

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: USING BORDERLANDS LITERATURE TO  
INCREASE INTEREST IN LITERACY IN THE  
HERITAGE LANGUAGE: TEACHER RESEARCH  
WITH LATINO/A TEENAGE STUDENTS

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This ethnographic action research documents my reflective practices as a teacher of Spanish for Heritage Speakers as I worked to engage my Latino/a students in literacy. In pursuit of this goal, I used borderlands literary topics, which deal with the dual experience of the immigrant or child of immigrants who lives a bicultural and bilingual existence, to guide students to explore their linguistic and cultural identities. I used several strategies to engage students, including independent reading, discussions of class readings, projects, movies and writing assignments. Throughout

the process, I sought to acknowledge students' agency and draw on their perspectives, seeking their input and making use of reading topics that addressed the issues of socio-economic marginalization with which many students identified. As I lacked previous experience teaching Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes, I also sought the professional advice of five teachers who were veterans of the course. My experience suggests a connection between identity exploration and interest in reading in the Latino/a teenager, a finding with implication for how to engage the Latino/a student in literacy. My experience also sheds light on the roles played by the teacher of Latino students and the curriculum, as well as on the use of ethnographic action research as a way to become culturally responsive. This research adds to the body of knowledge about the experiences of 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students, including students of dual Latin American heritage, and emphasizes the heterogeneity within the Latino/a culture.

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LITERACY IN THE HERITAGE LANGUAGE:  
TEACHER RESEARCH WITH LATINO/A TEENAGE STUDENTS

By

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## Dedication

To my 43 Latino/a students and to all of my other *hijos infinitos*, I wish for you more visibility in the curriculum and a heightened sense of social and academic identity, that the label *at-risk* may cease being associated with you.

To the alpha and omega of *mis hijos infinitos*, my sons Andrew and Zachary, so that you may come out of your young lives with a strong and positive sense of identity as the amazing beings you have the potential to become.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Instilling the Love of Reading

*“...who can deny the power of a teacher who makes students fall in love with learning?” (Walker-Dalhouse & Risko, 2008, p. 424).*

The first day of the 2009-10 school year, I suddenly discovered the obvious. My primary goal had always been to instill the love of reading in children who had not been read to by their parents. In the two previous years, when my job only consisted of being my high school’s Dean of Students, I shared books from my office’s personal library with students in detention as well as with students who were sent to my office for behavioral reasons. That year I shared several books with and even created a short-lasting book club for the very bright child of an illiterate mother. I also shared my books with one of our most troubled Latina students who was currently attending an alternative school. The last time I saw her I told her, “Don’t forget to read one book a week.”

Somehow I have always intuited that the most genuine and enduring kind of teaching has to do with the simple, metaphoric act of cultivating a seed. Cultivating the seed of love for reading in children who lack cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1977/1990) does not always come easily but may be of great consequence. I have always felt that improved literacy coupled with the love of reading may be valuable for children whose identities may be compromised by their lower status in American society.

Instilling the love of literacy in children whose existences straddle the United States’ dominant culture and language and the Latin American culture and language



may be problematic. Curriculum that includes mainstream, monocultural, and monolingual topics which deny or do not reflect the borderlands existences of students may not be optimally conducive to enhancing their literacy. Children with bilingual and bicultural identities may be more inspired to initially develop their literacy through more familiar cultural topics which may be explored in their heritage language, a mixture of their heritage language and English, or English. Those children may be described as borderlands children, defined by Cline and Necochea (2006) as the “need to negotiate two cultures, two languages, and two worlds” (p. 268).

It is possible that if borderlands students become more literate in their heritage language through the exploration of their identity via literary topics that reflect their experiences, their sense of identity may become less problematic. Developing these students’ bilingualism in addition to facilitating their identification with literary characters who mirror their lives may be beneficial to both their identity and their engagement with literacy. Then, if they develop their literacy in Spanish through such topics, they may be able to transfer their Spanish literacy skills to the English language. In the end, literacy may empower them in more ways than one.

In my own life as a Latina in the United States, I remember the day I fell in love with reading in a Spanish literature class at an American university. I had recently come from Puerto Rico and was going through confusing times, trying to adapt to a culture and learn a language that did not mirror my culture or language in any way. I reminisce that we were studying medieval literature. I was fascinated at how my exposure to medieval literature connected me to my roots in an *ancestral*

kind of way (Godina, 2003). While I had never studied medieval Spanish literature before, I suddenly felt a sense of connection that I had been lacking for quite a while.

As I then majored in Spanish and Latin American literature for both my Bachelor's and Master's degrees, I grew to appreciate the richness of my language and culture as they were reflected in the aesthetic experience that reading became for me (Athanases, 1998). But the moment I fell in love with reading, I was born into a new identity as a borderlands person as well as a reader. Thus, I was born again at the exact crossroads between my cultural, linguistic, and reader exploration journeys. That day I decided to learn everything I could about literature that was written in Spanish. And eventually I got to explore world literature in my comparative world literature class, another one of the most important points of my life. Thanks to my decision to take a Spanish literature class at a confusing time, my engagement with the written world generated one of my most enriching habits, a habit that grants me a feeling of centering, of not being dissonant with my surroundings, of not having to adapt to one more situation. The day I fell in love with reading, I was reminded of portions of my identity which still remain vibrant today after thirty years of living in the United States: my Latin American culture and Spanish, my heritage language. I fell in love with my own language in a culture that did not really value it. But my language gave me resilience, strength to *acculturate* (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997) to the American culture. That was the kind of experience I intended to replicate for my students that school year in my two *Spanish for Heritage Speakers II* classes.

