior knowledge-related

responses when discussing the mid-level text than when discussing the text with the fewest

culturally relevant features.  This finding points to multiple possibilities.  Counting the features

of cultural relevance of a text may be too narrow of an approach for analyzing whether and to

what extent a text can support children in drawing on prior knowledge.  Likewise, certain

features of cultural relevance may be more salient to different individuals and groups of children

than other features. Culturally relevant features may have a cumulative effect in supporting

children's activating and drawing on prior knowledge during discussions.

**Comprehension**

In order to address question 1c. and identify and characterize the *evidence of*

*comprehension present in children's oral responses in discussions*, I used the coding protocol to

assign descriptive codes to oral responses that featured evidence of one of five key

comprehension strategies.

Table 11 displays the frequency with which each comprehension code occurred across all

book discussion activities, within the discussions of each text, and within each individual

discussion.  The data makes it possible to examine the types of comprehension strategies the

children used during discussions for each text.  If a child's response included evidence of prior

knowledge and the use of a comprehension strategy, the two corresponding codes were assigned

to the same response.  Examples of oral responses assigned both a prior knowledge-related and

comprehension-related code are examined subsequently.

Table 11. Children's Use of Comprehension Strategies in Discussions of Each Text

| *Text* | Discus-sion Activity | *Text-to-Self* | *Text-to-Text* | *Text-to-World* | *Drawing an Inference* | *Synthesis* | *Questions* | *Total* | *Total Number Oral Res-ponses* | *Percentage of comprehension-related responses* | *Number of sample children who drew on comprehension* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mi propio cuartito *(My Very Own Room)* | First | 3 | 0 | 0 | 26 | 1 | 0 | 30 | 71 | 42.25% | 12 |
| | Second | 1 | 0 | 0 | 31 | 1 | 31 | 64 | 112 | 57.14% | 14 |
| | Third | 7 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 8 | 1 | 28 | 68 | 41.18% | 10 |
| | Total | **11** | **0** | **0** | **69** | **10** | **32** | **122** | **251** | **48.61%** | **14** |
| El camino de Amelia *(Amelia's Road)* | First | 0 | 3 | 1 | 19 | 5 | 9 | 37 | 104 | 35.58% | 6 |
| | Second | 2 | 0 | 1 | 33 | 4 | 17 | 57 | 119 | 47.90% | 8 |
| | Third | 0 | 0 | 3 | 18 | 1 | 2 | 24 | 57 | 42.10% | 7 |
| | Total | **2** | **3** | **5** | **70** | **10** | **28** | **118** | **280** | **42.14%** | **10** |
| El pollo de los domingos *(Chicken Sundays)* | First | 2 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 1 | 1 | 27 | 83 | 32.53% | 9 |
| | Second | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 9 | 31 | 29.03 | 0 |
| | Third | 1 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 4 | 13 | 34 | 70 | 48.57 | 5 |
| | Total | **3** | **0** | **0** | **39** | **5** | **23** | **71** | **184** | **38.58%** | **10** |

Data from Table 11 yield three key findings regarding the identification of and frequency

of children's use of comprehension strategies in discussion activities.  *First*, evidence of oral

language productivity was present across all discussion.  Evidence of comprehension strategies

was present in children's oral responses across all discussions.

The children talked a great deal and more than one-third of their talk up to almost half of

it provided evidence of comprehension. *Secondly*, the strongest form of comprehension exhibited

by the children was in making inferences throughout all discussions, particularly during the

second discussion activities for *My Very Own Room* and *Amelia's Road*. *Third*, the greatest

percentage of children's responses featuring comprehension-related strategies occurred when

discussing the book of highest cultural relevance, *My Very Own Room*. The fewest

comprehension responses occurred during discussions of the story with the least cultural

relevance, *Chicken Sunday*.

- Evidence of oral language productivity was present across all discussions. Evidence of comprehension strategies was present in children's oral responses across all discussions.

Various factors contributed to the number of oral responses that the children generated

during discussion activities, some of which are discussed below. For example, the interactive

nature of the reading aloud of each text yielded multiple opportunities for the children to share

ideas. In addition, the format of the hot seat in which children generated questions for a

character and then asked and responded to the questions, themselves, provided children

numerous opportunities to contribute. This is one reason why the teacher selected the hot-seat

activity. The teacher also suggested that beginning with *My Very Own Room*, a text with which

she thought the children would have multiple connections, might have helped build confidence

among certain children.

The first excerpt below is from the teacher interview in which she read and talked

through excerpts from child data for this text.

> …what I liked about these [discussion] activities is that…everybody was participating. I really liked that… [T]hen I think that could lead to higher comprehension later on. But [the students] have to feel comfortable taking risks… and [Evelyn] obviously had a connection about her dad working late, and Carlos had a connection about mom working every day so they could relate…to the dad working a lot and sleeping a lot.

> I: Do Carlos and Evelyn participate frequently, about average or infrequently?

T: Evelyn more than Carlos, but…it's not directly related to the book but…it speaks to the importance of [an] environment where they feel like it's safe to say whatever they're connecting with the book…No one's going to [say]…that's the wrong answer or that's not what I'm looking for. That speaks to the importance of…validating kids' answers and…accepting that that's where they're at. But they definitely still had a connection to the book. (Personal communication, April 7, 2017)

Here the teacher discusses the interplay between an affirming environment and a

culturally relevant text. She suggests that when children feel safe to contribute their personal

connections to a text, they may participate more frequently, which can lead to comprehension

development.

- The comprehension strategy for which evidence appeared the most frequently in child data across all nine discussions was drawing an inference.
  - Among all nine discussions children drew an inference with the greatest frequency during the second discussion activities for My Very Own Room and Amelia's Road.
  - Children also generated a question with the greatest frequency during the second discussion activities for My Very Own Room and Amelia's Road and during the third discussion activity for Chicken Sunday. Each of these discussion activities followed the hot seat format.

The teacher provided numerous prompts and opportunities for children to draw

inferences during the first discussion activity of each text in which she read aloud the books.

Table 12 shows the number of questions and prompts from the teacher that solicited inferences,

including children's predictions (which are a type of inference), in the first discussion for each

text. Many of these questions elicited one or more inferences from the children. Hence the

interactive nature of the read aloud activities allowed children multiple opportunities to draw

inferences.

Table 12. Teacher Questions and Prompts for Inferences and Predictions During the Read Alouds

| Type of Response Elicited from Teacher's Question | Text #1 *My Very Own Room* | Text #2 *Amelia's Road* | Text #3 *Chicken Sunday* | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Inference | 5 | 12 | 7 | **24** |
| Prediction | 2 | 1 | 4 | **7** |
| Total | **7** | **13** | **11** | **31** |

In addition, the relatively large number of inferences identified within the second discussion activities for *My Very Own Room* and *Amelia's Road* can be attributed, in part, to the number and types of questions the children asked during the hot-seat activity. Children's questions frequently required the child in the hot-seat to draw an inference in order to respond. For example, in the following exchange, Enrique is in the hot-seat as the father from *My Very Own Room*. Adrian asks him why he has to work in the factory. Enrique's response was coded as drawing an inference [IN].

**Transcription and Code**

Adrian: ¿Por qué, por qué necesitas trabajar en esa fábrica?

Papá: Porque me gusta um porque me gusta ganar el dinero. **[IN]**

**Translation and Code**
Adrian: Why, why do you need to work in that factory?

Dad: Because I like um because I like to earn money. **[IN]**
Similarly, during the hot-seat activity for *Amelia's Road*, Yesenia responded to questions from the point of view of Amelia. One classmate asked her why she had to carry the heavy bag of apples. Yesenia's response was coded as drawing an inference [IN].

**Transcription and Code**

Evelyn:  ¿Por qué tú tenías que cargar esa bolsa um pesada con las manzanas?

Amelia:  Porque um, porque tenía que ayudar a mi familia.  **[IN]**

**Translation and Code**

Evelyn: Why did you have to carry that heavy bag of apples?

Amelia:  Because um, because I had to help my family.  **[IN]**

- Evidence of comprehension was present in children's oral contributions most frequently during discussions for the text with the highest cultural relevance, My Very Own Room, in particular during the third discussion.

Child data indicate that nearly half of children's responses across all discussions for *My Very Own Room* presented evidence of prior knowledge and experiences.  More than half of children's responses demonstrated evidence of comprehension during the hot seat discussion. The children generated several questions that required the child in the hot seat to draw an inference to respond.  Data also indicated that the greatest number of study children, 14 of 15, contributed responses in which evidence of comprehension was present during discussions of this text.  This is an unanticipated key finding.

Question 2:  How does drawing on prior knowledge contribute to the quality and depth of children's talk as evidenced by comprehension strategies they employ in literature discussions?

In order to investigate *how drawing on prior knowledge contributes to the quality and depth of children's talk as evidenced by comprehension strategies they employ in literature discussions,* the data was examined in two ways.

b.  How are incidences of prior knowledge connected with evidence of comprehension in discussions?

c. Is there was a relationship between children's perceptions of the cultural relevance of

a text and the frequency and quality of their oral responses during discussions of that

text?

## Co-occurring and Contingent Responses

In relation to question 1a. Table 13 identifies the co-occurrence and contingent uses of

prior knowledge and comprehension codes within the same discussion.

Table 13. Co-Occurrences and Contingency of Prior Knowledge and Comprehension in Discussions

| Text | PSN TS | PSS TS | PSS IN | SK TT | VK TW | Total Co-occur-rences | Contingent Responses | Total Co-occurrences and Contingent | Number of Responses for Each Text | Percent of Contingent and Co-occurring | Total Responses Comprehension | Total Response Prior Knowledge |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Text# 1: *My Very Own Room* | 7 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 2 | 13 | 251 | 5.2% | 122 | 33 |
| Text# 2: *Amelia's Road* | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 8 | 280 | 2.86% | 118 | 12 |
| Text# 3: *Chicken Sundays* | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 184 | 1.6% | 71 | 9 |
| Total | 9 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 21 | 3 | 24 | 678 | 3.54% | 311 | 54 |

PSN TS = Personal Singular Narrative + Text-to-Self  SK TT = Shared Knowledge + Text-to-Text
PSS TS = Personal Singular Statement + Text-to-Self  VK TW = Vicarious Knowledge + Text-to-World
PSS IN = Personal Singular Narrative + Inference

A co-occurrence indicates that a child explicitly drew on prior knowledge as she

employed a comprehension strategy during a discussion.  A contingent occurrence is when a

response assigned a code of prior knowledge either immediately precedes or follows a response

assigned a comprehension code.  Co-occurrences capture when an individual child draws on

prior knowledge to comprehend, whereas a contingent occurrence captures when a child seems

to build on a peer's prior knowledge or comprehension.

For example, in the following excerpt Gaby describes how she helps her mother who works very hard. Her personal narrative is in response to how the family members, including the dad who works very hard in a factory, helps the character in My Very Own Room prepare her new room. Her response was assigned the codes text-to-self connection [TS] and PK Personal Singular Narrative [PSN].

**Transcription and Code**

Gaby: Mi mamá también trabaja en una fábrica y—trabajaba en una fábrica, ahora trabaja en una Family Dollar y viene a las 3 de la noche y cuando ella llega yo (otra vez?) estoy casi despierta y cuando (.) yo estoy casi despierta yo le ayudo a mi mamá a meterse a la cama. [TS] [PSN]

**Translation and Code**

Gaby: My mom also works in a factory and—she worked in a factory, now she works at a Family Dollar and she comes [home] at 3 in the night [morning] and when she arrives I (again?) am almost awake and when (pause) I am almost [half] awake I help her into bed. [TS] [PSN]

The following is an example of contingent prior knowledge and comprehension codes. Eva infers that the character in *My Very On Room* wanted her own space because her little brothers are messy. Her inference prompts Enrique, who is a younger brother, himself, to declare, "Yeah, that's me." Then he proceeds to share a personal singular narrative in which he always leaves his toys out when he goes to sleep and his brothers always tell him to pick them up.

**Transcription and Codes**

Eva:  Boys are messy.  **[IN]**

T:  Boys are kinda what?  ((laughing))

Enrique:  Yeah, that's me… **[TS]**

The data in Table 13 indicate that incidences of prior knowledge were infrequently explicitly connected with evidence of comprehension. The most frequently co-occurring prior knowledge and comprehension codes were personal singular statements or narratives co-occurring with text-to-self connections for a total of nine incidents across all discussions. Juzwik et al. (2008) describe how evidence of prior knowledge is related to key comprehension strategies.  Personal singular narratives (and statements) are evidence of prior knowledge that often relate to an event, situation, or character in a text.  Shared knowledge includes knowledge of texts that students in a classroom have read previously. Hence the strategy of drawing on schema to make a text-to-text connection may include evidence of shared knowledge for a text read previously.  Similarly, a child who makes a text-to-world connection may be drawing on vicarious knowledge, such as knowledge gathered from the news, popular culture, or community.

Even though drawing an inference requires a reader to use her prior knowledge in addition to textual clues to form a conclusion (Miller, 2002, p. 243), readers rarely articulate their prior knowledge when inferring unless instructed to do so.  (For example, a sentence frame that could be utilized to make the text-to-self comprehension strategy explicit for children follows.  When _____ happened in the text, it reminded me of _____.  This helps me understand _____.)  The teacher did not use sentence frames to guide children in explicitly drawing on prior knowledge to employ a comprehension strategy during discussions as this was

not a direct part of the discussion objectives.  When considering the aforementioned partial explanation of drawing an inference, the number of inferences the children made throughout the discussions suggests that they frequently drew implicitly on their prior knowledge in addition to textual clues to draw conclusions.

A closer examination of the data shows that evidence of both prior knowledge and comprehension in a single oral response occurred the most frequently during the third discussion of *My Very Own Room*.  There were seven oral contributions in which children shared a personal singular narrative or statement to make a text-to-self connection that could help one make meaning of part of the text.  There was one personal singular statement that presented evidence of drawing an inference and one incidence of contingent oral responses in which one child's personal narrative prompted another child's text-to-self connection.  There were seven incidents of co-occurrences across the three discussions for *Amelia's Road*.  Of note, during the first discussion of this text three children contributed responses that drew comparisons between the main character in *My Very Own Room* and Amelia.  Beto shared two vicarious statements that made connections between a part of the text and the world.

**Children's Assessment of Cultural Relevance**

Question 2b. addresses *whether there is a relationship  between children's perceptions of the cultural relevance of a text and the frequency and quality of their oral responses during discussions of that text*.  Table 14 shows the mean rating for features of cultural relevance from the study children's Cultural Relevance Rubrics (Ebe, 2010) for each text.

Table 14. Mean Rating for Features of Cultural Relevance from Children's Rubrics for Each Text out of a Possible 4 Points

| Features of Cultural Relevance | *Mi propio cuartito/My Very Own Room* | *El camino de Amelia/ Amelia's Road* | *El pollo de los domingos/ Chicken Sunday* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shared ethnicities: "Do the characters look like you and your family?" | 2.43 | 1.86 | 1.79 |
| Familiar settings: "Have you lived in or visited places like the ones in the story?" | 2.57 | 1.92 | 2.07 |
| Contemporary: "Could the situations and events in the story happen today?" | 2.93 | 3 | 2.64 |
| Age: Do you think the main character(s) are about the same age as you? Familiar situations and experiences: | 3 | 3.29 | 2.86 |
| Linguistic characteristics: "Do the characters in this story talk like you and your family?" | 3.64 | 2.93 | 1.64 |
| How frequently do you read books like this one? | 3.64 | 2.77 | 2.93 |
| "Have you experienced the same or similar situation like in the story?" | 3 | 1.86 | 2.14 |
| Do you think you understood well the central message of the story? | 3.36 | 3.14 | 2.86 |
| Total Mean | 3.07 | 2.6 | 2.37 |

The children's mean scores for each text align with the percentage of responses in which children drew on prior knowledge and demonstrated evidence of comprehension for the discussion activities of each text.

## Summary

In this chapter quantitative data generated from the qualitative coding of child discussion data were presented and described to answer the study questions. A key general finding and achievement across all discussions is the evidence of child's robust language productivity and comprehension. Child discussion data show that children's oral responses include evidence of prior knowledge and demonstrate evidence of comprehension with the highest frequency when discussing the text with the highest cultural relevance. This is an anticipated result.

The differences in evidence of prior knowledge and comprehension between discussions of text #2, Amelia's Road, and text #3, Chicken Sunday, were minimal. This finding suggests that there may be a cumulative effect of features of cultural relevance in a text; when a single text embodies multiple culturally relevant features, it may provide children with more opportunities to draw on prior knowledge and to contribute comprehension-related responses during discussions.

Findings indicate that incidences of prior knowledge were infrequently explicitly connected with evidence of comprehension in discussions of all texts. In addition, children's ratings of cultural relevance of each text indicate that text #1, *My Very Own Room*, had the highest level of cultural relevance. This finding aligns with positive differences in evidence of prior knowledge and comprehension for this text. Two unanticipated findings also relate to the children's ratings. The greatest number of children, 14 of 15, contributed prior knowledge- and comprehension-related responses in discussions of *My Very Own Room*. The next chapter uses qualitative data from child discussions and teacher interviews to further interpret the quantitative findings.

CHAPTER V

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter uses qualitative data from the children's book discussions along with teacher interview data to further interpret and account for the quantitative findings. The results showed positive differences in the percentage of oral responses with evidence of prior knowledge and/or comprehension for the text with the strongest cultural relevance, *My Very Own Room*. The results also indicate positive differences in the number of children who participate across the three discussions of this text. Results demonstrated minimal differences in the number of responses in which evidence of both prior knowledge and comprehension either co-occurred or were contingent in discussions for all texts; however, the greatest number of co-occurrences and contingent responses were present during discussions for the text with the strongest cultural relevance, *My Very Own Room*.