#### Literacy and Empowerment through the Exploration of the Borderlands Identity

The observations I made during the first few days of class led me to the topic of my research. The day I met my Latino students, I immediately discerned that many

of them disliked reading. I also observed that most of them naturally spoke more English than Spanish. When I asked them in what language they preferred to speak, most of them expressed that English was their preferred language. For a couple of days many of them resisted my request to only speak Spanish, which made me wonder if they could actually speak Spanish. To my surprise, once they understood that I really meant for them to speak only in Spanish, most of them could speak Spanish quite fluently. However, when it came to reading in Spanish out loud, only a couple of students in each class offered to read. Moreover, the writing literacy in Spanish of many of them was pretty low, even though this was a second level class. Two months later, I still struggled with my students not wanting to speak and write in Spanish. I could say that most of them felt most comfortable with Spanglish<sup>1</sup> if they were forced to speak at least some Spanish. On one hand, many of my students were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Americans or had spent a significant portion of their lives in the United States. On the other hand, the majority of their parents spoke mostly in Spanish. I noticed a strong Latin American heritage in their home environments every time I called any of their homes. Spanish music was often in the background, voice mail messages were in Spanish or included Spanish music, and parents naturally spoke in Spanish to me. Moreover, while more than half of my students were born or grew up in the United States, during the World Cup most of them preferred the Spanish or Latin American teams to win over the United States team. It became evident to me that my students lived a borderlands existence between the world of their roots and families and their lives as American teenagers.

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<sup>1</sup> Spanglish has been defined by Stavans (2003) as a hybrid form of verbal expression which consists of the lexical and syntactical combination of Spanish and English.

From the first day of school, I also noticed my students' high interest when we started reading the book *Cuando era puertorriqueña* (When I was Puerto Rican) (Santiago, 1993), an autobiographical tale by a borderlands female who lives between the Puerto Rican and American cultures. The students seemed quite focused when we read her description of the three ways she identifies linguistically: speaker of English, Spanish, and Spanglish. No student knew the word *monolingüístico*, which surprised me and made me wonder if they had ever explored their cultural and linguistic identities. I then explained the difference between living monocultural/monolingual and bicultural/bilingual existences and asked them to provide definitions and examples of the word *cultura*. Through the entire discussion, student interest did not fade.

These observations made me understand that one of my roles that school year was helping my students explore their sense of identity in as many ways as possible. From the beginning I also made a concerted effort to understand and be proactively open to their agency, to actively listen to their voices and to use their lives, opinions, desires, and interests as blueprints for my teaching Spanish literacy.

In this dissertation, I document how I attempted to develop my Latino and Latina students' interest in literacy (reading and writing) in their heritage language by drawing on their linguistic and cultural experiences and perspectives. The agency of my students served as my guide in our joint exploration of their multiple identities. I designed discussions that helped them understand their position in American society and their role in understanding the *word* so they could impact their *world* (Freire, 1998; Freire, 2005; Freire & Macedo, 1987). By using their cultural experiences, perspectives, agency, and voice, I intended to help them explore their own identity. It

was my hope to strengthen it and develop their interest in reading and writing literacy in Spanish, the language that connects them to their roots. I also explored how I, through reflective practice, as a teacher who had never taught solely Spanish Heritage Speakers, analyzed and accommodated my everyday lessons to student needs. I studied their progress – or lack thereof – through the entire school year.

The two main questions I explored were:

- 1) How do my students view their cultural and linguistic identities?
- 2) Can I, through the exploration of culturally relevant borderlands literary topics impact my students' interest in literacy?

To answer those questions, I examined various aspects of my practice such as:

- a) How do I attempt to draw on my students' linguistic and cultural experiences, voice, and agency as a guide to teach them literacy?
- b) How do I guide my students' exploration of their cultural and linguistic identities through culturally responsive literary topics with which they identify?

### Methods

I conducted action research during the 2009-10 academic year in my two classes of Spanish for Heritage Speakers II. I combined action research with ethnography by using the anthropological framework of culture, instructional context, social structure, and power to inquire and find solutions to culture-related research questions (Jacob, 1995). Throughout the semester I presented my students with varied borderlands and other culturally relevant readings. I also documented my reflective practice as an inexperienced teacher of Spanish for Heritage Speakers who aimed to increase her students' interest in reading.

In order to obtain a more complete interpretation of events, I collected multiple types of data. I interviewed Spanish for Heritage Speakers teachers in order to understand their strategies to impact their students' social and reader identities. Moreover, I interviewed my students in focus groups. The interviews were audiotaped. Students also completed questionnaires that had to do with their cultural, linguistic and reader identities. Furthermore, the students wrote journal entries about cultural and linguistic topics in addition to general reflections about the culturally relevant topics we read about and discussed. I also kept a journal about my own thoughts, reflections about my actions, and decisions to take further actions. Last but not least, I took field notes about my observations during whole class and small group discussions. I systematically collected and coded the data in the form of an evolving, descriptive catalog of themes. Through the semester I revisited the themes I coded to determine if they had changed. I then coded the changes.

#### Description of School and Students

The school where I have worked for the last 17 years is one of the smallest high schools of a large school district in a southern state. At the time of my study, its student population consisted of 1,372 students. The high school is also one of the most diverse schools in the district. The students come from at least 83 countries and collectively speak at least 40 world languages. The school's population is divided into 25% White, 7% Black, 39% Latino, 23% Asian, 4% Multi-Racial and 2% Undesignated. Due to the low income levels of their families, 46% of these students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Forty eight percent of Latinos qualify for free and reduced lunch. Classes in English for Speakers of Other Languages enroll 12% of the

student body and 41% of students are limited English proficient. The special education population is 19%.

While my school's Latino students still follow the national pattern of underrepresentation on the college track, there has been an indication of positive change over the last ten years. Latinos, who make a large percentage of those who qualify for free and reduced lunch, constitute about 50% of the students served by Advanced Via Determination (AVID). In addition to this program's focus on recruiting Latino/a students, other college identification programs such as College Partnership, the local university's Early Identification Program and the local community college's Pathways actively recruit a large number of Latino/a students. The increasing number of Latinos attending college now constitutes 31% of the school's students who go to college. However, Latinos are still significantly underrepresented on the attendance of four-year colleges. While whites make the highest percentage of students going to four-year institutions (44%) right after graduation, Latinos make the highest percentage of students who initiate their college education in the local community college (43%). This fact may be a cause of concern since community college students are 14.5% less likely to complete a degree within nine years as opposed to university students (Long & Kurlaender, 2008).

Nevertheless, the majority of Latinos taking Spanish for Heritage Speakers II and III and AP Spanish Language envision earning at least a bachelor's degree. Seventy five percent of students who take Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes do it with the goal of earning the advanced diploma which is better regarded by colleges than the regular diploma. Over thirty percent of these students claim to want to complete at least a Bachelor's degree. And almost half claim to intend to go beyond,

towards a graduate degree. The students in Spanish for Heritage Speakers II and III take on average 3 honors and 3 AP courses throughout their high school career.

Almost 50% of the students taking Spanish for Heritage Speakers II and III claim to have friends in regular classes. Thirty seven percent claim to have friends in honors and advanced classes or in a combination between regular and advanced classes.

Almost all of the students take Spanish for Heritage Speakers III after they have finished the second level, a fact that did not change with my students. Furthermore, about 80% of the students in Spanish for Heritage Speakers III take AP Spanish Language the following school year, constituting almost the entire membership of the AP Spanish Language classes. The students in AP Spanish Language classes take an average of two honors and four AP courses in their high school career. Almost sixty percent of the students taking AP classes plan to complete Bachelors' degrees and almost 40% claim that they will do graduate work. That class makes the highest scores of the school on any AP exam.

In the 18 years I have worked at that school, I have witnessed several periods of concerted efforts to recruit minority students into the college track via identification through SAT scores and recommendation by teachers and counselors. Serious collaboration among the educators in the school has focused on identifying and providing support to students who, while underprivileged, have the potential to attend college. I have always felt part of that effort towards the advancement of traditionally marginalized students such as Latino/as. I, as well as other members of my school, have attempted to instill in traditionally marginalized students a vision of an academic path.



My assumptions about the students I had in Spanish for Heritage Speakers II conformed to the demographics described above. I knew that our number of Latino/a students on the college track was increasing thanks in part to teachers who believed in and worked towards developing these students' potential. Although it was unrealistic to expect many of these students immediately to attend four-year colleges mostly because of their socio-economic and legal situations, I felt that with encouragement and support systems Latino/a students would increasingly persist in an academic path. So I worked to instill in my students a vision of becoming college students as I prepared them for the higher level of Spanish for Heritage Speakers III which would eventually lead them into the college level AP Spanish Language class.

I taught two Spanish for Heritage Speakers II classes. My total number of students was 43, with 23 males and 20 females. My fifth period, the class I saw every day after lunch, consisted of 23 students: 14 males and nine females. In November, one of my male students was placed in jail for committing a gang-related crime. Another student was placed in an alternative facility for emotional disabilities. I kept contact with my student who was in jail by visiting him and bringing him books and notebooks in which to write. My plan was to send him one letter a month with a literary excerpt until he got out of jail, hopefully when he turned 17. My seventh period, the class I saw every other day for a longer period, consisted of 20 students: seven males and 13 females. One female student was out for most of the year with epilepsy.

With only two exceptions, the parents of my students were Latin American. Twenty-five students had parents who came from the same Latin American country. The other 16 had parents who came from two different Latin American countries.

Twenty-six (over half) of my students were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation American, which means they were born in the United States but their parents were born in another country. The other 16 students were 1.5 generation which means they moved to the United States before the age of 12. My students' Latin American cultural background included the following countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela, Chile, El Ecuador, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Mexico. The country most represented by far was El Salvador with 19 students.