The teacher provided important insights about the outcome of her use of culturally relevant texts (CRTs). The cultural relevance of a text, the children's experiences, and the teacher's instruction can interact in ways that generate productive book discussions in which many children contribute and build on one another's ideas to deepen comprehension. In an interview conducted after the three discussions for the text with the highest cultural relevance, *My Very Own Room*, concluded, the teacher explained:

> I was really surprised especially the first day [when she read aloud My Very Own Room]…their enthusiasm and how many of them were participating…they all have so much to say and they all want to talk. So then I realized, it's not them [who are disengaged]; it's the curriculum or the teacher that's not eliciting that [deeper thinking

116

and language] from them. So it reminded me, oh yeah, if you use the right resources and the right questions… (Personal communication, March 17, 2017)

In the hands of a knowledgeable, skilled invested teacher invested in the subject matter, all children are capable of generating meaning from a good story. In this study, discussions for all texts yielded comprehension; however, both the children and teacher found the greatest points of connection in the text with the highest cultural relevance, *My Very Own Room*. These connections contributed to the positive qualitative and quantitative differences in the discussions for this text.

First I will provide context for the teacher interview data employed in this chapter. Teacher interview data are derived primarily from the following questions and prompts.

- How does this text fit into your curriculum?
- What was the main goal or goals you had in mind when discussing this text with your students?
- Is there anything particular about the discussions that stood out to you? Were there any unexpected or surprising responses?
- Here are some excerpts from _____ (title of text). Could you talk through them for me? I want to hear your impressions and hear what you thought.

Additional data come from the final interview in which I shared initial findings with the teacher to check for accuracy. Her observations and explanations of the children's responses to each text brought a different lens to the interpretation of the data.

## Background on the Teacher

The teacher's responses and interpretations were influenced, at least to some extent, by the presence of the investigator and by the focus of the study. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, I explained to the teacher that I was interested in observing the children's discussions and documenting any evidence of prior knowledge and comprehension. I also stressed that I did not want her to plan her questions and instruction any differently due to my presence. The

teacher made two references to her participation in the study during the second interview. The

statements suggest that her responses during teacher interviews were not unduly influenced by

my presence and by the study.

The following two excerpts come from an interview conducting after the completion of

all discussions of the first two texts, *My Very Own Room* and *Chicken Sunday*. In the first

excerpt she was discussing her observations of the children's questions from the hot seat for *My*

*Very Own Room*. In the second excerpt Ms. León was reflecting on her participation in the study

through the first two texts.

> …they did ask deep questions… I was pleasantly surprised… because I went into it with
> no expectations—kind of like you—I just wanted to see what happens and…what I can
> do with [the generations of questions]...
>
> I think all that conversation that we had… helped them each time [to] increase their
> comprehension and then they were able to apply it to their own reading… I really
> appreciated that…. I had no expectations…you're going to come in, I'm going to do read
> alouds…but I actually got a lot out of it for my own practice. (Personal communication,
> March 17, 2017)

These statements suggest that the teacher was not unduly altering her classroom

instruction or tailoring her interview responses for the investigator's sake.

The discussion below draws on child data and teacher data to further illuminate the

following three findings of the study.

- Finding 1: Children's responses demonstrated evidence of prior knowledge with the
  greatest frequency when discussing the text with the highest cultural relevance, My
  Very Own Room.

- Finding 2: Children's responses demonstrated evidence of comprehension with the
  greatest frequency when discussing the text with the highest cultural relevance, My
  Very Own Room.

- Finding 3: There were minimal differences in the number of responses in which
  evidence of both prior knowledge and comprehension either co-occurred or were

contingent in discussions for all texts; however, the greatest number of co-occurrences and contingent responses were present during discussions for the text with the strongest cultural relevance, My Very Own Room.

**Prior Knowledge**

**Positive Differences in Children's Responses When Evidence of Prior Knowledge Was Present**

[It wasn't] just a core group that participated…it was like **everybody, everybody** [teacher stress] everybody…could relate to something—the uncle, the dad snoring, the bed…siblings, they had a lot of connections [to the family members and situations in the text]. (Personal communication, March 17, 2017)

The quantitative results indicated positive differences in the percentage of oral responses with evidence of prior knowledge in all discussions of *My Very Own Room*. The teacher's commentary that "everybody…could relate to something…they had a lot of connections" suggests that this text in particular included many points of cultural relevance that elicited responses from several children.  The child and teacher data discussed below attest to two key points regarding culturally relevant texts and prior knowledge.  First, a text with high cultural relevance for a particular group of children will provide many children, not just a core group, with multiple points of connection.  Second, the multiple points of connection in the text will support children in drawing on and articulating their prior knowledge and experiences frequently during discussions of the text.

The teacher's knowledge of her students, their families, and community informed the pre-discussion pair share activity for the first reading of *My Very Own Room,* the text with the highest cultural relevance.  The teacher asked the children to describe the room in which they slept, including with whom they shared this space and what they liked and disliked about it.  Notably, the range of similar responses indicates that shared and tight sleeping spaces is a strong

point of connection that many children found with this text.  In addition, the children report on

their partner's experiences accurately and with detail, which attests to their engagement. Below

is a brief excerpt.

**Code and Transcription**

Evelyn:  Diana dijo que cuando se duerme con su hermano y cuando su mama le dice que es hora de dormir, se va a dormir pero en la noche su su hermano se despierta y luego le dice a Diana si puedes jugar (  ) [PSN]

Alyssa:  Dijo Carlos que él se duerme con su papá, su hermano, y su mamá.  [PSS]

Gaby:  Lizbet dijo que lo que no le gusta de su cuarto es que no hay mucho espacio para que pongan sus juguetes ( ). [PSS]

Beto:  A mi no me gusta mi hermanito chiquito, no, que va a la casa porque la otra vez yo necesitaba quedar a las en el domingo yo necesitaba quedar a las 3 de la mañana porque se duerme tarde. [PSN]

Alejandra:  [Carolina dijo] Que que cuando ella se duerme con su tía y su mamá ella siempre está en medio y no le gusta. [PSN]

**Code and Translation**
Evelyn:  Diana said that she sleeps with her brother and when her mom says it is time for bed, she goes to sleep but in the night her, her brother wakes up and later he [asks] Diana if he can play. [PSN]

Alyssa:  Carlos said that he sleeps with his dad, his bother, and his mom. [PSS]

Gaby:  Lizbet said that what she doesn't like about her bedroom is that there is not much space to put her toys. [PSS]

[PSN] Beto:  I don't like my little brother, no, that he comes to the house because the other time I had to stay until—on Sunday I had to stay [up] [until] 3 in the morning because he falls asleep late.  [PSN]

Alejandra:  [Carolina said] That, that when she sleeps with her aunt and her mom she is always in the middle and she doesn't like it.

Children reported on experiences with small and shared sleeping spaces and some of the

problems that can arise as a result—from a younger brother waking up his sister in the middle of

the night to play, to having to sleep in the middle of a bed between two adults. These prior experiences with shared and crowded sleeping spaces prepared the children to identify closely with the main character in *My Very Own Room*. Before the teacher began reading the first page, she showed the illustration of the six children in the family sharing two beds. "*Veo a muchos niños poniendo atención a la ilustración*" [I see many children paying attention to the illustration], the teacher commented as children's giggles emerged. This was a point of nonverbal connection right from the start.

Teacher contributions from discussion data also indicate that the opportunity to describe a daily experience yielded participation from more students than usual. The teacher made the following comment at the end of the pre-discussion activity for *My Very Own Room*. Note her enthusiastic response to and acknowledgement of children's descriptions.

**Transcription**

Teacher: Gracias por compartir…Me encantó escuchar. Nunca habíamos tenido tantos niños participar y aprendí mucho de Uds.

**Translation**

T: Thank you for participating… I loved listening. We have never had so many children participate, and I learned a lot from you all.

The teacher acknowledges children's oral contributions as valuable and even instructive—she learned a lot from them. This type of response fostered a safe space in which children's oral contributions and prior experiences were invited and affirmed. Both the teacher and the points of connection in the text invited children to make connections during discussions for this text.

Sharing living spaces temporarily with extended family members was another point of

connection for several children.  The main character in the story mentioned that sometimes

extended family members came to live temporarily with her family. While reading aloud the text

in the first discussion the teacher paused to ask if the children had ever had a similar

experience.  Several children responded affirmatively at the same time.  Above the cross-talk,

Beto exclaimed, *"!Oh!  !Siempre!"  "!Mi padrino! !Mi padrino!"* [Oh!  Always!  My godfather!

My godfather!] and Enrique added, *"La prima de mi"*  [*My cousin!*].  The teacher reminded the

children that the main character loved her family but just felt that their home was very—and she

paused a moment.  The video recording captured Yesenia gesturing with her hands for emphasis

as she completed the sentence, *"amontonado"* [crowded].  This brief but dynamic interaction

demonstrates that children were tuning into and recalling their own experiences with a key

situation in the text.

The following excerpt derives from child data for the second discussion of *My Very Own

Room*.  A child commented that *"hasta el papa"* [even the dad]" who *"trabaja muy tarde"*

[works very late] (in a factory) was helping.  The teacher paused to acknowledge this keen

observation and modeled making her own text-to-self connection within which she compared her

own father who works in a factory with the father in the text.   Thus this is a point of connection

for both the teacher and the children with teacher's personal narrative eliciting several

connections from the children; familiarity with a family member who works in a factory, and

experiences with a parent who works late.  In particular, both Evelyn and Carlos are struggling

readers (and comprehenders).  Neither child is categorized as having special learning needs;

however, the special education teacher read with a small group of struggling readers daily,

including Evelyn and Carlos. Notably, neither participates frequently and Carlos less so than

Evelyn.

### Transcription and Code

Evelyn:  Cuando llega mi papá a las 9 de la noche mi papá se quiere dormir y luego mi hermano está jugando y le digo que se cae pero no se  cae. [PSN]

Alyssa:  Mi mamá [trabaja] mucho porque ella ()ir en taxi a la 1 de la mañana. [PSS]

T:  Ves?  A nosotros, hasta conocemos hasta mamás que trabajan mucho verdad?

Carlos:  Mi mamá trabaja todos los días y [inaudible] la señora que al trabajo…quiere salir y dice a veces [muy tarde?].  [PSS]

Gaby:  Mi mamá también trabaja en una fábrica y, trabajaba en una fábrica, ahora trabaja en una Family Dollar y viene a las 3 de la noche y cuando ella llega yo estoy casi despierta y cuando … yo le ayudo a mi mamá a meterse a la cama.  [PSN]

### Translation and Code

Evelyn:  When my dad arrives at 9 at night, my dad wants to sleep and later my brother is playing, and I tell him to be quiet but he won't be [be quiet]. [PSN]

Alyssa:  My mom [works] a lot because she (inaudible) to go in a taxi at 1 in the morning.  [PSS]

T:  See?  For us, we even know moms who work a lot, right?

Carlos:  My mom works every day and [inaudible] the woman who at work… wants to leave and sometimes she says [very late?].  [PSS]

Gaby:  My mom also works in a factory and, worked in a factory, now she works in Family Dollar and she comes at 3 in the night and when she arrives I am almost awake and I help her in the bed. [PSN]

These excerpts from child data indicate that key characters and situations in the text were similar to people and experiences present in children's daily lives.  In addition, Gaby's brief narrative relates to one of the big ideas in the story, mutual support among family members.  Importantly, the child who interjected "Even the dad [was helping]" and the teacher's decision to engage his observation and model her own connection opened this space in which other children

could articulate their experiences related to this part of the text.

An important piece of the first finding is that the teacher frequently mediated children's connections by modeling her own personal narratives related to characters, events, and big ideas in the text. As mentioned above, the teacher also found multiple points of connections in the text and often recounted brief stories about growing up with two brothers and/or about her dad who also worked in a factory. Her personal connections with the text elicited similar connections and examples of prior knowledge and experiences from the children. For example, during the second discussion for *My Very Own Room*, the teacher shared a personal narrative about growing up with a father who worked long hours in a factory. An excerpt from the observational field notes narrative for this discussion notes:

> The teacher's connection sparks lots of interest in the children. I count 6 to 7 hands raised. The teacher calls on Evelyn, and I see more hands go up, but am trying hard to listen and document their words. After Evelyn finishes I count 9 hands and then 12. Children want to share….Even Adan and Carlos raise their hands and share…. it really is a sea of hands. (Observational Field Notes, Feb. 22, 2017)

Several children reported on their own mother's or father's hard work and/or long work hours. The cultural relevance for both the teacher and children generated language productivity related to the children's and their teacher's experiences as well as that of the text.

The data also suggests that the multiple points of connection in this text invited new voices, such as that of Carlos, into the discussion. As the teacher stressed, it wasn't "just a core group" contributing during discussions for *My Very Own Room; **everybody** [teacher stress] everybody…could relate to something…"* An unanticipated finding from the quantitative data indicated that across discussions for each text, the greatest number of children drew explicitly on prior knowledge and experiences when discussing *My Very Own Room*, the text with the highest

cultural relevance. Across the three discussions for this text 14 of 15 study children contributed

at least one response that drew on prior knowledge. The range of children included in the

excerpts above attest to the number of different students accessing and articulating their prior

knowledge and experiences for situations described in the text.

The following excerpt derives from teacher interview data collected after all three

discussions for *My Very Own Room* were completed. The teacher read and talked through

excerpts of transcribed discussions for the text, including the one above. Notably, she suggests

that this text stimulated oral language productivity because children connected with characters

and events which opened the way toward comprehension of the story. She also points to the

importance of cultivating an environment in which children feel safe contributing their

ideas. These are ingredients essential for productive book discussions in which children develop

comprehension.

> …even though I'm reading Evelyn's response—
>
> [Evelyn: When my dad arrives at 9 at night, my dad wants to sleep and later my brother is playing, and I tell him to be quiet but he won't be [be quiet].]
> it's not showing comprehension but what I liked about these activities is that [they] encouraged [children to participate]—everybody was participating. I really liked that. I think that could lead to higher comprehension later on. But they have to feel comfortable taking risks and she obviously had a connection about her dad working late, and Carlos had a connection about mom working every day… [students] could relate to the dad working a lot and sleeping a lot.
> [Carlos: My mom works every day and [inaudible] the woman who at work… wants to leave and sometimes says [very late?] (Personal communication, April 7, 2017)

The teacher's commentary provides further evidence that children found multiple points

of connection with the text with the highest cultural relevance, *My Very Own Room*. She

explicitly restates that everybody was contributing. Her knowledge that participation in book

discussions can lead to higher comprehension attests to the potential of including literature that

taps into children's daily experiences and prior knowledge as one part of the reading

curriculum. More voices yield more opportunities for children to build off one another's ideas

thus broadening the base of common understanding for the story's events and characters.

The child data provides a snapshot of the different types of prior knowledge and

experiences that children brought to the discussions for *My Very Own Room*, the text with the

highest cultural relevance. Both child and teacher data indicated that more than just a core group

of strong readers and comprehenders found multiple points of connection with this text. The

high level of cultural relevance provided children with several opportunities to see aspects of

themselves and their daily lives in the characters and situations. In addition, the classroom

environment, with the teacher's instructional choices and flexible discussion facilitation, worked

together to support children in accessing and articulating their prior knowledge and experiences

for aspects of this text.

Children also drew on prior knowledge and experience when discussion the text with the

middle level of cultural relevance, *Amelia's Road*, and the weakest, *Chicken Sunday*. During

discussions of both texts, the teacher briefly referred to events and characters in *My Very Own

Room*. Three of the 12 incidents of prior knowledge present in discussions of *Amelia's Road* and

three of the nine in discussions of *Chicken Sunday* drew on collective shared knowledge of *My

Very Own Room*. Beto, in particular, found points of connection with the themes of immigration

and poverty in *Amelia's Road.*

During the third discussion of *Amelia's Road*, the teacher and children talked about how

and why Amelia's life could be better. Beto offered a possible reason for why Amelia had to

work in the fields. A few minutes later the teacher recounted that when her mom was 16 years

old, she left her home in Mexico one summer to pick beans in California. Then Beto made a similar personal connection.

**Transcription and Code**

Beto: Or maybe ellos viven en Mexico y allí no hay mucho dinero por eso— [VK vicarious knowledge]

Beto: También mi papá se vino acá porque allá necesitaba [trabajar] en el mecánico con su papá. [PSN]

**Translation and Code**

Beto: Or maybe they live in Mexico and [over] there there isn't much money for this [reason]— [VK vicarious knowledge]

Beto: My dad also came here because [over] there [in Mexico] he needed to [work] in the mechanic [shop] with his dad. [PSN]

Here Beto drew on his prior knowledge of Mexico and on knowledge of his father's immigration experience to contribute to the discussion. During the interview conducted at the conclusion of the discussions for *Amelia's Road*, the teacher discussed Beto's contributions. She was happy that the children did not connect with a child who had to pick apples every morning for three hours before school. But she also recognized that many children's parents would most likely have connections with migrant farm work.

> I would try to bank on [parents' experiences like Beto's father] more next year… maybe some kind of home-school activity…go home and ask your parents, tell them about the book that you're reading—or something that [the parents] fill out so that [the children] can come back and share those stories…it is more powerful…también mi papa se vino [My dad also came]…that makes it culturally relevant…—it's something that can become a way to connect with their parents and a way to understand their parents' struggle because the character's a little girl…their parents could probably tell them childhood experiences and [the children] could see... compared to that little girl and compared to their parents they're already better off. (Personal communication, April 11, 2017)

Here the teacher discusses strategies for making the text more culturally relevant to the

children the next time she reads the book. She suggests that connecting children with their family histories and struggles could help children relate more to Amelia's experiences and deepen comprehension of the text. Thus cultural relevance is not only in the text itself as a discrete object of meaning. Cultural relevance can be cultivated when a teacher is in tune with her children's daily and cultural experiences and family histories, for example.

During the read aloud of *Chicken Sunday*, the characters painted dozens of eggs. The teacher paused and asked what a dozen was. In the following excerpt, Gaby draws on an everyday experience to clarify the definition for her peers.

**Transcription and Code**

Teacher:  ¿Qué es una docena?

Beto: ¡Cien!

Teacher:  No [Cross talk Gaby: Doce]

Gaby:  No, doce, doce.

Teacher:  Doce.  ¿Cómo sabias?

Gaby:  Porque, como yo voy a Dunkin Donuts con mi mama, mi mama le pide una docena a la muchacha y yo le pregunto que es una docena y ella me dice una caja de 12 donas. [PSN]

**Translation and Code**

Teacher:  What is a dozen?