### Overview

The purpose of this research, which lasted throughout the 2009-2010 academic year, was to document my attempts as a teacher of two Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes to help my Latino students improve their interest in literacy in their heritage language. I attempted to help my students through the use of borderlands and culturally relevant literature. Borderlands literature explores the dual experience of the immigrant or child of immigrants who lives a bicultural and bilingual existence. Culturally relevant literature reflects the multiple cultural experiences of students.

I drew attention to the students' voice and agency in order to help them understand their place in the world and how they could construct their own sense of identity. Furthermore, I intended to let them understand that they could impact the way I conducted my class. In regards to language, while I acknowledged the legitimacy of my students' language choices, my ultimate goal was to make my students as fluent as possible in their heritage language because of the benefits that I will refer to later. Last but not least, this study documented my reflective practice as a Latina teacher with no previous experience teaching Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes to improve my students' interest in literacy while contemplating the topics

referred to above. I consulted the professional advice of five teachers who have had extensive experience teaching Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes. Those teachers were consulted solely for their professional advice and not for research purposes.

In the second chapter, I review literature that inquires about different dimensions of the borderlands experience. Two of those dimensions are cultural and linguistic. The other two have to do with the general academic experiences of borderlands students and their more specific experience as readers. In the third chapter, I describe in more detail the methods I used to gather and analyze data.

The fourth chapter includes how my students identified linguistically and culturally as well as how their cultural appreciation changed. In the fifth chapter I describe how I drew on those characteristics with the goal of becoming a more culturally responsive teacher in order to engage my students in literacy. In the sixth chapter I address how my students' reading interest changed as they became more acquainted with borderlands topics. The last chapter presents the summary of my findings on my students' linguistic and cultural identity as well as on their changes in literary engagement as I implemented culturally responsive strategies. It also comprises implications for teaching and for future research. Last, in that chapter I include the contributions and limitations of my research.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this section I present the most recent research regarding the borderlands cultural experience and, more specifically, the social identity of the borderlands adolescent. I review scholarship on the importance of maintaining close ties to cultural/linguistic roots, the dualistic experiences of borderlands students, and the benefits of developing fluency in the heritage language. I then examine the literature that deals more specifically with pedagogical interventions which may better reach minority readers. The interventions include culturally responsive practices; connections between cultural and linguistic identity and reader identity; and strategies to reduce aversion to reading in resistant readers. Last, in order to inform my pedagogical strategies and research approach to this study, I analyze two documented examples of teachers who also tried to transform their students' reader identities.

### Borderlands Cultural Experience

The term *frontera* (*borderlands*), in reference to the Latino experience, generally alludes to the physical *frontera* (border) which divides Mexico and the United States. Cline and Necochea (2006) quote a teacher of Mexican American children who refers to her students as “los niños de la frontera (children of the borderlands)” (p. 274). That teacher explains, “Los niños de la frontera son un crisol de culturas. Por esta razón, una/o maestra/o debe de disfrutar y aceptar la diversidad de culturas, idiomas, y regiones. (The children in the border are a collection of cultures. For this reason, a teacher needs to enjoy and accept the diversity of cultures, languages, and regions.)” (p. 274). Cline and Necochea (2006) describe borderlands

children as children who “frequently need to negotiate two cultures, two languages, and two worlds” (p. 268).

An author who has elevated the term *borderlands* to a symbolic level is Mexican-American Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) who calls herself a *border woman* since she grew up between two cultures, “the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)” (p.19). Anzaldúa writes, “The US-Mexican border es una herida abierta<sup>2</sup> where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (p. 19). She divides the term borderland into physical, psychological, sexual, and spiritual dimensions:

The actual physical borderland that I’m dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. It’s not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Not comfortable but home. (p. 19)

While the borderlands experience of Latinos has been mostly related to the Mexican experience, Esmeralda Santiago’s autobiographical account *Cuando era puertorriqueña (When I was Puerto Rican)* (1993) illustrates the process of acculturation of a young Puerto Rican woman as she moves to the mainland from the island. The main focus of that book involves the problematized identity of a teenager who, in addition to exploring her identity as an adolescent, also struggles to define her

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<sup>2</sup> “is an open wound”

borderlands identity. She straddles (Carter, 2005) the language and culture she comes from and the language and culture she moves into.

The linguistic dualism of both Anzaldúa and Santiago are also evident in both their books. As demonstrated in Anzaldúa's words, "The US-Mexican border es una herida abierta<sup>3</sup> ..." (p. 25). Anzaldúa's constant use of Spanglish, a combination of English and Spanish within the same sentence, demonstrates the complexity of her borderlands existence. She also writes, for example, "*la madre naturaleza*<sup>4</sup> succored me, allowed me to grow roots that anchored me to the earth" (p.19-20). Some of her verses express that complexity as well:

1,950 mile long open wound  
dividing a pueblo,<sup>5</sup> a culture,  
running down the length of my body,  
staking fence rods in my flesh,  
splits me splits me  
me raja me raja<sup>6</sup> (p. 24)

In a parallel fashion, Santiago's dualism is expressed in her prologue as she describes the reasons for the *espanglicismos* which she calls a *language of necessity*:  
Several years ago, if someone had referred to the many *espanglicismos* in my vocabulary, the embarrassment would have left me wordless. Nowadays I have to accept that this language invented by necessity is the one that allows me to express myself in my own way. When I write in English, I have to

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<sup>3</sup> "is an open wound."