Beto:  100!

Teacher:  No [Cross talk Gaby: Twelve]

Gaby: No, Twelve, twelve.

Teacher: Twelve.  How did you know?

Gaby: Because I go to Dunkin Donuts with my mom, my mom asks the girl for a dozen and I asked her what a dozen was and she told me [it was] a box of 12 donuts. [PSN]

Gaby's brief narrative demonstrates how an everyday experience, such as going to Dunkin Donuts with one's mother, can yield prior knowledge that is relevant and valuable for making meaning in the classroom. Gaby also explained what a time capsule during the reading aloud of *Amelia's Road*. Both of these examples demonstrate how a child's prior knowledge and experiences can clarify key vocabulary for peers.

- Finding 2: Children's responses demonstrated evidence of comprehension across all discussions for each text. Children's responses demonstrated evidence of comprehension with the greatest frequency when discussing the text with the highest cultural relevance, My Very Own Room.

**Comprehension**

Children's oral responses demonstrated comprehension throughout all discussion activities for each text. This section examines qualitative data attesting to comprehension in children's responses for discussions of all three texts. Children's comments along with teacher interview data and observational field notes further explore evidence of comprehension in children's responses, and I employ teacher data and observational field notes and narratives to interpret children's responses.

A striking example of a response that demonstrates evidence of comprehension comes from the discussions of *My Very Own Room*, the text with the highest cultural relevance. During the first reading and discussion of this text, the teacher paused and asked the children why they thought the younger brothers were being so helpful rather than complaining. The first illustration in the text had portrayed three boys in one bed and the sister and the two remaining brothers in another bed. Carolina recalled a key detail from the image. In addition to being very kind and

supportive younger brothers, Carolina proposed that they were also willing to help their sister prepare her new room for another reason.

**Transcription and Code**

T: ¿Por qué están tan contentos y le están ayudando y no se sienten nada de envidia?

C12: Porque maybe le var a dar miedo que tiene su propio cuarto.

T: Oh, oh ellos piensan—le va a dar miedo….Pero tú crees que ellos quieren que ella tenga miedo?

Niños: No.

T: No parece verdad porque están—

Niños: Alegres. Felices.

Carolina: Y también puede ser como dos en una cama. [IN]

T: A lo mejor están pensando ay que bueno ya tenemos que dormir tres. Uno se va a pasar para aca y vamos a tener mas espacio, verdad? …Y como ella es una buena hermana a lo mejor ella los trata bien, están contentos que ella va a tener su propio cuarto. Me gusta mucho esta familia.

Beto: Antes yo me peleaba con mi hermana porque no mi hernamo por cuando ellos vinieron ya tuvo su primer bebe y luego lo quitaron el cuarto lo dieron un chiquitito y luego ese cuarto estaba grande. Y a mi y a mi me dijeron no porque um luego mi hermanita no mi sobrina que se iba se iba como se iba, le iba a apachurrar. Ahora tiene una cama más grande ( ) por otra casa. [PSN, T-S]

**Translation Code**

T: Why are they so happy and are they helping her and they don't feel any envy?

Beto: Because maybe she will be scared to have her own room.

T: Oh, oh, they think—she's going to be scared…But do you think that they want her to be scared?

Children: No.

T: That doesn't seem true because they are—

Children:  Cheerful. Happy.

Carolina:  And also there could be like two in the bed. [IN]

T:  Most likely they are thinking, how nice, now we [only] have to sleep [with] three [brothers].  One is going to go over there, and we are going to have more space, right?... And she is a good sister, most likely she treats them well. They are happy that she is going to leave her own room.  I like this family a lot.

Beto:  Before I argued with my sister because, no my brother for when they came [they] already had their first baby and later they took away a room and they gave [the baby] a small room and later that room was large.  And they told me, me, me, no [not to sleep with her] because um later my little sister, no my cousin was going to, was going to, I was going to squash her.  Now she has a larger bed (inaudible) in another house. [PSN, T-S]

Carolina suggested the brothers figured that there would be more room in their own bed if their sister were to move, and the teacher had not considered this possibility.  Yes, the boys were loving and helpful, but it also worked to everyone's advantage if their sister moved to a new room.  Carolina's simple inference added another possibility that still fit within one of the themes of the text, mutual family support, especially during tight times.  The teacher recalled this particular inference in a teacher interview conducted at the conclusion of all discussions for *My Very Own Room*.

…it [that the brothers might be thinking that now there would be more room in the bed if the sister has her own room] never occurred to me—they [the students] were the ones who said, "because now I have more space in the bed.  If she leaves now there won't be three of us in one bed." So that kind of told me that they did have a connection to being cramped and how it benefits everyone if we help her… (Personal communication, March 17, 2017)

The teacher suggests that Carolina and others may have been drawing on their own experiences with shared and/or tight living and sleeping spaces.  The text had portrayed the brothers as eager to help and very happy for their sister.  Carolina's inference added an additional and realistic perspective of a child. Notably, as well, Beto's

follow-up narrative builds on Carolina's response.  He explains why his older brother

asked him not to sleep with the new baby—Beto could have squashed her!

Another example of children drawing inferences to contribute to and generate meaning

comes from the third discussion of *My Very Own Room*. The sister in the story liked to sit alone

in a tree early in the morning so she could think and read in a quiet space. In this excerpt the

teacher was probing to see if the students remembered this part.  (Later in the discussion she

reread the page in which the sister sat alone reading.)  This initial question elicited both a literal

response and some brief inferences.  Note how Beto seems to build off of Eva's response, "so

she can change."

### Transcription and Code

T:  ¿Por qué fue tan importante para ella tener su propio cuarto?

Gaby:   Porque no estaba muy comoda y sus hermanos siempre le apachurraban.

Eva:  Privacy.  So she can change.

T:  ¿Qué quiere decir eso Eva? ¿Privacidad?

Eva:  Like her own space.

T: Que ella tiene su propio espacio, ¿verdad?  Y ¿qué más quiere decir
privacidad?  Cuando tienes tu propio espacio.

Beto:  Para que no se vean.

### Translation and Code

T:  Why was it so important for her to have her own room?

Gaby:   Because it wasn't very comfortable and her brothers always crowded her.

Eva:  Privacy…so she can change.

T:  What does that mean, Eva?  Privacy?

Eva:  Like her own space.

T:  That she wanted her own space, right?  And what else does private mean?  When you have your own space.

Beto:  So that no one sees her.

Here Gaby draws directly on the text whereas Eva and Beto draw inferences to move

beyond the text.  Eva was very engaged and led this part of the discussion.  She is quite small

and was sitting on her knees throughout in order to assert herself.  Later the teacher told me that

Eva had brothers, which explains many of her contributions during this part of the

discussion.  The teacher read through this brief excerpt and was pleased that children were citing

evidence from the text, as well as drawing inferences.  She specifically pointed to the responses

of Gaby and Eva as she commented: "So she's citing evidence right there (pointing to Gaby's

response). This is inferential, right?  That's good because there was the literal and there was the

inferential" (Personal communication, April 7, 2017).

In this brief commentary the teacher noted that both literal and inferential contributions

are necessary for comprehension.  Consolidation of literal comprehension is necessary in order to

generate inferential meaning and move beyond the text.  The teacher did not comment on Beto's

follow up response to Eva.  In the final interview conducted with the teacher she talk about how

all of the discussion activities provided children with important opportunities to build on each

other's ideas.

The children's oral contributions demonstrated comprehension across discussions of

*Amelia's Road* and *Chicken Sunday,* as well.  The number of inferences the children made, in

particular, across most all discussions is an important achievement and points to the many

opportunities the children were provided to talk about the characters.  For example, at the end of

the second discussion for Amelia's Road, Adrian had approached the teacher and asked her why

Amelia has to work if she's a child. During the final discussion for this text, the teacher posed

this question to the group. Why does Amelia have to work if she's a child?" An excerpt from

responses to this question follows. Note the particularly detailed narrative from Beto.

**Transcription and Code**

*Eva:  Para que sea mas rápido. [IN]*

*Beto:  Yo creo [que] cuando ya sea grande ya pueda comprar su propia casa y luego pa'que tenga con sus hijos tenga pa'que cuando sea grande le compre pa'que sea sus hijos y no necesitan, ah, no necesitan ayudar a la granja y otra y otra y otra [granja]. [SY]*

*Bety:  Porque, porque necesita ayudar a sus papás.  [IN]*

**Translation and Code**

Eva:  So that it's faster. [IN]

Beto:  I think that when she is [all] grown [then] she can buy her own house and later so that she [will have] with her children, she [will have] when she is older, she [will] buy it, so that it belongs to her children and they, ah, they don't need to help on the farm and another and another and another [farm]. [SY]

Bety:  Because, because she needs to help her parents. [IN]

The two inferences are logical.  Yes, the work could be completed more rapidly if there

were two more hands helping, and it seems that *Amelia needed* to help her parents. Beto explains

that when Amelia grows up and has children she's going to buy her own house for her children

so that they don't have to work on a farm and move from one farm to the next as Amelia did

when she was a child.  He makes a prediction that articulates and extends a big idea in the text.

Beto also reported why his father had moved to the U.S. from Mexico and proposed that Amelia

lived in Mexico because "allá no hay mucho dinero" [over there there is not much money].  This

is a particularly striking inferences and was assigned the code of synthesis. Beto's response

demonstrates an "evolving understanding about the big ideas in the book;" Amelia does not want

her children to have the same life that she had (Miller, 2002, p. 184). In essence, he "brings

together [his] background knowledge and understanding of the book to create….[an] original

understanding of the text" (Miller, 2002, p. 185). Beto's responses were unique in this way, and

the teacher noticed. She did not comment specifically on the other two responses in the excerpt.

> T: …he's [Beto] already thinking…hopes and dreams…she's going to grow up and—
> Investigator: So they don't have to go.

> T: Yes, and he's thinking of how—I'm sure his dad tells him I don't want you to have to
> do what I had to do—he's making that connection…that's another thing that surprised
> me… You can tell the conversations he's having with his dad. (Personal communication,
> April 11, 2017)

Here the teacher draws an inference—that Beto's father has told his son that he wants a

better life for Beto. This was surprising yet it reminded her that even though the children had

difficulty, for the most part, relating to Amelia's experiences, the text might be somewhat

relevant for their parents. As previously referenced, after reading several responses from Beto,

the teacher remarked that next year when she read this text she would try to build a home-school

connection. Beto's contributions are also important to note because they point to the complexity

of cultural relevance. The study children share multiple key sociocultural features that shape

their experiences and knowledge; yet even with a seemingly homogeneous group, children have

a range of different prior cultural knowledge and experiences. In addition, Beto could be the

more competent peer during a discussion of this text. The discussion format could be organized

so that his experiences and understanding could facilitate the comprehension of his peers.

The children's responses during discussions for *Chicken Sunday* demonstrated

comprehension, as well. At the end of the third discussion for this text, the teacher asked the

children what they thought the author's message was.  Enrique contributed a thoughtful

response.  I was particularly surprised because I had noticed less engagement throughout the

final discussion.  At the beginning of my observational field notes narrative, I had typed:

> What I noticed today was less engagement.  Specifically, the majority of the children
> were looking down and there weren't as many hands raised.  It seemed like children
> wanted to participate because some raised their hands but then wouldn't be able to think
> of a question or remember it. Beto [was] absent today.  The conversation [did] not have
> the same energy.  I attribute some of this to Beto's absence. (Observational field notes
> narrative, March 10, 2017)

The teacher also had to practice wait time, "slowly leafing through the illustrations" and

"rephrasing/restating the question" in order to elicit responses from the children (Observational

field notes narrative, March 10, 2017).  Enrique, however, explained a particularly deep

conclusion that he had drawn from the text.

**Transcription and Code**

Enrique:  Um, que um los, los personas que um (.) que tú quieres um (.) puedes,
puedes  ayudarles para que su vida pued—pueda ser mejor.

T:  Wow.  Las personas que tu quieres, tu puedes ayudarles que su vida sea mejor.  Qué
mensaje poderoso.  Wow. Y ¿cómo tu aprendiste esto de este libro?  Donde viste eso?

Enrique:  Um, cuando um, cuando el Sr. Ko-Kodinski estaba triste y ellos le hicieron um
algunos huevos de país.

**Translation Code**

Enrique:  Um, that, um the, the people that um (pause) that you love um (pause) you can,
you can help them so that their life can—can be better.

T:  Wow  The people you love, you can help them so that their life is better.  What a
powerful message.  Wow.  And how did you learn that from this book?  Where did you
see that?

Enrique:  Um, when, um, when Mr. Kodinski was sad and they made [for] him um some

eggs from his country.

Enrique's contribution was also assigned the code of synthesis because he stated a big idea or theme from the text in his own words. The teacher's follow-up questions also supported Enrique in explaining and extending his conclusion and synthesis. In an interview immediately following the conclusion of this final discussion activity for *Chicken Sunday,* the teacher briefly commented on Enrique's response. "I loved Enrique's answer. That was deep…even I was kind of grappling with what is the author's message" (Interview 3). As mentioned, the majority of the teacher's comments about discussions and child excerpts for this text focused on why she perceived the intergenerational and interracial relationships in the story as less relatable for the students. She also acknowledged that the children still found meaning in the text. The message that Enrique gleaned from the story attests to his comprehension.

An unanticipated finding regarding evidence of comprehension in discussions was that more children contributed responses in which evidence of comprehension was present during discussions for *My Very Own Room*, the text with the highest cultural relevance, than for the other two texts. This finding is similar to the unanticipated finding regarding the number of children who contributed prior knowledge-related responses. Both the teacher and I observed participation from more children during the discussions for *My Very Own Room*, and the quantitative data confirmed our perceptions that the children contributed more comprehension-related responses for this text. Importantly, many children generated responses that demonstrated emerging to profound comprehension for all texts.

In this section child data have provided a snapshot of the evidence of comprehension strategies that children employed to contribute during discussions for the three texts. Both child

and teacher data indicated that children contributed meaningful responses across all

discussions. However, where there was strong cultural relevance in the text, children's responses

presented the strongest evidence of comprehension with the greatest frequency.

- Finding 3: There were minimal differences in the number of responses in which evidence of both prior knowledge and comprehension either co-occurred or were contingent in discussions for all texts; however, the greatest number of co-occurrences and contingent responses were present during discussions for the text with the strongest cultural relevance, My Very Own Room.

**Co-occurrent and Contingent Responses with Prior Knowledge and Comprehension**

There were minimal differences in the number of responses in which evidence of both

prior knowledge and comprehension either co-occurred or were contingent in discussions for all

texts. In addition, there were few incidents of co-occurring and/or contingent responses in

discussions for all texts. The greatest number of co-occurrences and contingent responses,

however, were present during discussions for the text with the strongest cultural relevance, *My*

*Very Own Room*. Contingent responses are ones in which one child's prior knowledge seems to

facilitate and elicit another child's comprehension or vice versa. In essence, contingent

responses suggest that children are building on one another's ideas and experiences in order to

deepen comprehension and generate new meaning. This interaction is highly complex, and clear

evidence that a child is specifically building off of another's ideas can be difficult to identify.

The following excerpt comes from child data for the third discussion of *My Very Own*

*Room*. The teacher had asked the children if they thought it was important to have one's own

private and quiet space and why. This exchange features child responses in which evidence of

both prior knowledge and comprehension beyond the literal are evident. In addition, it includes

evidence of contingent responses in which children appear to build on one another's ideas in

order to generate new meaning. Key responses stem from Eva's inference that perhaps the sister

cleans up after her brothers and claims that "boys are dirty."

### **Transcription and Code**

T: …Hmm, entonces otra razón por la cual ella quiere su propio espacio, su propio cuarto es para tener no sólo privacidad pero tener—

(?): Silencio. (?): Espacio

T: Silencio. Para poder—

Gaby: Pensar.

T: ¿Crees que eso es importante para la gente tener un lugar donde tú puedes ir y pensar y estar tranquilo? ¿Estar en silencio? [Eva: And be private?]

T: ¿Por qué?

Carolina: Porque después puedes tener más espacio para poner sus cosas. [IN]
…

Leislie: Para que duerma bien.
…

Eva: Maybe she cleans up all the mess. [IN]

T: Oh, a lo mejor cuando estaba con sus hermanos ella tenía que recoger todo el tiradero. ¿Por qué crees que eso podría pasar?

Eva: Boys are dirty. [PSS]

T: Boys are kinda what? ((laughing))

Enrique: Yeah, that's me. [PSS]

T: ¿Porque tenía muchos hermanos y a lo mejor eran flojos? [Enrique: Mm-hm.] Y no querían recoger? Pero ¿esos hermanos parecen flojos?

**Niños:** No [Lots of cross-talk; Le ayudaron; sacar todo eso; T: La ayudaron mucho.]

Enrique: Cuando um yo siempre jugaba, yo siempre jugaba dejo los juguetes allí y siempre me dormían. [Cross-talk Teacher: Ahhh, entonce—] Entonces mis hermanos

mayores siempre me (inaudible dicen que?) tengo que recoger.  [PSN, TS]

T:  Ohh, entonces a lo mejor como ella era mayor que ellos pasaban como contigo y los hermanos jugaban y le tocaba a ella azar todo, verdad?  O podría ser [Cross-talk Eva: Y my brother's like ( )] posible.  Carlos?

Carlos:  Cuando (estaba?) jugando con los, los Legos  ( ) luego dejé tirados y después tenia muchos y ( ) después mm mm mi hermano dijo que—¿quién hizo este tiradero? Y yo lo escuché.  [PSN, TS]

T:  Entonces a lo mejor tú tienes razón porque yo sé que Enrique quiere mucho a sus hermanos, habla muchos de sus hermanos pero a lo mejor Enrique  sabe que es posible que los hermanos menores estaban haciendo tiradero en el cuarto y a la hermana le tocaba a recogerlo.  Entonces ella quiere su propio cuarto para que no tenga que estar

 (?):  Limpiando.

**Translation and Code**

T:…Hmm, so another reason for which she wants her own space, her own room is not only to have privacy but to have—

(?):  Silence. (?):  Space.

T:  Silence.   To be able to—

Gaby:  To think.