<sup>4</sup> "mother nature."

<sup>5</sup> "people."

<sup>6</sup> "splits me splits me."

translate from the Spanish that is stored in my memory. When I speak in Spanish, I have to translate from the English which defines my present. And when I write in Spanish, I find myself in the middle of three languages, the Spanish of my childhood, the English of my adult life, and the *espanglés* which crosses from one world to the other just as we cross from our *barrio* in Puerto Rico to the *barriadas* of Brooklyn. (Santiago, 1993, p. xvii, Translated by Magda A. Cabrero)

In the United States, the reference to Latinos' dual cultural and linguistic experiences has often been limited to mostly Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans (Pahl & Way, 2006; Ruiz & Chavez, 2008). Thus, the experience of many of the more recent immigrants, such as Salvadorians and other Central Americans and Bolivians and other South Americans, remains mostly unexplored. Despite their different national origins, it is possible that many Latinos may *straddle* (Carter, 2005) two cultures and languages which are considered to have different degrees of value in the American culture. Latinos' mother culture and language have been considered as *colonized* by the dominant, *colonizer* culture and language (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Jimenez, 2002).

Living in the borderlands may be a common experience between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students. It may also reflect the experiences of children who have grown up in the United States despite their foreign birth. The later immigrants are often referred to as the 1.5 generation (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) characterize the borderlands experience of these children as "combining American culture with the sights and sounds of a history of foreign lands, seeking to balance the pressures of immigrant families and native peers, and

striving to fulfill the goals of material success and personal freedom” (p. xviii).

These three groups often experience a lower social class status. They tend to straddle home and school environments which significantly differ culturally and linguistically (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). However, individuals in any of those groups may have different cross-cultural identities which demonstrate varied levels of connection to their parental cultural and linguistic identities (Suarez-Orozco, 2005).

First generation immigrants generally use their countries of origin as a *point of reference* and are often aware of the option of going back if needed. In contrast, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants lack that point of reference and belief in that option (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). According to Perez Firat (1994), of the three groups 1.5 generation immigrants are “translation artists. Tradition bound but translation bent, they are sufficiently immersed in each culture to give both ends of the hyphen their due” (p. 7).

Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco and Todorova (2008) argue that, while immigrant children initially tend to feel enthusiastic about learning in American schools, a *downward trajectory* which translates into lower academic engagement starts for many of them by their fourth year in the United States. Some of the factors that contribute to that decline have to do with family structure, parental education, parental employment, and gender (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). In regards to gender, boys tend to experience more blatant acts of discrimination than girls, have teachers who hold lower expectations for them, and are more quickly negatively recruited by the streets. Thus negative environments impact males more directly. While there is no significant difference between the



standardized test scores of female and male students, girls' GPAs tend to be higher due to their behavioral component (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). Limited parental education and unemployment generally exert a negative impact. And negative family experiences such as divorce or separation of family members who stay behind while others move to the United States tend to cause downward mobility. There are problems between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1.5 immigrant children and their 1<sup>st</sup> generation parents because of emerging cultural clashes.

According to Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco and Todorova (2008), mentors who can serve as cultural mediators are crucial in the successful acculturation of those students. A meaningful connection may make all the difference in the immigrant student's academic motivation and effort. The mentor's bilingualism may also make a great difference. Nieto (1999) and Moll (1996) have made reference to the important role that the teacher plays as the cultural mediator in the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1978) of the immigrant student. A cultural mediator may play a significant role in helping the immigrant student reach the next level of academic engagement (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). The mediating process may have a crucial impact on and create a connection between students' interest in literacy and their development of a healthy social identity.

#### *The Social Identity of the Borderlands Adolescent*

*"And yes, the 'alien' element has become familiar - never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home." (Anzaldúa, p.19)*

Although one could argue that the identity of all teenagers is problematic, the

problem is exacerbated for teenagers who live between cultures because of the borderlands experiences they live through. That issue is not limited to Latino children in the United States as Vyas (2004) has demonstrated in his study of Asian teenagers. In addition, the sense of identity can vary within individuals from the same culture. Even within the same family, children may adopt different identities (Vigil, 1988; Vyas, 2004). Family members, for instance, could go from being completely assimilated and speaking only English, to becoming bicultural, bilingual or Spanglish-speakers (Vigil, 1988). Moreover, according to Chappell and Faltis (2007), borderlands children vary in their cultural and linguistic knowledge. Some children are more familiar with their heritage language than with their heritage culture and vice versa.

An important part of the identity development of humans is their process of social identification. Tajfel and Turner (1986) defined social identity as “that part of the individual self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 255). It has also been suggested by Phinney (1989; 1993) that, for most children, the time to explore their social identity is when they are going through middle adolescence or about the time they are in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. According to Phinney’s (1989; 1993) model of ethnic identity development, the stages of social identity include *unexamined, moratorium or search*, and *achieved or committed*.