T:  Do you think it's important for people to have their own space where you can go to think and be in peace?  Be in silence?  [Eva: And be private?]

T:  Why?

Carolina:  Because then you can have more space to put your things.  [IN]
…

Leslie:  So that she can sleep well.
…
 Eva:  Maybe she cleans up all the mess.  [IN]
 T:  Oh, most likely when she was with her brothers she had to clean up all the mess. Why do you think that could happen?

Eva:  Boys are dirty.  [PSS]

T:  Boys are kinda what?  (laughing)

Enrique:  Yeah, that's me.  [PSS]

T:  Because she had a lot of brothers and most likely they were lazy?  [Enrique:  Mm-hm.]  And they don't want to clean up?  But those brothers seem lazy?

Children:  No [Lost of cross-talk; they helped her take everything out; T:  They helped her a lot.]

Enrique:  When um I was always playing I was always playing with my toys there and I always went to sleep. [Cross-talk Teacher:  Ahhh, so—] so my older brothers always (inaudible tell me that?) I have to clean up.  [PSN, TS]

T:  Ohh, so most likely because she was older than them, it happened like with you and the brothers played and it fell on her to clean up everything, right?  Or it could be [Cross-talk Eva: And my brother's like ( )] possible.  Carlos?

Carlos:  When (I was?) playing with the, the Legos (inaudible) later I left [them] thrown about and afterward I had a lot and (inaudible) afterward mm, mm, my brother said that—Who made this mess? And I heard him.  [PSN, TS]

T:  So most likely you are right because I know that Enrique loves his brothers very much, he talks about his brothers a lot, but most likely Enrique knows that it's possible that the younger brother were making a mess in the room and the sister had to clean up.  So she wants her own room so she doesn't have to be—

(?):  Cleaning.

Here the discussion moved beyond the text, and the children drew explicitly on personal experiences to infer why the sister would want a space of her own.  Notably, Eva's claim prompts Enrique to draw a connection to his own experiences as a younger brother.  Enrique's connection prompted Carlos to make his own connection, both to Enrique's response and the claim that Eva originally proposed. The teacher's careful facilitation and explication of the boys' connections supported this type exchange in which meaning unfolded within the interaction among the children.

They're talking about sharing a room and your brother's making a mess and you having

to clean it up and wanting a quiet space. Even though it is using their prior knowledge but it's also recognizing that character… And again, Carlos is participating and just throwing in his two cents…it's understanding family dynamics, when you share a space and having to be respectful…but I think that's his own level of understanding of why she needs some space from her siblings so I think that's really good. (Personal communication, April 7, 2017)

The teacher identifies the children's evolving understanding that seems to run through the excerpt.  She suggests that collectively the children drew on prior experiences with having siblings and making a mess, and on their understanding of the protagonist to generate an additional reason why the sister might have wanted her own room.  The brothers in the book were certainly not portrayed as messy, and there were no indications that the sister had to clean up their mess; yet the teacher's final comment explains how Enrique's and Carlos' connections can work within what they know about the characters in the text.

Vygotsky (1978) explains, "Every function in children's cultural development appears twice, on two levels.  First, on the social, and later on the psychological level" (p. 128).  Over time, from participating in literature discussions, young readers can internalize the academic discourse necessary for reading, thinking, and writing about complex texts.  Hence, a teacher can consistently model for and with her students the use of comprehension strategies, such as making a text-to-self connection, to deepen understanding.  She can provide the students with ongoing opportunities across time to practice making their own connections with peers and in groups. The teacher and children can discuss how their connections help them to understand character motivation and situations in texts.  Over time, children accommodate the strategies and are able to apply them when reading independently.  Importantly, in these early years of schooling, this type of learning can be mediated, co-constructed, through peer cooperation as this excerpt attests to.  Even though the teacher was facilitating the conversation, the children demonstrated an

emergent capacity to build on each other's experiences in order to generate new and deeper meaning.

## Being in the Hot Seat

Data from the hot seat discussions yielded an exciting and unanticipated finding; this discussion format unlocked a key cognitive skill essential for reading comprehension development, the generation of authentic questions about characters, events and key themes in a text.  The children generated the greatest number of questions during the hot seat discussion for each text.  In addition, they made inferences the most frequently during this discussion format for *My Very Own Room* and *Amelia's Road*.  Children's questions were assigned one of two descriptive codes, Question Inferential [QI] or Question Text [QT].  QI indicates that a child must make an inference to respond to the question.  QT indicates that a child must draw on evidence explicitly stated in the text in order to respond to the question.

Table 15 displays a list of questions and responses the children generated during the hot seat activity for each text. The codes are denoted in brackets following the child's response to which the code is assigned.  Notably, nearly all of the questions generated for all characters for the three texts required the child in the hot seat to make an inference in order to respond effectively.  Some questions required one to draw explicitly on the text to respond.

Table 15. Children's Questions Generated for Hot Seat Discussion for Each Text

| Strongest Cultural Relevance: *My Very Own Room*<br>N = 32<br>N for QT = 3; N for QI = 29 | Middle Cultural Relevance: *Amelia's Road*<br>N = 17<br>N for QI = 15; N for QT = 2 | Weakest Cultural Relevance: *Chicken Sunday*<br>N=22<br>N for QI = 20; N for QT =2 |
|---|---|---|
| For the Father<br>• Adrian: *¿Por qué necesitas necesitas, trabajar en esa fábrica?* [QI]<br> *Dad: Poque me gusta um porque me gusta ganar el dinero.* [IN]<br>• Adrian: Why do you need to work in that factory? [QI]<br> Dad: Because I like to, um because I like to earn money. [IN] | For Amelia<br>• *Eva:¿Por qué no llorabas cuando tu papá sacó la mapa al final?* [QI]<br> *Amelia: Porque después yo pensaba que ya nos vamos a mudar a a una casa bonita.* [IN]<br>• Eva: Why didn't you cry when your dad took out the map at the end? [QI]<br> Amelia: Because afterward I thought that we are now going to move to a, a pretty house. [IN] | For Mr. Kodinski<br>• Adrian: *¿Por qué te gustan mucho los huevos que te pintaron los niños?* [QI]<br> Mr. Kodinski: Porque son de mi país y los extraño. [IN]<br>• Adrian: Why do you like the eggs that the children painted a lot? [QI]<br> Mr. Kodinski: Because they are from my country and I miss them. [IN] |
| For the main character, Amada<br>• Yesenia: *¿Por qué les (dejaste entrar) a tus hermanos?* [QI]<br> *Amada: Porque me ayudaron, uh, a hacer mi cuarto y yo quería leerles un cuento.* [SY]<br>• Yesenia: Why did you let your brothers enter?<br> Amada: Because they helped me, uh, to make my new room and I wanted to read them a story. [SY] | • *Alyssa: ¿Por qué trabajas mucho con tu familia?* [QI]<br> *Amelia: Porque a veces no tenemos mucha comida.*<br>• Alyssa: Why did you work so much with your family? [QI]<br> Amelia: Because sometimes we don't have much food. [IN] | • *Alyssa: Um, ¿por qué te enojas mucho?* [QI]<br> *Mr. Kodinski: Um, porque no me gusta enojarme pero es que los niños siempre me hacen enojar.* [IN]<br>• Alyssa: Um, whey do you get angry a lot? [QI]<br> Mr. Kodinski: Um, because I don't like to get angry but it's that the children always make me angry. [IN] |
| For the brother, Hector<br>• Gaby: *¿Por qué um ( ) fuiste a ayudar a ponerles las estampillas?* [QI]<br> Hector: *Porque, um, porque ella quería la, la, porque ella quería um, um porque ella nunca ha tenido eso.* [IN]<br>• Gaby: Why um (inaudible) do you go help put on the stamps? [QI]<br> Hector: Because um, because she wanted the, the, because she wanted um, um because she had never had that. [IN] | • Carlos: *¿Por qué te cambiaste de escuela?* [QI]<br> Amelia: *Porque nos vamos a mudar.* [IN]<br>• Carlos: Why did you change schools? [QI]<br> Amelia: Because we are going to move. [IN] | For Mrs. Eula<br>• Bety: *¿Por qué te gusta mucho el pollo?* [QI]<br> *Mrs. Eula: Está muy rico.* [IN]<br>• Bety: Why do you like chicken a lot? [QI]<br> Mrs. Eula: It is very delicious/rich. [IN] |
| For the Mother<br>• *Enrique: Ah, ¿por qué ahh por que, um por que al primero no le dejastes tener um el el cuarto? [QT]*<br> *Mom: Porque había muchas cosas que estaban guardando.*<br>• Enrique: Ah, why did you ahh why um why in the beginning did you not let her have um the, the room? [QT]<br> Mom: Because there were many things that we were storing [in there]. | • *Evelyn: ¿Por qué a la niña no le gusta (la?) otra escuela?* [QT]<br> *Bety: Porque la, la otra maestra no quería aprender los nom los nombres de nadien.*<br>• Evelyn: Why doesn't the girl like (the?) other school? [QT]<br> Bety: Because the, the other teacher didn't want to learn the name the names of anyone. | • Yami:*¿Por qué quieres la gorra?* [QT]<br> Mrs. Eula: *Porque estaba bonita.*<br>• Yami: Why do you want the hat? [QT]<br> Mrs. Eula: Because it was pretty. [QT] |

The children generated questions for different characters. The teacher described the hot

seat discussion activity for all three texts as particularly effective for developing ways of

thinking and talking about texts that can promote comprehension. She specifically mentions

"building off other people's ideas," which attests to the co-construction of understanding that she

observed in the hot seat discussions for each text. The following excerpt from teacher data

derives from the final interview that occurred after classroom data collection had concluded and

when I shared initial findings with Ms. León.

> [The hot seat] in a sense forces the kid in the hot seat to see events and the character through being the character, right? So [the students] are pushed a little more to make those connections or to relate to the characters because they're actually having to act out the character. So for the other kids, it gives them an opportunity to ask questions, which is a different strategy. … the kid in the hot seat is the one that will hopefully be able to build on prior knowledge and use even the prior knowledge gained through the other discussions to figure out the character, what motivates the character, why does the character do this…or feel this way…I just think that the hot seat lends to more critical thinking better than say a worksheet. I could have typed up all those questions and had them sit there and answer them… there's no dialogue, there's no interaction, there's no engaging, and there's no building off other people's ideas... I think it [generating and responding to questions in the hot seat discussion] deepens comprehension…even if they're not able to build on prior knowledge, they're not able to make connections, but at the very least they're given pause to think about why is this character doing this, what motivates this character...[T]hen it builds oracy because the kids are asking questions, the person in the hot seat's answering questions…they come up with better questions than me sometimes so then you…see what are they wondering about. So I think it's just a very powerful strategy in that sense. (Personal communication, August 4, 2017)

In this detailed excerpt the teacher describes several key aspects of the hot seat discussion

format. Apart from the generation of authentic questions, the hot seat discussion format provides

children with opportunities to practice one or more of the following comprehension strategies in

order to respond to peers' questions: drawing on prior knowledge for a text, citing evidence

from the text, and drawing on prior knowledge gained from previous discussions of the text. She

also addressed the language productivity that is embedded in an activity in which the teacher

serves as more of a guide, and the children ask and respond to each other's questions.

Data from teacher interviews indicate that the teacher found the children's questions

generated during the hot seat activity for *My Very Own Room* as "deep" and "perfect".

> … the questions are to get [the students] to think about possible answers… The author's

not going to tell us everything about [Amada's] family. But we can [use our prior knowledge]… the way Eva said well maybe they're messy… and Gaby's using the actual evidence in the book… [Gaby said] look at them in the bed, she's tired of being smushed with them….there was stuff that wasn't explicitly spelled out in the book but there [were] clues so you could…piece [the meaning] together with your own prior knowledge and what you know about families and tight spaces… I was happy that they were able to do it and then show me that…I can teach them why you ask those questions and why those questions are good questions to ask. (Personal communication, April 7, 2017)

The teacher also discussed the students' difficulty responding to some of the questions from the point of view of Amelia, a migrant farmworker whose daily experiences differed greatly from those of the children in the classroom. Likewise, she described a few questions from the hot seat discussion for *Chicken Sunday* as "superficial," and suggested the students had difficulty relating to characters' intergenerational and interracial relationships. Importantly, however, both child and teacher data demonstrate evidence of inferential comprehension in children's oral responses for the hot seat discussion for all texts.

In this section child discussion data and teacher interpretations of children's exchanges have provided a descriptive interpretation of three key findings from data analysis. An important achievement of the discussions was the presence of robust language productivity and evidence of comprehension in children's responses across all discussions for each text. Another key finding indicated that children drew on prior knowledge and demonstrated comprehension most frequently when discussing the text with the highest cultural relevance. An unanticipated finding showed the greatest number of children, 14 of 15, contributed both prior knowledge- and comprehension-related responses when discussing this text, as well. When more children contribute meaningful responses during book discussions, they have greater opportunities to build off of each other's ideas and generate new interpretations and deeper meaning. The text with the highest cultural relevance, *My Very Own Room*, provided the type of opportunity in

which children could bring many of their experiences to the task of making meaning through

facilitated talk with peers and their teacher.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study proposes that reading and discussing culturally relevant texts (CRTs) that tap into children's prior knowledge and experiences can serve as a catalyst for the development of reading comprehension and oral discourse among Spanish-English emergent bilingual children. The answer to the study question—Can culturally relevant texts afford second-grade Spanish-English bilingual children primarily from working class backgrounds opportunities to draw on prior knowledge in comprehending a text during literature discussions?—is yes. Children drew explicitly on prior knowledge in their oral contributions across all nine discussions, and their responses presented evidence of comprehension for all discussions of each text, as well. In particular, the data indicate that children drew on prior knowledge most frequently, and contributed responses in which evidence of comprehension was present with the greatest frequency, during discussions for the text with the highest cultural relevance. The greatest number of children contributed these types of responses during discussions for this text, as well. These findings support a tentative conclusion that this text, in particular, provided children with opportunities to draw on prior knowledge and experiences to comprehend.

The answer to the question—How does drawing on prior knowledge contribute to the quality and depth of children's talk as evidenced by comprehension strategies they employ in literature discussions?—was inconclusive but yielded a tentative association. While incidences of prior knowledge were infrequently explicitly connected with evidence of comprehension

148

across all discussions, evidence of both prior knowledge and comprehension in a single oral response occurred the most frequently during the third discussion of *My Very Own Room.* Interestingly, the children's mean rating for the cultural relevance of each text paralleled the descriptors for each text. The mean score for the text with the greatest cultural relevance was the text with the highest results on comprehension with prior knowledge. The mean score for the middle-level text followed, and the text with the lowest cultural relevance received the lowest mean score. This finding, in particular, suggests that children are attuned to what they are reading, and how they see themselves in relation to texts. It also suggests that they may be capable evaluators of the cultural relevance of their reading materials. Recruiting children's point of view and support during the text selection process may ultimately provide optimal opportunities for children to practice thinking and talking about texts in ways that contribute to academic success. This finding also serves as a reminder that children are capable of thinking deeply in ways that are infrequently tapped into or measured in classroom activities and discourse practices.

## Summary of Key Findings

Findings from this study build a case for the intentional use of culturally relevant texts as part of the literacy curriculum for Spanish-English emergent bilingual children. While the children contributed responses in which evidence of comprehension was present in all discussions across all texts, positive differences were identified across the discussions for the most culturally relevant text. Analysis of child discussion data indicates:

(i) Children drew explicitly on prior knowledge and experiences the most frequently when discussing the text with the highest cultural relevance.

(ii) Children's responses demonstrated evidence of comprehension with the greatest frequency during discussions for the text with the highest cultural relevance.

    (iii)    Minimal differences were evident in the number of responses in which evidence of both prior knowledge and comprehension either co-occurred or were contingent in discussions for all texts; however, the greatest number of co-occurrences and contingent responses were present during discussions for the text with the strongest cultural relevance.

The lack of evidence of explicit prior knowledge and comprehension in individual responses can be attributed to multiple factors. As discussed in the results of Chapter IV, even though making an inference requires a reader to use her prior knowledge and on textual clues to draw a conclusion (Miller, 2002, p. 243), readers rarely articulate their prior knowledge when inferring unless instructed to do so. Explicitly articulating one's prior knowledge to comprehend was not one of the teacher's objectives when facilitating the discussions. In addition, the prior knowledge and comprehension codes did not capture the internal or implicit mental process of drawing on one's prior knowledge and experiences to infer meaning in a text. Conducting brief post-discussion focus group conversations with children could elicit more information on the interaction between children's prior knowledge and comprehension for texts read.

In school, it seems that children need direct instruction in order to explicitly articulate the prior knowledge and experiences they draw on to comprehend. For example, Miller (2013) suggests that teachers record a list of children's text-to-self connections for a story read together. The list is made available to children, and the teacher facilitates a discussion with the children on how their prior knowledge and experiences can help them comprehend situations and/or characters more deeply. Likewise, Miller suggests providing children with a T-chart when making predictions. On the left side of the chart, the children write a prediction for what will occur next in a story, and on the right side children respond to the question, "What's the thinking

behind your prediction?" (p. 138). This type of explicit instruction and practice helps children to internalize the strategy of using one's prior knowledge to infer meaning when reading.

The teacher did not frequently and explicitly ask the children to report on the prior knowledge that underpinned their responses because this was not an objective of the discussions. When a child made an inference, the teacher typically did not ask the child what experiences caused her to think in that way. When the teacher modeled her own text-to-self connections, she did not use sentence frames or patterned language in which she explicitly connected her prior experiences with a situation or character in the text. The discussions were more organic, and a principle objective was for children to ask questions about the texts in order to deepen comprehension.

Additional unanticipated findings indicated that the greatest number of children contributed responses in which comprehension and/or prior knowledge was evident when discussing the text with the highest cultural relevance. Across the discussions for this text, 14 of 15 children contributed responses in which evidence of prior knowledge or evidence of comprehension was present. Hence, among the three texts in the study, the one with the highest cultural relevance, *My Very Own Room*, served as a catalyst for discussion activities in which more children contributed meaningful responses with the greatest frequency. Another unanticipated finding pointed to the hot seat as an effective discussion format in eliciting a key cognitive skill essential for comprehension development, the generation of authentic inferential questions for characters and key events in a text. Children generated original and primarily inferential questions with the greatest frequency during this discussion format for each text.

Additionally, for two of the texts, the children drew inferences the most frequently during this discussion format.

Teacher data provided qualitative descriptions of children's participation and comprehension, as well. "… [I]t was like **everybody**, **everybody**, [teacher stress] everybody could relate to something…" and "…people in the hot seat knew how to answer those questions. [The children] knew exactly why they [the brothers] helped them [their sister and parents]" (Personal communication, March 17, 2017). Hence, in line with empirical findings from Lohfink and Loya (2010), children were more likely to contribute during discussions because the texts connected with their cultural backgrounds; "[t]he events in the stories reflect *real* events in their lives—experiences that they can talk about…" (p. 360). When reading child data the teacher also discussed how children drew explicitly on the text and also drew inferences based on what they knew about living in and sharing tight spaces.

**How Findings Fit within Literature**

### Comprehension and Culturally Relevant Texts

The following section situates key findings within empirical research on the relationship between prior knowledge and reading comprehension, and on the development of reading comprehension among young Spanish-English bilingual children. These findings were achieved in Spanish in a second grade classroom in which children used their cognitive, cultural, experiential, and linguistic resources to contribute to meaning-making during book discussions. Within this section, contributions of the study findings are examined in the context of schema theory and facilitative encoding, sociocultural theory, and translanguaging and third space theory. The multiple theoretical frameworks employed to interpret findings provide critical

insight into the complexity of conducting classroom-based research with Spanish-English emergent bilingual children.

**Schema Theory: Children's Prior Knowledge for a Text Can Facilitate Comprehension**

Children drew explicitly on prior knowledge and experiences most frequently when discussing the text with the highest cultural relevance. In addition, their responses demonstrated evidence of comprehension with the greatest frequency during discussions for the text with the highest cultural relevance. These key findings from book discussions amplify the empirical research literature to date. Studies have long indicated a strong association between prior knowledge for a topic of a text and aspects of reading comprehension for the text (Adams et al., 1995; Recht & Leslie, 1988; Schneider et al., 1989). This also includes prior cultural knowledge for a text (e.g., Bell & Clark, 1998; Lispon, 1983; Garth-McCullough, 2008). Moreover, studies conducted with Spanish-English emergent bilingual primary grade children have also established a relationship between prior cultural knowledge and aspects of reading comprehension in English (Ebe 2010, 2012, 2014). Study children made significantly more high-quality miscues when reading a CRT than when reading a non-CRT, and the children's holistic retelling scores for the CRT were significantly higher.

These key findings are compatible with fundamental tenets of schema theory. Schema theory posits that prior knowledge for a text facilitates the cognitive process of integrating new information in a text into one's existing knowledge or schema. A robust schema for a text frees cognitive space and resources to focus on more complex aspects of comprehension, such as making and articulating inferences (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Hence, Miller (2002) explains that competent comprehenders employ their "schema to draw inferences in order to answer

questions and generate meanings that are not explicitly found in a text" (p. 121). In essence, both research and theory attest to the critical role that prior knowledge can play in reading comprehension.

Schema theory provides an important yet partial explanation of key findings of the study. It does not, however, foreground the specific role of culture—the experiences and knowledge embedded children's daily practices within families and communities, and their knowledge related to their ethnicities, social class, and language backgrounds—as a fundamental resource for learning and comprehending. Literacy scholars, McVee et al. (2005) point out that while experience is considered a cornerstone of individual comprehension, the social and cultural nature of individual experience is for the most part negligible throughout articulations of schema theory (p. 538). They draw on Vygotskyan theory and propose that "schemas are cultural historical constructions that emerge only within the individual through transactions with others" (p. 541). Children's emerging schemas are shaped by their experiences interacting with their families and communities and within their family and community histories. Beto's emerging schema related to immigration to the U.S. from Mexico is embedded in his father's first-hand experiences leaving Mexico for the U.S. When Beto suggested that Amelia's family lived in Mexico because "*allí no hay mucho dinero por eso*— […over there there isn't much money [and] for that reason—]", he drew on prior knowledge of his father's experience, one grounded in the histories of many Mexican-Americans.

Cultural, experiential, and linguistic knowledge form part of one's knowledge base and schemas. Furthermore, schema theory does not account for the development and emergence of the cognitive processes fundamental to reading comprehension development in novice readers.

For these reasons, the study draws on both Rueda's (2011) facilitative encoding hypothesis and on sociocultural theory to further interpret findings and situate them within empirical research.

**Facilitative Encoding: Children's Cultural Schema Can Enhance Comprehension**

Rueda's facilitative encoding hypothesis (2011) prioritizes the role that children's cultural knowledge can play in making academic tasks more comprehensible. This hypothesis explicitly draws on schema theory and cognitive load theory to describe how a child's specific cultural schema, such as an understanding of the immigration process, can support comprehension of a task by reducing the cognitive load of the task. As a theoretical framework, it is useful in interpreting why children's oral contributions presented evidence of comprehension strategies most frequently during discussions of the text with the highest cultural relevance. Rueda suggests that children may process information in a story more efficiently when the situations and events map onto their prior knowledge and experiences. More efficient processing frees cognitive resources to focus on more complex tasks, such as making inferences.

For example Carlos, a child who does not participate frequently in class discussions, made meaningful contributions during discussions for all three texts. In particular, he drew on prior knowledge and demonstrated use of a comprehension strategy most frequently during discussions of the text with the highest cultural relevance. Carlos contributed in the following ways when discussing *My Very Own Room*.

- Reported on his sleeping arrangements at home
- Asked an authentic question that demonstrated evidence of inferential thinking (and not during the hot seat)
- Asked two additional questions for two different characters during the hot seat
- Reported on a peer's interpretation of the text
- Connected to the text by reporting on his mom's work schedule
- Made a text-to-self connection by reporting a personal narrative about being a younger brother

Rueda's hypothesis (2011) explains how children's cultural schema can facilitate comprehension. Carlos' shared experiences with the characters in the text with the highest cultural relevance seemed to unlock aspects of his cognitive capacity and to invite his active participation.

As mentioned, study findings are compatible with empirical research findings that have identified a relationship between specific cultural knowledge for a text and aspects of reading engagement and comprehension among Spanish-English bilingual children (Ebe, 2010, 2012, 2014; Lohfink & Loya, 2010). Ebe's studies were conducted in English and measured individual children's reading miscues, recall, and comprehension of two texts. The current study's focus on oral contributions during book discussions of texts with different levels of cultural relevance as determined by the teacher and children, and in Spanish, is unique.

Findings from Lohfink and Loya (2010) identified a relationship between children's cultural experiences and engagement and interpretation of culturally relevant texts read and discussed in English. They found that children responded to specific cultural cues in the texts when writing about and discussing the texts. Findings from the current study confirm and extend those of Lohfink and Loya. More children contributed prior-knowledge related responses during discussions of the text with the greatest cultural relevance. In addition, results suggest that the correlation between cultural connections in a text and children's contributions during discussions is evident when discussing texts in Spanish. The current study's focus on children's comprehension of culturally relevant texts also yields a unique contribution of the literature. Lohfink and Loya suggest: "[C]ulturally relevant texts could serve as more than just a plan for reading engagement—they could also become bridges to connect the how-to skill development

of reading comprehension as well as other language arts content" (p. 360). As the authors posed, findings from the current study suggest that culturally relevant texts may be effective resources for reading comprehension development among this particular child population.

Furthermore, study findings confirm those from López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate (2013) and Martínez-Roldán (2000); Spanish-English bilingual children draw on home language patterns and cultural and personal experiences to participate and meaning making of texts during book discussions. The current study's examination of the relationship between aspects of children's oral responses and the cultural relevance of each text adds a unique contribution to empirical research on Spanish-English bilingual children's reading comprehension development in Spanish.

McVee et al. (2005) draw from Vygotskyan theory and propose that "schemas are cultural historical constructions that emerge only within the individual through transactions with others" (p. 541). The cultural and experiential resources that Spanish-English emergent bilingual children from working class families who are growing up in urban neighborhood bring to the reading comprehension process are unique. These resources form part of the children's knowledge base, and they inform the emerging schemas the children bring to the task of comprehending text.

For example, Beto's knowledge of his father's immigration experience informed his understanding of aspects of *My Very Own Room* and *Amelia's Road*, the texts with the highest and middle level of cultural relevance, respectively. Beto suggested that perhaps the child migrant farmworker and protagonist in *Amelia's Road* had to work in the fields because she lived in Mexico and over there there is not much money. Later in the discussion Beto reported that his

father came to the U.S. because in Mexico he had to work in the mechanic shop with his dad.

The protagonist in *My Very Own Room* states that sometimes extended family members came to

live temporarily with her family. The teacher paused to ask if the children had ever had a similar

experience to which Beto exclaimed, *"!Oh! !Siempre!" "!Mi padrino! !Mi padrino!"*

[Oh! Always! My godfather! My godfather!]. In this text the uncle gives his bed to his neice

because he is returning to Mexico. During the hot seat discussion of this text, Beto asked the

uncle why he had needed to stay with his brother's family for a few days. The text did not state

explicitly state this. Beto inferred that the brother had been staying with his brother's family,

quite possibly based on his own experiences.

Thus far, study findings have augmented empirical research on the relationship beteween

prior knowledge, with a focus on children's specific cultural and experiential resources, and

aspects of reading comprehension. Both schema theory and Rueda's facilitative encoding

hypothesis (2011) are useful theoretical tools for explaining key cognitive processes that occur

within individual children when they draw on cultural and experiential knowledge and resources

to comprehend during book discussions. Reading comprehension, however, is not an isolated

process that occurs within the individual child. Emergent readers are novices in the process of

appropriating ways of thinking about texts. They need extensive opportunities to participate in

facilitated talk about texts in order to achieve high levels of comprehension.

**Sociocultural Theory: Children's Sustained Facilitated Social Interaction around a Text**

**Can Stimulate Comprehension**

The study intentionally focuses on children's oral responses during book discussions.

Sociocultural perspectives of learning pose that thought and language originate within social and

cultural activity and thus development and learning emerge within these activities, as well

(McVee et al., 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).  Listening to and reporting on the ideas and connections

of others was a hallmark of the discussions.  Children also frequently generated questions for

characters and responded to peers' questions.  In addition, children frequently responded to the

teacher's literal and inferential questions about aspects of the texts, and they often reported on

their personal connections with situations and characters in the texts.  Children's thinking

permeated the classroom during discussions, and evidence of comprehension was evident in their

oral responses.

Sociocultural theory serves as a framework for describing how book discussions in which

children's sustained facilitated social interaction around a text can stimulate comprehension.

Martínez-Roldán's (2000) findings demonstrated this phenomenon in her year-long case study of

Spanish-English bilingual children's multiple book discussions. Findings from this study

demonstrate this phenomenon with a similar child population and when discussing texts with

different levels of cultural relevance.  Findings suggest that facilitated talk about texts,

particularly during the hot seat discussion format and in cooperation with one's peers, can

enhance the appropriation of questioning and making inferences, two comprehension strategies

necessary for high-level comprehension, (Miller, 2013).

Children achieved the greatest comprehension during the hot seat discussions, a primarily

child-led discussion format in which children generated questions and a peer responded.  The

teacher, Mrs. León, alluded to this phenomenon in the following excerpt from teacher interview

data.  Below is part of her response to the question, "Is there anything in particular about the

discussion of *My Very Own Room* that stands out to you?"

> [T]he hot seat made [the discussion] more student-lead, I feel… that's something that I realized, and that's why they looked forward to it…because they know they're literally going to be in the limelight…I did notice that you [the teacher] are more of a guide on the side because you're setting [the hot seat discussion] up for them. I think that stood out for me…and doing questioning that way will generate more authentic discussions. (Personal communication, March 17, 2017).

Findings indicated that nearly all of the questions the children generated during the hot seat discussions required the child in the hot seat to make an inference in order to respond effectively.

The teacher discussed the hot seat, in general, in the final interview after all data collection had concluded.

> [T]he hot seat lends to more critical thinking better than say a worksheet... I could have typed up all those questions and had them sit there and answer them… But…there's no dialogue, there's no interaction, there's no engaging, and there's no…building off other people's ideas… they come up with better questions than me sometimes. (August 4, 2017).

Children's responses demonstrated evidence of comprehension most frequently during the hot discussion for the text with the highest cultural relevance. The greatest number of study children, 14 of 15, contributed comprehension-related responses during this particular hot seat discussion, as well. This key finding suggests that several key elements interacted to support the children in achieving a high-level discussion. The teacher's pedagogical orientation and knowledge of and trust in her children led her to select a child-centered and child-facilitated discussion format. Then together the text with the highest level of cultural relevance and the child-centered discussion format tapped into the children's cognitive capacities, yielding a high-level discussion.

The children's experiences participating in the hot seat discussion format seem to embody aspects of Vygotsky's description of a fundamental component of learning:

> …an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that

is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers.  Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. (p. 35)

In particular, findings from the study suggest that intentionally selected materials and discussion formats, such as texts with high cultural relevance for the children and the hot seat discussion format, can provide children opportunities to interact with each other and collectively generate high-level comprehension in their discussions.  These findings confirm those from Martínez-Roldán (2000)—emergent bilingual children are capable of engaging in high-level, student-led book discussions in which comprehension permeates the exchanges.  This has clear implications for both classroom practice and research.  When the expert teacher becomes a "guide on the side," children may be capable of working at their highest levels in cooperation with each other rather than in direct collaboration with a teacher.

Language is a fundamental cultural tool used to negotiate meaning; therefore children's talk is the primary data analyzed throughout this study.  The theoretical frameworks discussed thus far do not explicitly foreground the children's linguistic knowledge, the bilingual practices and cognitive resources associated with emergent bilingual children.  Just as the facilitative encoding hypothesis emphasizes the interaction between culture and comprehension, translanguaging pedagogy and theory (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014) and third space theory (Gutiérrez et al., 1995; Gutiérrez et al., 1999) foreground children's language practices and linguistic expertise as powerful resources for learning.

**Translanguaging Pedagogy and Theory: Access to One's Full Repertoire of Linguistic**

**Resources Can Facilitate Participation and Comprehension**

Flexible patterns of participation in which both children and teachers can draw on all of their languages to maximize comprehension is essential for children whose knowledge and experiences are distributed across more than one language (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014). The novice reader is initially an apprentice in the process of accommodating and integrating new information in a story with their existing knowledge. Emergent bilingual children need to be able to recruit all of their tools for meaning making and learning when practicing this process. Having access to one's full linguistic repertoire is fundamental to translanguaging theory.

The teacher in this study is a self-described, "translanguager" (Personal communication, April 7, 2017). She and the children, as bilinguals, drew on all of their language resources within a linguistically flexible instructional setting to contribute meaningfully to discussions. Hence, rather than practicing a strict separation of languages or correcting children when they code-switched or used a non-standard dialect of Spanish, Mrs. León modeled being bilingual during Spanish literacy instruction. She primarily used standard Spanish during discussions, but she occasionally code-switched intentionally for emphasis, to clarify a child's thinking, or to connect children's learning across languages. She also code-switched unintentionally, drawing on English and Spanish occasionally to express her feelings and personality.

Both the teacher and children demonstrated intrasentential code-switching during discussions; they used both Spanish and English words and/or phrases in a single sentence and in a grammatically standard way in some of their oral contributions in discussions. Other times children moved back and forth between languages. For example, Enrique used English to

respond to a comment that Eva made in English. He then elaborated on Eva's and his own comments in English by making a text-to-self connection in Spanish as demonstrated on pages 141 to 142 in Chapter V.

When both the teacher and children bring non-standard and traditionally disparaged ways of speaking into academic conversations, they contribute to the creation of a third space in the classroom. In addition, both the teacher and children drew on "local knowledge" or informal, experiential knowledge, to participate and make meaning in discussions (Gutiérrez et al., 1999, p. 294). For example, the teacher and several children reported on a parent's long and late work hours and on problems that arise when sharing tight living spaces to connect with the situations, characters, and big idea in *My Very Own Room*. Alternative language practices and children's local, experiential knowledge become valuable tools for meaning-making in classrooms in which a third space thrives.

Findings from the current study build on those from the research of López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate (2013) and Martínez-Roldán (2000), among others. Spanish-English emergent bilingual children draw on all of their linguistic resources, as well as on personal and cultural experiences, to make meaning during discussions. Evidence of comprehension was present throughout all facilitated book discussions about texts with different levels of cultural relevance. The children had access to their full repertoire of language skills and practices across all discussions, and this open access may be important for children's reading comprehension development in Spanish and English.

Translanguaging theory, specifically, builds on Cummins (1981a) common underlying proficiency model. Cummins posits that conceptual learning and the development of cognitive

skills in one language facilitates learning in the other language. When children learn to generate questions when reading, to search for evidence in a text, and to infer the answers in order to deepen comprehension, these strategies and skills transfer across languages. They do not have to be relearned. Thus comprehension strategies that children appropriate during Spanish instruction and through the use of standard Spanish, a dialect of Spanish, or language features from both Spanish and English, support their reading comprehension development in English.

The discussion of findings in the context of the diverse theoretical frameworks employed in the study may provide a nascent blueprint for conducting classroom research with any child population, and specifically with Spanish-English emergent bilingual children. Documenting and analyzing interactions among children and their teacher as they discuss texts in the classroom requires an intentional integration of theoretical frameworks, and an understanding of how each one can serve to capture and explain authentic glimpses of children's thinking. By examining the cognitive, cultural-experiential, and linguistic resources evident in children's discussion responses for texts with different levels of cultural relevance, a detailed sketch of key features of high-level discussion with Spanish-English bilingual children emerges. Teacher pedagogy and classroom culture also emerge as fundamental components of high-level discussion.

**Tapping into Emergent Bilingual Children's Skills in Facilitated Literature Discussions**

The teacher in this study was invested in the children, the texts, and discussions. Mrs. León knew her students well. She knew their siblings, their families, and their community. As discussed, the teacher grew up in a working class family and in a community similar to the one in which she now works. She understood her children not only because she knew them well;

she had also lived and experienced first-hand many of the same daily experiences and situations her children were experiencing at ages seven and eight.