The choices that students make to identify with one culture or language over the other has also been explored from the perspective of becoming *cultural straddlers, non-compliant believers*, or *cultural mainstreamers* (Carter, 2005). Accordingly, while some Latino students prefer to assimilate to the dominant culture, others straddle both cultures

or simply opt to take a resistance stance. It is possible that students who choose to become resistant towards the dominant culture may demonstrate it in their low academic achievement as they are not ready to negotiate schools' power structures. Or it may be that other students chose to identify more with their minority side because of the comfort and resilience gained by that choice (Carter, 2005).

Research has also explored the conscious or unconscious denial of one's heritage culture and language to assimilate to the dominant culture and language (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Jimenez, 2002). The students who choose the *colonizer* over the *colonized* identity run the risk of suppressing a major part of their identity. According to Nieto (2008), students for whom assimilation would mean suppressing a major part of their identity need to become bicultural for the sake of survival. The *colonization* of a major source of identity for Latino children may be extremely detrimental for them and may impact their self-esteem and academic achievement. Valenzuela (1999) has explored the *subtracting* effect of certain schools on Latino children. These schools do not build on the cultural and linguistic experiences of those students. Moreover, they don't acknowledge their agency, resulting in limited academic engagement. Jimenez (2002) argues about the necessity for students to have access to fundamental parts of their identities. I would add that by creating an awareness of and helping students understand that there may be some value in the side that has been forgotten, suppressed, or denied, their identity may be strengthened. A good way to do it may be through the exploration of borderlands and culturally relevant readings in their heritage language, Spanish.

The borderlands identity of the immigrant student has been deemed problematic by several researchers. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) express concern about the lives of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation children:

Relative to the first generation, the process of ethnic self-identification of second-generation children is more complex and often entails the juggling of competing allegiances and attachments. Situated within two cultural worlds, they must define themselves in relation to multiple reference groups (sometimes in two countries and in two languages) and to the classifications into which they are placed by their native peers, schools, the ethnic community, and the larger society. (p. 150)

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) divide the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant experiences into three categories. *Consonant acculturation* has to do with parents and their children acculturating and learning English at a similar pace. *Downward assimilation* takes place when parents don't acculturate and learn English at the pace of their children. This causes role reversal in which the parent loses control over the child. Downward assimilation also tends to occur in the absence of a supportive community that helps the family maintain the integrity of its heritage culture and language. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) state that students experiencing downward assimilation may live *bonds of solidarity* that, far from helping them succeed academically, pull them away from advancement: "Reactive ethnicity is a 'made-in- America product' - basis for collective solidarity [...]. Youthful solidarity based on opposition to the dominant society yields an adversarial stance toward mainstream institutions, including education" (p. 285). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) explain that fast assimilation is unhealthy for children and their families. They propose that *selective acculturation* is the ideal experience for immigrant families. When children selectively acculturate, they are fluently able to move between the world of their parents and the world of their schools. They can experience and select the values of both cultures. They are

bilingual which allows them to continue communicating fluidly with their parents as they learn the new language. Their identity is enriched and does not suffer.

Vigil (1988) explains that one of the most challenging tasks for children of Latino immigrants is developing a positive sense of identity:

Language inconsistency at home and school, a perceived gap in the status of their parents and the quality of their environment and those of the larger society, and the dangers and attractions of barrio streets create an ambiguity in their ethnic identity. Parents and older siblings are often unable to effectively guide youngsters in ways to reconcile the contrasting cultural worlds, and this results in an uneven adoption of acculturative strategies. (p. 41)

Another detrimental factor to student academic achievement and emotional wellbeing may be when students develop an oppositional identity. According to Orozco (2008), 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant students may develop oppositional identities if they experience discrimination and feel alienated from the mainstream educational culture. This oppositional identity may trigger an oppositional stance against certain aspects of American culture and institutions (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). However, their oppositional identity does not necessarily oppose academic values. On the contrary, immigrant youth tend to value receiving a good education. But a great number of these young people “in turn disconnect from their studies, finding their schoolwork boring, constricting and irrelevant to their lives” (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008, p. 215). Sadly, many immigrant students attend schools which don’t nurture an academic identity. Through the years, “academic improvement was the exception, not the rule” (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008, p. 261).

Trueba (1998) and Vigil (1988) insist on the importance of exploring the complicated identity of the Latino student. Trueba writes about the need for more research on the experience of the bicultural, binational family and on how to include their experiences in the curriculum. All the challenges mentioned above combine with the need for refuge and belonging as causes for *cultural transitional* youngsters to join gangs, which occurs more commonly among 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Latinos according to Vigil (1988). When students are ready to explore their social identity, complications can result if they find that the people they are closest to are not valued by the dominant culture. Nieto (2004) explains: Aside from the normal anxieties associated with adolescence, additional pressure for culturally subordinated students may be the result of several factors, including the physical and psychological climate of the schools they attend, the low status their native languages and cultures are accorded in the societies in which they live, the low expectations that society has of them, and their invisibility in traditional curricula. (p. 179)

In regards to racial socialization, Gans (2007) has explored the dichotomy between *ethnic identity* and *racial identification*. While *ethnic identity* may be personal and private, the *identification* as a racial being is imposed on a person by society and it eventually impacts the child's *racial* identity. Once Latino children become aware of the way they are racially *identified* by society, their race might then turn into a problematic part of their identity. Cross (1991) alludes to the detrimental effect that racial *identification* by society may have on the developing *identity* of non-white children because those children start internalizing the negative perceptions of others.