Mrs. León was invested in her students as bilingual learners, as well.  Her own child attended the dual language program of the school. "I knew I believed in dual [language education], and I knew I wanted it for my own children… I've always been able to be a dual language teacher.  That's definitely who I am" (Personal communication, January 20, 2017). This investment means that she believed her students were linguistically and intellectually talented, and she treated them that way.  She held high expectations for them.  These are key tenets for culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1992; 1994), the kind of teaching that yields academic success for children from minority and traditionally marginalized backgrounds.

Mrs. León's classroom was child-centered.  Children made identity collages during the first month of school, and they lined the walls for the year.  Child-created classroom signs and charts, and child-generated classroom rules were on display.  Children sat in clusters of desks and frequently worked in small groups and pairs on the floor. The following excerpts derive from the teacher's discussion of her teaching philosophy and history.  Her investment in both her students and her own professional growth are evident.

> I definitely try to be child-centered and to focus on the whole child…I'm driven more by what's best for the kids and not what is…mandated or pushed on me because I think ultimately…that's how it should be… [At the second school where I worked] I learned a lot about…holistic teaching and the whole child and social justice…I was always a cooperative learning person, and I got to do that and continue to do that… [At my third school] I grew the most professionally because we were a small building, and we had a lot of PD [professional development] among the staff, a cozy atmosphere where we could sit and talk about our ideas and explore areas of growth and need. (Personal communication, January 20, 2017)

The classroom environment that Mrs. León and her students cultivated was child-centered and cozy.  Discussions often featured children working in cooperation, rather than simply responding to the teacher's questions. The teacher was committed to her professional growth, as well.  On several occasions she referenced a professional development series in which she had learned about the importance of generating authentic questions for reading comprehension development. Her selection of the hot seat discussion format was not an accident. Her strong professional knowledge base and a steadfast belief in and understanding of her students' capabilities informed her instructional decisions.

In this study, the text with the highest cultural relevance provided both the children and teacher with multiple points of connection.  This selection was not an accident either. When discussing culturally relevant texts weeks before data collection began, the teacher made reference to the text she ultimately selected for the highest cultural relevance, *My Very Own Room*.

> We have a lot of bilingual books, and the characters…a lot of times look like [my students], [they have] Spanish names like them, struggles that they have, [such as] having to share a room like [in] Mi cuartito…I try to find—even if it's just in my classroom library—a lot books that they can relate to. (Personal communication, January 20, 2017)

The teacher knew this text would connect the children's lives to the text and to the curriculum.  The children described their own versions of a key event in the text and were giggling knowingly at the illustrations before she read the first word on the first page.  The teacher also recounted to students her multiple childhood stories that related to situations and themes in the text.  When she talked about how hard her dad worked in the factory, children talked about their own mom or dad who arrived late from work.  After the teacher recounted that she used to have to hold the door closed so that her two brothers would not enter while she was

changing, a child recounted her own narrative in which her uncle told her to always keep the door closed when he came over with her aunt.  The multiple points of connection provided the teacher with ample opportunity to model making authentic text-to-self connections.

The teacher and the text, together, invited children's contributions in which they made their own connections. The text tapped into the children's prior knowledge, and the teacher mediated children in articulating their connections by modeling her own.  Children contributed personal statements and brief narratives of experiences that were similar to those in the text.  The teacher also acknowledged and often built on children's responses.  Children felt invited to share their knowledge and experiences.  These multiple points of connection for both teacher and children yielded opportunities for robust language productivity.

Gay (2000) articulates that culturally responsive teaching is instruction that connects abstract academic concepts to children's "lived sociocultural realities" (p. 32).  The teacher used the text with the highest cultural relevance, *My Very Own Room,* very effectively to elicit the greatest number of prior experiences from the greatest number of students.  More children were able to connect their lived experiences to the text, and more children's oral responses demonstrated evidence of comprehension, a very abstract concept.  This echoes the suggestion from Juzwik et al. (2008) that using oral narratives to connect with texts may invite a broad "range of students' and teachers' voices and previous experiences into the classroom (p. 1118).

The teacher also had high expectations for her students because she knew them well, and she also knows the cognitive and social benefits of developing strong bilingual and biliteracy skills.  Read alouds and discussion activities in the classroom were dynamic.  The teacher asked several open-ended questions, ones that asked the children to draw inferences, such as making

predictions and synthesize key points and messages in a text.  She expected the children to have

and to share opinions and interpretations.  She and the children created a space in which flexible

participation patterns were the norm.  The teacher called on children who raised their hands but

also welcomed and responded to spontaneous comments and insights from students.  Children

felt invited to share their knowledge and experiences *and* did not always have to wait to be called

on to report on an idea. Flexible participation patterns included flexible language practices.  Both

the teacher and children drew on their bilingual language skills and occasionally used English

and code-mixed in order to negotiate meaning during discussions.  This also reflects the creation

of a third space in the classroom in which children could mix languages to connect daily

experiences to academic discussions.

The children also participated in frequent pair-shares. Children were expected to report

on what their partner said; active listening was the norm.  Thus children had frequent

opportunities to hear the interpretations of others.  The teacher's frequent inferential questions,

the flexible participation patterns, and the frequent opportunities for pair-shares with active

listening allowed for multiple interpretations of an event or situation in a text to emerge across

discussions.

Together these practices yielded discussions in which children's responses were

frequently characterized by a comprehension strategy. When several children are contributing to

a discussion, there is language productivity that features different voices.  When there is

language productivity in which evidence of comprehension is present and that features different

voices, children have more opportunities to build on the ideas of other's.  This enhances the

opportunities for children to generate high-level thinking and talk.  In turn, novice

comprehenders (e.g., Carlos) have more opportunities to tune into more competent

comprehenders (e.g., Enrique and Eva) and generate their own new interpretations that build on

those of their peers, as described during the final discussion for the text with the highest cultural

relevance.

## Key Cognitive Skills of Emergent Bilingual Children

A final component of the study findings points to the fact that the emergent bilingual

children in this study are capable of engaging in high-level thinking and talk about texts.  Data

indicated that this type of thinking and talk occurred most frequently during discussions of the

text with the highest cultural relevance and during the hot seat discussion format in which

children took the lead.  Part of the problem that formed the basis for this study is that Spanish-

English emergent bilingual children who are categorized as English learners and who come from

working class and lower SES backgrounds are also frequently assigned the label of "at-risk" for

academic failure (Espinosa, 2013; Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006).

Due to pervasive differences in school achievement between English learners and their

monolingual English-speaking peers, policy makers, educators, and researchers have often

focused on what is missing.  They and have searched for ways to compensate for what these

children lack, with a clear focus on English proficiency.  Clearly developing a high level of

English proficiency is paramount for academic success in the United States.  Language

proficiency in English, however, is not related to the children's cognitive capacity or their

reading comprehension capabilities in Spanish.

This study's findings make unique contributions to the understanding of reading

comprehension development among Spanish-English emergent bilingual children from working

class backgrounds. First, when afforded opportunities to listen to and discuss texts in their most proficient language, the children demonstrated high-level thinking and talk across nine book discussions. This finding aligns with results from López-Robertson and Schramm-Pate (2013) that Spanish-English bilingual children

> are capable of and entitled to an education that pushes their thinking and although their first language is not English, and their idea of literacy and manner of becoming literate may not be consistent with that of the American public school system, this in no way signifies they are deficient. (p. 53)

The evidence of comprehension present in responses during discussions for all texts points to the fact that these children are capable of achieving cognitively demanding tasks related to comprehension development during text discussions.

In addition, children drew inferences frequently and generated numerous questions for characters that contributed to the co-construction of meaning for all three texts. These key findings further contribute to current lines of research that seek to understand what emergent bilingual children (typically considered at-risk for academic failure) know and can do and not in comparison to monolingual English--speaking children (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006; Gutiérrez, Zepeda, & Castro, 2010; Rueda, 2011). In her discussion of questioning as a comprehension strategy, Miller (2013) points to Rothstein and Santana (2011) who "consider a child's ability to formulate her own questions to be the most important learning skill… questioning is at the heart of becoming an independent thinking and a self-directed learner" (p. 123). The generation of questions and drawing of inferences during discussions are cognitive skills essential for strong comprehension development. This study amply provides further evidence that the conditions needed to draw out these skills are evident and accessible in the emergent bilingual children participating in this study.

Furthermore, the children's facility with generating questions and making inferences during the hot seat discussions may be related to the positive differences in cognitive flexibility and inhibitory control associated with bilingual children (e.g., Barac & Bialystok, 2012; Bialystok, 2011). Cognitive flexibility allows children to readily switch and apply different rules according to context. Generating questions for multiple characters from the same story requires children to take on and switch among multiple perspectives. Responding to questions from the perspective of a character also requires flexible thinking. Inhibitory control skills allow children to maintain focus, resisting distractions and impulses. Additionally, responding to questions from the perspective of a character requires a child to inhibit her own point of view and maintain focus on the character's motivations.

Interestingly, the teacher used the text with the highest cultural relevance to introduce the comprehension strategy of asking questions to deepen comprehension. In addition, children must respond to peers' questions from the point of view of a character in the text in the hot seat discussion format. Thus, questioning, inferring, and understanding point of view are comprehension strategies essential for success in a hot seat discussion. It is possible that the text with the highest cultural relevance provided the study children with an optimal learning environment in which to succeed.

## Limitations of the Study

A primary limitation of the study lies in the conservative definitions and measures of the constructs of prior knowledge and comprehension. Methodologically, a sole reliance on a priori codes to describe these constructs constrained evidence of comprehension in children's responses. The coding protocols did not identify patterns that might have emerged directly from

child data. For example, the comprehension codes did not capture evidence of children's confirmation of predictions. Multiple times during the reading aloud of the texts a child confirmed a prediction by exclaiming, "yes!" or whispering, "that's what I said."

The small number of classroom observations (N=9) and texts read (N=3) is another limitation. The study captured a snapshot of children's comprehension evident in discussions of three texts with different levels of cultural relevance. Collecting child data from discussions of more texts with different levels of cultural relevance could contribute to greater reliability of study findings. Likewise, collecting child data across a longer period of time would strengthen reliability.

Furthermore, collecting child data only during book discussions limits the definition of comprehension and therefore narrows the understanding of children's comprehension. The study captured a narrow yet essential aspect of children's comprehension evident in discussions in cooperation with peers and their teacher. As Ebe's (2010) study demonstrates, several other measures are necessary to more accurately capture aspects of children's comprehension, including an examination of miscues, recall, and responses to inferential questions of texts read independently.

Researcher bias is inherent to qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). My knowledge of research findings on the benefits of dual language education and bilingual and biliteracy development, my professional experience, and my beliefs informed the study design, questions, and interpretation of data. The teacher also shares a similar knowledge base, professional experiences, and beliefs about dual language education, which informed her responses during interviews and her interpretations of children's responses during discussions.

Using multiple methods of data collection (e.g., transcribed child discussions, teacher interviews, and discussion observations), and recruiting an outside coder, however, served to mitigate these biases.

## Implications for Future Research

The following potential areas for further study emerge from these findings.

As discussed above, collecting child data in Spanish from additional sources, such as those in Ebe's (2010, 2012, 2014) work (e.g., miscues analysis and a holistic retelling) and across a longer period of time, could provide a more accurate assessment of Spanish-English emergent bilingual children's cognitive skills that support reading comprehension. Findings would contribute first to a growing but nascent body of research that describes the cognitive and linguistic skills that emergent bilinguals bring to the task of reading comprehension development in the primary grades. The range of diverse cultural and linguistic experiences among Spanish-emergent bilingual children demands more description that closely examines specific populations. Children categorized as ELs are typically discussed as a homogeneous group. Aspects of the prior knowledge and experiences of Spanish-English emergent bilingual children in an urban Midwestern school will differ from those along the Texas-Mexico border and those in rural North Carolina, for example. Additional data sources, a larger sample, and an extended data collection period could serve to clarify and extend findings from this study.

In addition, conducting a similar study with a similar child population with texts read in English but discussed in Spanish and English as necessary could contribute new knowledge about the relationship between prior knowledge and experiences for a text read in English, the study sample's less familiar language, and aspects of children's comprehension. These findings

could contribute new knowledge regarding translanguaging classroom practices and theory in the service of reading comprehension development.

Child data from the hot seat discussion format suggested that children may be capable of working at their highest levels in cooperation with each other rather than in direct collaboration with a teacher.  Further investigation into classroom and instructional features that create opportunities for children to work in cooperation with each other to achieve high-level literature discussions is necessary.  Such as investigation would seek to identify classroom conditions, discussion formats, instructional resources, and features of teacher pedagogy that make high-level comprehension during book discussions possible.

There is also a need to examine evidence of prior knowledge and comprehension in the responses of children who are considered struggling comprehenders during discussions of CRTs. An examination of small-group discussions of CRTs in which struggling readers and/or comprehenders are provided with explicit instruction on how to talk about a book read and build on each other's ideas could be beneficial.  The positive association between early oral language skills and later reading comprehension skills, coupled with the positive relationship between prior knowledge and increased aspects of comprehension suggest that children may benefit from discussing CRTs within flexible yet intentionally facilitated formats.

Children must have access to a rich range of genres, including both mirrors and windows. A final line of future research would examine how to support teachers in identifying CRTs for the children in their classrooms and in using these texts as an integral component of their literacy instruction.  An essential part of this investigation would examine the balance needed between

CRTs and window texts, those texts that reflect experiences beyond children's immediate communities.

## Conclusions

This study's findings contribute to theory and literature on cultural and linguistic responsiveness (e.g., García & Wei, 2014; Gay, 2000) by providing an explicit example of how culturally relevant instructional materials can enhance Spanish-English bilingual children's participation and comprehension during book discussions of texts read aloud. Findings have been situated within current knowledge of multiple theoretical frameworks and empirical research on the role that aspects of prior knowledge and experience plays in reading comprehension. Results also document and attest to key cognitive and linguistic skills that Spanish-English emergent bilingual children bring to the reading comprehension task, countering deficit-driven approaches to instruction for and investigations of this child population.

In this section I first revisit Rueda's (2011) theoretical discussion, "Cultural Perspectives in Reading," in order to envision how findings might expand academic opportunities for Spanish-English bilingual children typically considered "at-risk" for academic failure due to socioeconomic status and English proficiency levels. Rueda discusses the potential dual role that culturally responsive instruction can play in the education of traditionally marginalized students. I then suggest a blueprint for future sociocultural research conducted with this unique and growing child population. Building on empirical findings from different fields of study and drawing carefully on multiple theoretical frameworks can yield new insight into comprehension development among Spanish-English emergent bilingual children.

Rueda's (2011) theoretical work connects culturally responsive instruction with enhanced cognitive processes.

> Thus, while culturally compatible instruction and classroom settings may make students feel better about being there, which is not a trivial consideration, these approaches may also make tasks more comprehensible and amenable to connections with existing prior knowledge. (p. 94)

Culturally relevant texts (CRTs) have a place within this discussion. Findings indicate that the text with the highest cultural relevance provided important opportunities for the children in this study to explicitly connect their own experiences with school literacy practices in the service of developing ways of thinking and talking about texts essential for academic success.

The text with the highest cultural relevance provided greater opportunities for success; more children contributed meaningful responses during discussions of this text. Results indicate that using CRTs as an integral component of comprehension development is one way that schools may be able to capitalize on emergent bilingual children's "social, cognitive, and linguistic skills for their own learning and development" (Orellana & Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 120). The children frequently connected prior experiences to situations and characters in the text, they generated several authentic questions about situations and characters, and they made inferences to respond effective to peers' questions.

In addition, the children demonstrated these capacities across discussions of all texts because they had access to cognitively demanding content and in their most proficient language, which is not always the case regarding instruction for emergent bilingual children (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Through facilitated oral discussions, the novice readers and comprehenders in the study gained exposure to and practice with connecting personal experiences with the experiences an author represented in a text. Furthermore, the discussions provided multiple

opportunities for children to generate original ideas and to listen to their peers' connections and original interpretations. Hence, opportunities to develop reading comprehension may increase when children can discuss complex texts with multiple points of connection within a linguistically flexible and skillfully facilitated discussion space.

A key hypothesis of the study is that the integration of carefully selected CRTs as one part of literacy instruction may result in expanded opportunities for academic success for students already considered at-risk. Rueda (2011) calls for further research on the implications of the systematic use of CRTs. Greater interest in texts may yield increased motivation and persistence among readers, which can yield greater effort and ultimately increased comprehension (p. 97).

Rather than trying to identify and describe what is missing among this child population, many education researchers have begun to identify and describe the unique and diverse linguistic, cultural and experiential knowledge and the cognitive capacity that emergent bilingual children bring to school. Empirical studies have documented children's and teachers' translanguaging practices in the classroom and how these practices support meaning-making (e.g., Worthy et al., 2013). Access to one's full range of language skills and practices in the classroom can facilitate comprehension (e.g., López-Robertson & Schramm-Pate, 2013). In addition, studies from cognitive psychology have identified advantages in aspects of executive function skills among diverse groups of bilingual children (e.g., Bialystok & Viswanathan, 2009; Carlson & Meltzer, 2008). Findings from this emerging body of research have implications for classroom instruction that have yet to be explored. Studies that build on the collection of findings from different fields of research conducted with Spanish-English emergent bilingual

children can provide researchers and educators critical opportunities to learn from this child

population and from teachers who are invested in their linguistic and cognitive capacity.