Pahl and Way (2006), who studied the ethnic identity exploration and affirmation of minority adolescents, argued for the importance of empowering minority adolescents to resist being overpowered by the dominant culture. By becoming resistant their sense of identity may become stronger. Pahl and Way (2006) also suggested that 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants may not have such a strong urge to resist the dominant culture because of their stronger roots. These immigrants have not been exposed to the higher social and cultural capital of the dominant culture and have not lost contact with their heritage language and culture, important sources for a positive sense of identity. Pahl and Way (2006) conclude that "... adolescents who are of a later generation may feel a need to reconnect with their origins and feel greater affirmation and belonging than immigrants who are trying to assimilate to the host culture" (p. 1405).

These researchers inquired into the individual trajectories of ethnic identity exploration and affirmation from middle (10<sup>th</sup> grade) to late adolescence of 135 Black, Dominican, and Puerto Rican adolescents. Ethnic discrimination made Latinos increase their exploration and their exploration enhanced their resistance stance. African Americans explored their identities for a longer period of time than Latinos and developed a stronger resistance stance than Latinos. Pahl and Way (2005) argued that the reasons for that phenomenon were that African Americans tend to experience more overt discrimination than Latinos; the African American community has a deep, historical understanding of living with discrimination and members offer a great deal of support to each other. The researchers found no impact of immigration status on the exploration and assertion of ethnic identity but suggested that immigrant status should be explored in its relationship to other dimensions of ethnic identity such as

the choice of self-labels or behaviors. In my opinion, another dimension that could be studied is dual ethnic identity. Studying that dimension may be beneficial because of the possible positive ramifications that exploring borderlands experiences may bring to adolescent immigrants (and children of immigrants).

My study complements Pahl and Way's study (2006) in several ways. In relation to further exploration of other dimensions of ethnic identity, I explored borderlands identity. More than just how immigration status impacts identity, I researched how the exploration of culturally relevant literary topics by 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant students (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) impacted their identity. Moreover, like Pahl and Way's (2006) students, many of my students were either in 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the typical time when social identity exploration takes place (Phinney 1989; 1993). I inquired if the exposure to culturally relevant and borderlands literature stimulated that sense of exploration. I also queried if a heightened understanding of the immigrant status through exposure to borderlands literature made a difference in regards to the exploration of ethnic identity. Another significant element of my study was its inquiry of the experiences of children whose nationalities had been less explored than the Puerto Rican and Dominican.

The way Latino students are *identified* (Cross, 1993; Gans, 2007) through labels may make a significant difference in their sense of identity. Portes and Rimbaut (2001) argue that there is a strong connection between identity and labeling: Ethnic identification begins with the application of a label to oneself in a cognitive process of self-categorization, involving not only a claim to membership in a group or category but also a contrast of one's group or category with other groups or categories. Such self-definitions also carry affective meaning, implying a



psychological bond with others that tends to serve psychologically protective functions. (p. 151)

Labels attributed to Latinos may have a negative impact on their sense of social identity. Rumbaut (1996) argues that immigrant students' self-esteem may be influenced by the way they are labeled at schools. For example, he found that the label "Limited English Proficient" negatively impacts the way immigrant students feel about themselves. Oboler (1995) argues that labels which are supposedly simply meant to socially categorize groups of people, stigmatize the very people they categorize. Accordingly, Oboler suggests that the label *Hispanic* not only stigmatizes Latinos but also is limited in that it does not acknowledge the rich diversity of Latino students' origins and histories of introduction to the United States. Nevertheless, it may be beneficial to recognize their commonness as long as it is done as a means of achieving socioeconomic progress in the United States (Oboler, 1995).

Instead of passively accepting the way society has identified them, minority students should be encouraged to *construct, negotiate, or redefine* their own cultural meanings and identities (Oboler, 1995). Some students may also prefer to distance themselves from adhering to an ethnic identity and focus more on their national identity (Oboler, 1995). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) refer to four types of identity that 2<sup>nd</sup> immigration children may adopt: foreign national-origin identity; hyphenated American identity; plain American national identity without a hyphen; and panethnic minority-group identity. A hyphenated American identity may be a combination with another national identity such as Salvadorian-American or a panethnic identity such as Hispanic-American. Panethnic minority-group identity has to do with belonging to

an ethnic group such as Latino or Hispanic which encompasses a group of different Latin American national origins. Portes and Rumbaut suggest that the sense of identity of immigrant students is not fixed as it tends to change according to the experiences they encounter.