Examining the complex interaction among:

(i)     text selection and how teachers use culturally relevant texts in the classroom;
(ii)    child-teacher and child-child interactions around the texts and within different
        discussion formats;
(iii)   teacher belief and pedagogy; and
(iv)    classroom environment and culture

requires extensive time in the classroom observing and collecting child and teacher data. In

addition, research conducted with Spanish-English emergent bilingual populations requires the

employment of specific theoretical frameworks to capture and interpret key linguistic, cultural,

and experiential knowledge that emerge from child data.  Sociocultural research designed to

document classroom conditions, teacher characteristics, and instructional materials that tap into

emergent bilingual children's range of abilities can expand models of reading comprehension

development. This calls for researchers to examine more closely and more frequently the diverse

range of resources that Spanish-English emergent bilingual children bring to the reading

comprehension task, as well as the learning conditions and materials that facilitate the high-level

comprehension of which the children are capable.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF SCHOOL COOPERATION

Principal

Assistant Principal

Assistant Principal

July 18, 2016

Dear Institutional Review Board,

I am writing to indicate my support of the dissertaion research study proposed by Amy Clark of Erikson Institute-Loyola University Chicago. Amy has been in contact with me about her proposed study, *A Case Study of Literature Discussions with Spanish-English Emergent Bilingual Children*. I am happy to have the opportunity to work with her as she studies how Spanish-English bilingual children draw on their prior knowledge to comrpehend texts during literature discussions in Spanish.

⬤ public elementary school in a very linguistically diverse neighborhood in ⬤ and the majority of the student population comes from low-income homes. In addition⬤ has a Spanish-English dual language strand, which means that students in dual language classrooms develop literacy skills and academic proficiency in Spanish and English. ⬤ strong commitment to developing literacy in both Spanish and English for children who come from low-income homes is very much in line with Amy's study.

I understand that Amy will provide consent forms in Spanish and English to the parents of the children in the study classroom. I will work with Amy to schedule times to meet with the families of the children in the study before and during the study as part of the consent process. I also understand that Amy will seek oral consent from all child-participants each time before she audio or video records the literature discussions. In addition, I understand that the teacher participant and/or any and all child participants can pull out of the study at any time during the study and for any reason, with absolutely no penalties or repercussions.

Amy will collect child-participants' WIDA ACCESS levels of English language development and their guided reading levels from their most recent Text Reading and Comprehension test (TRC). These data will be released to Amy with the students' names. At no time will these data ever leave the classroom or school. Amy will assign numbers to child participants and will record the levels next to children's assigned numbers. Thus no identifying information will be attached to children's ACCESS and reading levels.

I understand that Amy will observe a total of nine literature discussions in the study classroom. She will also video record three of the discussions and audio record six of the discussions. She will transcribe the discussions, herself. I understand that no identifying information for the school, teacher participant, and child-participants will ever appear in any written report or presentation of the study. All video and audio recordings will be stored on a secure drive at Erikson Institute and will be destroyed after the final written report is complete.

I am confident that Amy's research will be conducted in a manner that will not interrupt the ongoing work of our teachers or students in any way. Additionally I know that she will be respectful of the needs of parents, students, and teachers to be informed at all times about the nature of her work and to maintain their individual privacy.

Sincerely

APPENDIX B

TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**
**Loyola University Chicago**

**Project Title:** A Case Study of Literature Discussions with Emergent Bilingual Children

**Researcher(s):** Amy Clark **Faculty Sponsor:** Gillian McNamee, Ph.D.

**Introduction:**

You are being asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Amy Clark for a dissertation under the supervision of Gillian McNamee, Ph.D. in the Department of Erikson Institute Child Development at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Spanish-English bilingual teacher working in a Spanish-English dual-language classroom in which you and your emergent bilingual students discuss books read in Spanish. You are also being asked to participate because you have expressed familiarity with and interest in using culturally relevant texts with your students in literacy instruction.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to find out if reading and discussing books in Spanish about topics and themes that are familiar to the children in your classroom helps them understand the books. The purpose of this study is also to learn how bilingual children use their own experiences to help them understand and talk about books.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to:

- Be video and audio recorded during your regularly scheduled read aloud and book discussions of three texts that occur in your classroom. Video recordings will take place three times and audio recordings occur six times during the study. All recordings will be transcribed to determine if reading and discussing books in Spanish about topics and themes that are familiar to the children in your classroom helps them understand the books, and to determine how children in your classroom draw on their own experiences to help them understand and talk about books. I will transcribe all video and audio recordings. During transcription of video and audio recordings, your name will not be recorded, and no identifiable information will be used during analysis and discussion of transcripts.

- Be interviewed five times about the book discussions you carry out in your classroom and

be audio recorded during these interviews.  When the audio recorded interviews are transcribed, no identifying information about you, such as your name, will be included in the transcriptions. Interviews will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon location that is convenient for you and that affords the necessary privacy.  Each interviews will be transcribed by the researcher.  The duration of the first interview will be approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

- o The subject matter of the first interview will be your experiences using culturally relevant texts.  Topics include your professional development experience with using CRTs, your favorite CRTs, and your text selection process. In this interview, basic demographic information about you as a teacher will also be collected.
- o The duration of the next three interviews will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The focus of these interviews will be the book discussions that you facilitate with your students, and we will read excerpts of transcribed discussions.  Topics include your initial thoughts about the discussions and your interpretation of children's responses during the discussions.
- o The duration of the final interview will be approximately 30 to 45 minutes.  The purpose of this interview will be to collect your feedback on my interpretation of the data collected during the study. You will be asked to clarify, correct, and comment on the researcher's interpretations of the data.

- ▪ Guide your students in using a rubric to rate each of the three books for its  cultural relevance.

- ▪ Rate the cultural relevance of the three books using the same rubric.

**Risks/Benefits:**
There may be minimal discomfort felt during the interviews and video and/or audio recordings. Remember that the purpose is for the researcher to learn more about how bilingual children draw on their experiences to comprehend and talk about books, and that you and your teaching are not being evaluated in any way. During interviews, please keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers.  The researcher is interested in your own insights and interpretations of your students' book discussions. If any of the questions make you uncomfortable, you may skip them.

There are no direct benefits to participating in the study.  The results from the study can potentially benefit the field of education and the education of bilingual children and children who speak Spanish at home.  Talking about books helps children develop comprehension.  Results can potentially help teachers of bilingual children to select, read, and talk about texts that can better develop children's reading comprehension.

**Confidentiality:**

- ▪ All information gathered during the study will remain confidential. When the audio recorded interviews and book discussions are transcribed, no identifying information about you, such as your name, will be included in the transcriptions. When your speech is

transcribed, the researcher will use a capital "T" to indicate the speaker in the transcripts of the interviews and book discussions.

- When this research is written, no identifying information about you, such as your name or school, will be used.
- The researcher will keep the video and audio files of the interviews and book discussions on a secure drive at Erikson Institute. The video files will contain no identifying information about you other than your image and voice, and the audio files will contain no identifying information about you other than your voice. This consent letter and the cultural relevance rubric will be kept in a locked file at Erikson Institute. At the end of the study, all video and audio files will be destroyed. All other information collected will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

**Voluntary Participation:**

- Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. You may request that the researcher not attend on any day and at any time during the study with absolutely no penalties or repercussions. You may ask questions about the study and/or about your role in the study at any time throughout the study. You are free to communicate with the researcher at any time throughout the study to ask questions and/or clarify information about any aspect of the study.

- **Contacts and Questions:** If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Amy Clark at _____, or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Gillian McNamee at _____.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at _____.

**Statement of Consent:**
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.


_____          _____
**Participant's Signature**                              **Date**


_____          _____
**Researcher's Signature**                              **Date**

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR FAMILIES IN SPANISH

**CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN LA INVESTIGACIÓN**
**Universidad Loyola Chicago/Erikson Institute**

**Título del proyecto:** Un estudio de caso sobre conversaciones de libros con niños bilingües emergentes.

**Investigador(es):** Amy Clark **Patrocinador de la facultad:** Dra. Gillian McNamee

**Introducción:**
▪ Se solicita su permiso para que su hijo/a participe en un estudio de investigación dirigido por Amy Clark para una disertación supervisada por la Dra. Gillian McNamee, en el Departamento de Desarrollo Infantil del Instituto Erikson, Universidad Loyola Chicago.

▪ Se solicita su permiso para que la imagen y voz de su hijo/a aparezcan en tres grabaciones de video y para que su voz aparezca en seis grabaciones de audio de su maestro/a leyendo un libro en voz alta a los estudiantes y facilitando una conversación del libro con los estudiantes en el salón. Se le solicita este permiso porque su hijo/a está en una clase bilingüe de español-inglés en la que el maestro/a y los niños hablan sobre libros leídos en español. Si no desea que participe, su hijo/a no será grabado.

▪ También, se solicita su permiso para que el maestro/a de su hijo/a pueda hablar con la investigadora Amy Clark sobre el comportamiento y las respuestas orales de su hijo/a durante las conversaciones de libros.

Por favor lea este formulario con atención y pregunte lo que desee saber antes de decidir si su hijo/a participará o no en la investigación.

**Propósito:**
▪ El propósito de este estudio es examinar las conversaciones de libros que se llevan a cabo en español en la clase bilingüe de su hijo/a. El estudio examinará si la lectura de libros en español que incluyen temas que les son familiares a los niños los ayuda a comprender los libros y a hablar sobre ellos. El objetivo del estudio es también comprender cómo los niños bilingües usan sus propias experiencias para comprender los libros y hablar sobre ellos.

**Procedimientos:**
Si otorga su permiso para que su hijo participe en el estudio, el procedimiento de grabación de video y audio de las conversaciones de libros y el procedimiento de realizar las entrevistas con el maestro/a de su hijo/a se describe a continuación.

▪ El maestro/a de su hijo/a programará tres grabaciones de video y seis grabaciones de audio en las que él/ella leerá en voz alta un libro a la clase y propiciará una conversación sobre el libro con los estudiantes. Las grabaciones no cambiarán las rutinas de la clase; el maestro/a y los niños serán grabados durante las conversaciones de libros regulares que ya son parte del programa escolar. Las grabaciones se realizarán durante un período de seis semanas del

año escolar y cada una tomará alrededor de 30 minutos.  Las realizará la investigadora Amy Clark. Es posible que no todos los niños sean grabados; su permiso autoriza las grabaciones pero no garantiza que se grabe a su hijo/a.

- La investigadora Amy Clark hará cinco entrevistas con el maestro/a de su hijo/a sobre las conversaciones de libros.  En las entrevistas es posible que el maestro/a hable sobre el comportamiento y las respuestas orales de su hijo/a durante las conversaciones de libros. Las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo después de la escuela en un lugar privado y cada una durará entre 30 y 60 minutos aproximadamente.  Solamente la investigadora Amy Clark y el maestro/a de su hijo/a estarán presentes durante las entrevistas.

**Riesgos/Beneficios:**

- Es posible que su hijo/a experimente una incomodidad mínima durante las grabaciones de audio y video. Su hijo/a no va a participar en ninguna actividad ajena a las rutinas escolares o a la instrucción habitual que se imparte en el salón de clases. No se anticipan riesgos para su hijo/a por participar en esta investigación, más allá de los riesgos de la vida cotidiana.

- No hay beneficios directos para su hijo/a por participar en el estudio. Los resultados del estudio pueden ayudar a los maestros de niños bilingües a seleccionar, leer y hablar sobre los libros que mejor pueden ayudar a mejorar la comprensión lectora de los niños.

**Confidencialidad:**

- Nunca se divulgará ninguna información identificable sobre su hijo/a.

- Todas las grabaciones de audio y video serán transcritas por la investigadora. En ningún punto aparecerá el nombre de su hijo/a en las transcripciones o en el informe escrito final.

- Los archivos de audio y video serán guardados en un disco seguro cifrado con contraseña en el Instituto Erikson. Al finalizar el estudio, todos los archivos de audio y video serán destruidos.

- **Participación voluntaria:** Su consentimiento para que su hijo/a participe en el estudio es enteramente voluntario. Puede retirar su consentimiento que la imagen y/o la voz de su hijo/a sean grabados y retirar su consentimiento para que el maestro/a hable sobre el comportamiento de su hijo/a durante las entrevistas en cualquier momento, por cualquier motivo y sin penalización alguna durante el estudio.  Su hijo/a también puede decidir, en cualquier momento, por cualquier motivo y sin penalización alguna, no ser grabado.

- **Contactos y preguntas:** Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre este estudio de investigación, no dude en contactarse con Amy Clark _____; o con la patrocinadora de la facultad, la Dra. Gillian McNamee, al _____.

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre sus derechos o los derechos de su hijo/a como participante de la investigación, puede contactarse con la Oficina de Servicios de Investigación de la Universidad Loyola al _____.

**Declaración de consentimiento:**

Por favor, marque el cuadrado que indica si acepta permitir que su hijo/a participe en el estudio o si no acepta que él/ella participe en el estudio. Su firma indica que ha leído la información proporcionada anteriormente, ha tenido la oportunidad de formular preguntas y acepta que su hijo participe en este estudio de investigación. Se le entregará una copia de este formulario para su constancia.

_____

**Sí, acepto que la imagen y la voz de mi hijo/a aparezcan en tres grabaciones de video y que la voz de mi hijo/a aparezcan en seis grabaciones de audio a los efectos de este estudio de investigación; y acepto que el maestro/a de mi hijo/a pueda hablar con la investigadora sobre el comportamiento de mi hijo/a durante las entrevistas a los efectos de este estudio de investigación.**

**No, no, acepto que la imagen y la voz de mi hijo/a aparezcan en tres grabaciones de video y que la voz de mi hijo/a aparezcan en seis grabaciones de audio a los efectos de este estudio de investigación y no acepto que el maestro/a de mi hijo/a pueda hablar con la investigadora sobre el comportamiento de mi hijo/a durante las entrevistas a los efectos de este estudio de investigación.**

**Al firmar abajo, confirmo que se me ha informado cabalmente sobre los propósitos y procedimientos de las grabaciones y de las entrevistas con el maestro/a para este estudio, y que la casilla que marqué arriba refleja mis deseos al respecto.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Nombre de su hijo/a (letra imprenta)** | **Nombre del maestro (letra imprenta)** |
| **Su nombre (letra imprenta)** | **Relación con el niño** |
| **Su firma** | **Fecha** |

**Por favor devuelva este formulario a la maestra de su hijo/a y guarde la carta para su constancia. Se le proporcionará una copia de este formulario para su constancia. Muchas gracias.**

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR FAMILIES IN ENGLISH

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**
**Loyola University Chicago/Erikson Institute**

**Project Title:** A Case Study of Literature Discussions with Emergent Bilingual Children
**Researcher(s):** Amy Clark **Faculty Sponsor:** Gillian McNamee, Ph.D.

**Introduction:**
- You are being asked to let your child take part in a research study being conducted by Amy Clark for a dissertation under the supervision of Gillian McNamee, Ph.D. in the Department of Erikson Institute Child Development at Loyola University of Chicago.

- You are being asked if your child's image and voice can appear in three video recordings and if his or her voice can appear in six audio recordings of your child's teacher reading a book aloud and leading a discussion of the book with the students. You are being asked to let your child participate because he or she is in a Spanish-English dual-language classroom in which the teacher and children discuss books read in Spanish. If you do not want your child to participate, your child will not be recorded.

- You are also being asked if your child's teacher can talk to the researcher Amy Clark about your child's behavior and his or her oral responses during book discussions. If you do not want your child to participate in the study, your child will not be recorded and the teacher will not discuss your child with the researcher.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to permit your child to participate in the study.

**Purpose:**
- The purpose of this study is to examine the book discussions that take place in Spanish in your child's dual language classroom. The study will examine if reading books in Spanish that include themes that are familiar to the children helps them to better understand and talk about the books. The purpose of this study is also to learn how bilingual children use their own experiences to help them understand and talk about books.

**Procedures:**
- If you agree to permit your child to participate in the study, the procedures for classroom video and audio recordings and for conducting interviews with your child's teacher are below.

- Your child's teacher will schedule three video recordings and six audio recordings of him/her reading a book aloud to the class and/or leading a book discussion with the students. The recordings will not change the classroom routines; the teacher and children will be video or audio recorded during regular book discussions that are already part of the curriculum and daily schedule. Recordings will occur during one six-week period of

the school year and take approximately 30 minutes each. The researcher Amy Clark will do all recordings. Not all children may be video or audio recorded. Your consent allows recording, but does not guarantee that your child's image or voice will be recorded.

- The researcher Amy Clark will interview your child's teacher about book discussions five times. In interviews, your child's teacher may discuss your child's behavior during book discussions, such as his or her oral responses. The interviews will be conducted after school in a private space, and each interview will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Only the researcher Amy Clark and your child's teacher will be present during the interviews.

## Risks/Benefits:

- Your child may experience minimal discomfort during video and audio recordings. Your child will not be participating in an activity that is not already part of regular classroom instruction and regular classroom. There are no foreseeable risks for your child participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

- There are no direct benefits to your child from participation in the study. Results may help teachers of bilingual children to select, read, and talk about books that can better develop children's reading comprehension.

## Confidentiality:

- No identifying information about your child will ever be presented or reported.

- All video and audio recordings will be transcribed by the researcher. At no point will your child's name ever appear on any transcripts or in any part of the final written report.

- Video and audio files will be stored on a secured, password encrypted drive at Erikson Institute. At the end of the study, all files will be destroyed.

- **Voluntary Participation:** Your agreement to allow your child to participate in the study is entirely voluntary. You can decide not to allow your child's image and voice to be recorded and not to allow your child's teacher to talk about your child's behavior during interviews at any time, for any reason, and without penalty during the study. Your child can also decide not to be video or audio recorded at any time, for any reason, and without penalty.

- **Contacts and Questions:** If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Amy Clark at _____, or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Gillian McNamee at _____.

If you have questions about your rights and your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:**
Please check one of the boxes that indicates if you agree to permit your child to participate in the study or do not agree to permit him or her to participate.  Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to allow your child to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_____

**Yes, I agree to my child's image and voice appearing in three video recordings and to my child's voice appearing in six audio recordings used for this research study, and I agree to allow my child's teacher to discuss my child's behavior in interviews with the researcher for this study.**

**No, I do not agree to my child's image and voice appearing in three video recordings and to my child's voice appearing in six audio recordings used for this research study, and I do not agree to allow my child's teacher to discuss my child's behavior in interviews with the researcher for this study.**

**By signing below, I agree that I have been fully informed as to the purposes and procedures of video and audio recording and of interviewing the teacher in this study, and that the box I have checked above reflects my wishes.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Your child's name (print)** | **The teacher's name (print)** |
| **Your name (print)** | **Relationship to child** |
| **Your signature** | **Date** |

**Please return this form to your child's teacher, and keep the letter for your own reference. A copy of this form will be returned to you for your own reference. Thank you.**

APPENDIX E

AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING PROTOCOL

**Video and/or Audio Recording Protocol with Students**

Study:  A Case Study of Literature Discussions with Spanish-English Emergent Bilingual Children

1.  A single consent form will be sent home requesting parents/guardians to provide consent: (i) for their child's image and voice to be video recorded during three regularly scheduled read alouds and book discussions; (ii) for their child's voice to be audio recorded during six regularly scheduled classroom book discussions; and (iii) for the teacher talk with the researcher about their child's behavior and oral responses during book discussions.  The letter will explain the video and audio recording procedures and purposes and the procedure for conducting interviews with the teacher. Parents/guardians are given the option to decline participation in the study for their child without any negative impact on their child.

2.  In the event that more than three parents decline participation for their children in the study, the researcher will remove the three video recordings from the research protocol.  The researcher will only audio record book discussions and will discreetly pause the audio recording device when children without parental consent speak during book discussions.

3.  The researcher will seek oral assent from the child-participants before each recording using a very brief oral assent script.

3. Prior to the video and/or audio recordings, the classroom teacher will inform the students that video or audio recording will take place and will briefly share the purpose of the recording.  S/he will inform students that the recording is taking place to learn about the types of book talks Spanish-English bilingual children have about different kinds of stories.  All children will have time to ask questions about the video recording and audio equipment.

4.  The video and audio recording devices will be strategically placed so that neither impedes students' participation nor distracts them from the activity.

APPENDIX F

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

**Classroom Literature Discussion Observation Protocol**

Study:  A Case Study of Literature Discussions with Spanish-English Emergent Bilingual Children

Time: _____          Location:  _____

Date: _____          Number of participants:  _____

Physical setting of classroom and discussion area:  (Sketch and/or write.)

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) Discussion structures, routines, and protocols; | Researcher reflections; |
| (b) key moments and key exchanges in the discussion; | behavior, interactions |
| (c) non-verbal behaviors. | with participants; if and |
| | how they respond |

APPENDIX G

CULTURAL RELEVANCE RUBRIC SPANISH

| **La rúbrica de relevancia cultural para libros leídos** (Adaptada del *Cultural Relevance Rubric*, Ebe, 2010) |
|---|
| 1. ¿Los personajes en el cuento se parecen a tí y a tu familia? |

No, no se parecen
a nosotros …………………………………………………….mucho a nosotros.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

Sí, se parecen

---

2. ¿Has vivido en lugares o has visitado a lugares que son como los lugares en el cuento?

No ………………………………………………………………….Sí

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

---

3. ¿Este cuento podría ocurrir hoy en día?

No ………………………………………………………………….Sí

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

---

7. ¿Crees que el personaje principal (o los personajes principales) tiene casi la misma edad como tú?

No, hay una gran diferencia
entre nuestras edades………………………………………….la misma edad

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

Sí, tenemos casi

---

8. ¿Los personajes en el cuento hablan cómo tú y tu familia??

No ………………………………………………………………….Sí

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

---

9. ¿Con qué frecuencia lees cuentos como en este libro?

Casi nunca ……………………………………………………….Con frecuencia

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

---

10. ¿Te ha pasado una situación igual o parecida como ella en el cuento?

No …………………………………………………………………………………

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

---

11. ¿Crees que entendiste bien el mensaje central de este cuento?

No, no lo
entendí bien ………………………………………………………. muy bien

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

Sí, lo entendí

APPENDIX H

CULTURAL RELEVANCE RUBRIC ENGLISH

| Cultural Relevance Rubric (Ebe, 2010) |
|---|
| 1. Do the characters in the story look like you and your family?<br><br>Not at all like us………………………………………………… Just like us.<br>　　1　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　4 |
| 2. Have you ever lived in or visited places like those in the story?<br><br>No …………………………………………………………………..Yes<br>　　1　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　4 |
| 3. Could this story take place this year?<br><br>No …………………………………………………………………Yes<br>　　1　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　4 |
| 4. Do you think the main characters are about the same age as you?<br><br>Not close at all ………………………………………………Very close<br>　　1　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　4 |
| 5. Do the characters talk like you and your family?<br><br>No …………………………………………………………..Yes<br>　　1　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　4 |
| 6. How frequently do you read stories like this one?<br><br>No …………………………………………………………..Yes<br>　　1　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　4 |
| 7. Have you ever been in a situation like one described in the story?<br><br>No …………………………………………………………..Yes<br>　　1　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　4 |
| 8. Do you think you understood well the central message of this story?<br><br>No …………………………………………………………..Yes<br>　　1　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　4 |

APPENDIX I

CODEBOOK

I. A Priori Codes (Codes derived from literature and research questions) for Prior Knowledge

I.i  Personal Singular Narratives (PSN)
Definition: "[N]arratives about one's own experience" that are typically "characterized by simple past tense or historical present tense" (Juzwik, et al., 2008, p. 1133).  For example, "'One time we went down in the basement. She (babysitter) told the SCARiest story I ever remember. I was even scared for like a WEEK... this like STATue down in the basement.  SO SCARY." (p. 1133).
When to Use:  When a child uses first person to draw on a personal experience or event that is clearly related to the story and relevant to a key feature, event, or detail including a character, setting, an event a situation, an emotion, etc., and when the personal contains two temporally sequenced clauses linked by causality.
Example: *Um, um, ahorita, cuando, es que (luego?) también (necesito?) apachurrar con mi papá porque ahorita mi tío y mi tía están durmiendo ahí porque no tienen un lugar.  Entonces, yo siempre necesito quedarme allí, a veces cuando voy a la casa de mi tía por eso (ni quiero?) dormir porque ahí están todo apachurrada y siempre cuando voy allá hay unos sillones y luego lo juntan para que allí me duerma ( ).*  Um, um, now when, it's that (later?) also (I need?) to crowd in with my dad because now my uncle and aunt are sleeping there because they don't have a place [to stay/sleep]. So I always need to stay there. Sometimes when I go to my aunt's house for this reason (I don't want to?) sleep because everything is cramped and always when I go, over there, there are some big chairs and later they put them together and I sleep there (inaudible phrase).

I.ii  Personal Singular Statement (PSS)
Definition:  These are personal statements about one's own experience.
When to Use:  When a child uses first person to draw on a personal experience or event that is clearly related to the story and relevant to a key feature, event, or detail including a character, setting, an event a situation, an emotion, etc., and when it is a statement (rather than a narrative).
Example: *Mi mama se levanta a las 4 [a.m.]*. My mom gets up at 4 [a.m.].

I.iii  Vicarious Narrative (VN)
Definition:  Vicarious narratives are ones "about experiences that happened to others" (Juzwik et al., 2008, p. 1133).  For example, "'In Boston Public, like they… I don't know which it was, but these people…had a baby so they could get married because one of the parents didn't approve of it'" (p. 1133.)  A vicarious narrative is similar to a connection to the world as it can reference popular culture or current events.
When to Use:  When a child draws on or describes an experience that happened to someone else and that is clearly related to the story and relevant
Example: *A veces [los campesinos] se van con caballo.*  Sometimes they [the rural farmworkers] go on a horse.

I.iv.  Shared Knowledge (SK)
Definition:  Shared knowledge is prior knowledge based on shared classroom learning experiences (Soter et al., 2008), such as knowledge based on texts previously discussed and

knowledge related to class field trips.  Hence a text-to-text connection may be based on shared knowledge, indicating that a child is drawing on knowledge developed through classroom experiences shared with classmates.

When to Use:  When a child draws on relevant knowledge based on classroom experiences and that is shared by classmates, e.g., knowledge/ an experience that one shares with classmates based on a whole-class book.

Example:  *Que ellas [las protagonistas en dos textos diferentes] dos tuvieron su propio sueño.* That they [the protagonist in two different texts] both had their own dream.

II.  A Priori Codes for Comprehension Strategies

II.i  <u>Activating Schema—Text-to-self connection (TS)</u>

Definition:  A text-to-self connection occurs when children use their schema to make a meaningful and relevant connection from the text to themselves.

When to Use:  When the connection is both personal and meaningful, e.g., the connection can help one understand more about the text or a key feature of the text.

Example:  *También mi papá se vino acá porque allá necesitaba [trabajar] en el mecánico con su papá.*  My dad also came here because [over] there [in Mexico] he needed to [work] in the mechanic [shop] with his dad.

II.ii  <u>Activating Schema—Text-to-text connection (TT)</u>

Definition:  A text-to-text connection occurs when children draw on relevant schema related to another text while reading a new one and do so in a meaningful way.

When to Use:  When a child's connection: clearly relates to a common theme/ message between (or among) current and other text(s); can help one understand more about current text and/or greater theme or "big idea" (Miller, 2002, p. 86); and relates/compares characters/events from two texts in way that can enhance understanding (Miller, 2002, p. 87).

Example:  *Que ellas [las protagonistas en dos textos diferentes] dos tuvieron su propio sueño.* That they [the protagonist in two different texts] both had their own dream.

II.iii  <u>Activating Schema—Text-to-world connection (TW)</u>

Definition:  A text-to-world connection occurs when children draw on their knowledge of the world (e.g. current events) to make a meaningful and relevant connection to the text.

When to Use:  When connection relates key event/theme/situation /character to "what's happening in the world" in way that can potentially "raise social consciousness" (Miller, 2002, p. 89).

Example:  *También mi papá se vino acá porque allá necesitaba [trabajar] en el mecánico con su papá.*  My dad also came here because [over] there [in Mexico] he needed to [work] in the mechanic [shop] with his dad.

II.iv  <u>Drawing an Inference (IN)</u>

Definition:  Drawing an inference is evidenced when children "create a meaning that is neither stated explicitly in the text nor shown in the illustrations" (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007, p. 167), including predictions.

When to Use: When a child: determines meaning of unknown word in text using illustration and textual clues and prior knowledge; makes and/or confirms predictions about events and characters; or provides a relevant answer or response to a question about or event in text that is not explicitly answered in text or illustrations and the answer can help one understand more about the text or key feature of text (Miller, 2002, p. 140).

Example*: ¿Por qué te gustan mucho los huevos que te pintaron los niños? Porque son de mi país y los extraño.* Why do you like the eggs that the children painted for you so much? Because they are from my country, and I miss them.

II.v  Synthesizing (SY)
Definition: Synthesizing is evidenced when children restate or retell smaller sections and/or events of a story in an original way that communicates the gist of that section or event. Synthesis is about what happened and the reader's evolving understanding about the big ideas in the book. (Miller, 2002, p. 185).
When to Use: When a child describes or recounts a small section or event and includes an inference that relates the event of section to the/a theme/message/big idea of text.
Example: *Why did you let your brothers in?  Porque me ayudaron a hacer mi cuarto y yo quería leerles un cuento.* Why did you let [the] brothers in?  Because they helped me make my room, and I wanted to read them a story.

II.vi  Questions Inferential (QI)
Definition: When a child asks a relevant question for which the answer is not explicitly stated in the text, and that requires one to make an inference to respond appropriately and effectively, often a "why" question.
When to Use: When a child asks a question that requires one to make an inference to respond appropriately and effectively.
Example: *Why did you let your brothers in?*

II.vii  Question Text (QT)
Definition: When a child asks a relevant question for which the answer is explicitly stated in the text.
When to Use: When a child asks a question for which the answer is explicitly stated in the text and that does not require one to make an inference to respond effectively.
Example: *¿Por qué al primero no le dejastes tener el cuarto?* Why didn't you let her have the room in the beginning?

APPENDIX J

INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Semi-structured Interview Guide**

Study:  A Case Study of Literature Discussions with Spanish-English Emergent Bilingual Children

The in-depth interviews conducted with the teacher-participant in this study will explore key questions listed in the following guides but will do so in an organic way. Questions may be phrased slightly differently and may occur in a different order than listed in the guides below.  It is possible that the teacher-participant will raise unanticipated insights about the discussions. These insights may be explored at the discretion of the researcher and may be incorporated into future interviews if relevant to the study.

**Initial Teacher Semi-structured Interview Guide**
- Anticipated Interview Duration:  Approximately 30-60 minutes

Study:  A Case Study of Literature Discussions with Spanish-English Emergent Bilingual Children

Time of interview:          _____
Date of interview:          _____
Location:                          _____
Interviewer:                     _____
Interviewee:                     _____

The researcher will begin by very briefly reviewing the ongoing informed consent process and making sure that the teacher agrees to participate in the interview.  Then the researcher will briefly explain the purpose of the interview.  For example: *"Thank you again for agreeing to talk to me today.  The main purposes of this initial interview are to: (i) to gather some general background information about you as a teacher; (ii) to gain insight into your experiences using culturally relevant texts with your students; (iii) to collect some information about the unit of study in which the texts are integrated; and (iv) to identify the students you have observed to be the most Spanish dominant when reading and discussing texts this year.*

- Tell me a little about your classroom and students this year.

- My study will focus on the children you have observed to be more proficient in Spanish than in English when reading and discussing texts.
    - Which students have you observed to be more proficient in Spanish when reading and discussing texts thus far this year?

- Tell me about your teaching history.
    - How long have you been a teacher?
    - How long have you taught at this school?
    - Have you always taught in Chicago
    - How do you end up teaching in a bilingual setting?

- How would you describe your teaching philosophy?
    - (How would you describe your approach to teaching?)

- Tell me a little about your experiences working with CRTs.
    - What do you notice about the children when you read these texts with them or when they read them?
    - Why do you think that happens?
    - Can you tell me a little more about that?
    - Can you talk about any challenges?

- – Any successes?

- Tell me about your favorite CRT.

- Tell me about one or a few of your students' favorite CRTs.

- How do you select texts to read aloud and discuss with the children?
  - – Can you tell me a bit more about ___?

- How do you now when you've found a good CRT—a text that seems like a good cultural match for your students?
  - – Are there any specific features that you look for?

- How do you go about planning the questions for your collaborative conversations?
  - – Tell me more about _____.

- When you're facilitating a discussion, how do you know when the students have "gotten it"?—When they've really understood the main point or theme that you wanted them to "get"?

- Is there anything else you'd like me to know about your teaching philosophy, your group, or your experiences reading and discussing CRTs with your students?

- **Thank you for taking time to share your thoughts and insights with me.**

**Teacher Semi-structured Interview Guide for Discussing Transcribed Discussions**
  - – There will be three interviews, one for each text.
  - – Anticipated Interview Duration for each of the three interviews:  Approximately 45 to 60 minutes

Study:  A Case Study of Literature Discussions with Spanish-English Emergent Bilingual Children

Time of interview:            _____
Date of interview:            _____
Location:                     _____
Interviewer:                  _____
Interviewee:                  _____

The researcher will begin by very briefly reviewing the ongoing informed consent process and making sure that the teacher agrees to participate in each interview.  Then the researcher will briefly explain the purpose of the interview.  For example: *"Thank you again for agreeing to talk to me today.  The purpose of this interview is get your insights on and interpretations of the recent discussions."*

  - – I want to start by asking you to share your thoughts, in general, about this text.  Tell me about how this text fits within your unit or instruction.

  - – What was the main goal you had in mind when reading and discussing this text with your students?
  - – Can you tell me more about that?

- Now I'll ask you to share your initial thoughts about the discussions.

  - – Is there anything in particular about the discussions of this text that stand out to you?

– For example, did it essentially go as you had anticipated it would or do you remember any unexpected or surprising responses?

• Now we're going to read through some excerpts from the transcribed discussions of this text. I've highlighted some parts that I'd like you to talk about and talk me through. I will be asking you to talk about a few specific things. For example,

– I'll ask you to explain what motivated or prompted your responses to different contributions from the children.

– I'll also ask you to talk about whether you see the children using their prior knowledge during the discussions. And if you notice examples of this, I'll ask you to talk about what you notice, what you see happening in these exchanges.

– But at any time you can direct us to another part of the discussion—if you suddenly remember something or want to check on something.

Possible prompts and follow-up questions

• What did you think of this particular series of exchanges/this particular response?

• What do you think s/he (the student) meant right here?

– Why do you think the child said this _____? What do you think s/he meant here? What do you think s/he was trying to say?

• Why did you decide to follow up with that question right here?
• Talk me through this part of the discussion. What was your goal here?
• Do you think they "got it"/ "got this part"/"got what you were getting at here"?
• What part of their responses makes you think they "got it" (or didn't get it)?
  – Can you tell me a little more about that?
  – What do you mean by that?
  – I hear you saying _____. Is that correct?

• Do you think the children "got" the main point (or central theme/message/goal/strategy/objective) that you intended for them to understand about this text?
  – Why or what not?
  – What parts of the discussion make you think this way?
  – Why do you think the child said this _____? What do you think s/he meant here? What do you think s/he was trying to say?

• Is there anything else you'd like to read over or talk about regarding this text or the discussions for this text?

• **Thank you for taking time to share your thoughts and insights with me.**

**Interview Protocol for Participant Feedback Interview**
  • Interview duration: Approximately 30 to 60 minutes

Study: A Case Study of Literature Discussions with Spanish-English Emergent Bilingual Children

Time of interview:          _____
Date of interview:          _____
Location:                   _____
Interviewer:                _____
Interviewee:                _____

    The researcher will begin by very briefly reviewing the ongoing informed consent process and making sure that the teacher agrees to participate in the interview. Then the researcher will briefly explain the purpose of the interview. For example: *"I have been studying the data, and now I would like to check with you to make sure that I am on the right track with some of my interpretations of the information you have shared with me throughout the study. I would like to check for missing information and accuracy and get your feedback on some early key findings."*

- I will provide the teacher with three one-page excerpts from my preliminary analysis of the discussions that include substantial interpretation of the teacher's comments. I will ask her to read each page and talk about the following points and questions.

    – Does this interpretation (or finding) make sense to you based on our conversations?

    – Is this interpretation a little surprising to you or is it expected?

    – Is there anything you want to clarify or add here?

- I will also share additional findings in the form of a bulleted list and/or brief transcribed excerpts of discussions with subsequent analysis and ask a variation of the above three questions about the findings.

- **Thank you for taking time to share your thoughts and insights with me.**

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# VITA

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