In their study of Miami, Fort Lauderdale and San Diego 2<sup>nd</sup> generation high school students, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) concluded that something may occur to children of immigrants through their high school years to steer them away from identifying as American. While at the beginning of high school, 53% of the students identified as hyphenated American or American, only 34% felt the same way three years later. In fact, there was an increase of 20% on the students who associated with a foreign national origin or panethnic identifications. And while at the beginning of high school only 13% of the students considered themselves just American, by the end of the study, that percentage had gone down to 4%. Thus, instead of progressively or steadily identifying as plain American, the group tended to shift away from it:

The shift, therefore, has not been toward mainstream identities but toward a more militant reaffirmation of the immigrant identity for some groups and toward panethnic minority-group identities for others. (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 157)

These findings by Portes and Rumbaut in regards to 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants feeling less American may be possibly linked to the immigrant student's *downward trajectories* referred to by Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco and Todorova (2008).

A study that explores the impact of self-labeling on academic achievement is Zarate, Bhimji and Reese's (2005). Those researchers conducted open interviews in order to study the relationship between ethnic labels and the academic achievement of

79 Latino students, 78% of whom were born in the United States. The subjects they interviewed were part of a 15 year-old longitudinal study. What Zarate, Bhimji and Reese (2005) found was that students who only stuck to one ethnic label and/or did not offer a national or cultural explanation for the label they chose, tended to have lower academic achievement. On the other hand, the students who identified with several ethnic labels and offered an explanation based on the place they and their parents were born, their roots, background, and cultural heritage, tended to perform better in school. There was also a correlation between the students who identified biculturally and better academic achievement. Also, the students who identified as *Hispanic* did not feel comfortable with the term but understood that was the way they were identified in official forms. Most of the students did not identify as *American* unless they were prompted a second time. However, they never considered themselves just *American*. If they were born in another country, they identified with that nationality as one of the labels. If they were born in the United States, they identified in at least two or three ways, such as American, Mexican American and Latino. They considered Americans monocultural while most of them (78%) considered themselves bicultural. A student explained:

I say I am Mexican because when they say, 'What are you, Mexican?' I say I'm Mexican because my family is Mexican as far as I can remember, my great-grandmother is Mexican. But I say I am American because every time you cross the border, 'Are you American?' 'Yes, I am American.' But I am considered Chicano because that is what you call if your parents are from Mexico and you were born here. There is a subtle difference but to me they

are all the same. I don't feel like, nah, it's all about Mexico [...] My past roots are Mexican and my future roots are American. (p. 105)

The data suggested the importance of helping Latino students understand their identity in a fluid way. "For the majority of the students, the ambiguous territory between cultures and immigrant generations is a space that simultaneously allows for different degrees of 'mixing both cultures' and different degrees of Mexican, American and Latino" (p. 105). For some of the adolescents, their identity seemed natural and uncomplicated while for others it was *ambivalent* and *tenuous*. Zarate, Bhimji and Reese (2005) concluded that students may attain cultural capital when they are able to construct their own forms of cultural and linguistic identification. They recommended a more specific interview protocol or an ethnographic study to explore the connection between the way those students understand their identity and academic achievement.

Zarate, Bhimji and Reese's (2005) findings about the benefits of Latino students' constructing their own self-labels may have a connection with Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) research on the shift in 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants' self-labels. While Portes and Rumbaut did not present their conclusion of immigrant children feeling less American as positive, the construction of new self-labels by those students may have been beneficial for their own sense of identity. Those students may have gone through a healthy exploration of their own identities which may have naturally led them to change the way they self-identified. Such exploration may have resulted in a heightened ability to construct their own sense of social identity, which Zarate, Bhimji and Reese (2005) deemed beneficial.

Helping students understand and even construct a positive sense of borderlands identity is essential. By helping Latino students dig into their borderlands experience, we may help develop their higher order thinking skills, a better understanding of who they are and their place in the world, and a more positive sense of identity. In addition, providing students with the possibility of constructing their own identity instead of letting society identify them may make a difference. We need to help students understand their own sense of identity in a more out-of-the box manner.

The fact that seventy-eight percent of the students in Zarate, Bhimji and Reese's (2005) study were born in the U.S. and still understood their borderlands identity in a fluid way (not just American or Mexican American, for example) and considered themselves bicultural seemed to have helped them academically. We need to help students explore their identity for as long as it is possible. Thus I included students' extended exploration of identity as part of my research. I wanted to determine if helping them, during a period of social exploration, not just to understand, but also to construct their social identity in a more fluid way, would be beneficial. "Ways of identifying have a much more complex relationship with academic achievement than simply inspecting labels" (Zarate, Bhimji, & Reese, 2005, p.111). Hopefully the exploration of identity in a more fluid way would also impact student identity and achievement as readers. A way to help students construct a more complicated sense of identity would be to help them *remember* their roots in order to move forward.

### *Culture of Remembrance*

*“The recipes, the herbs and the cures; the music and the songs and the dances; the prose and the poems, the sorrows, the joys; the gain, the loss. This is my legacy. But I am old and failing. I entrust it to you lest it be lost and forgotten.”* (Preciado Martin, 1993, p. 36)

Assimilation for most of American history has resulted in the denial or the *forgetting* of the elements of society which do not belong to the White Anglo-Saxon, protestant culture, and language. Thus assimilation to being monolingual and monocultural may represent a form of self-denial for people who live bicultural/tricultural and bilingual/trilingual existences. Put simply, completely assimilating to English only and dominant cultural values could mean *acting white* and *not keepin’ it real* (Carter, 2005; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Ogbu, 1992; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998) for students who live borderlands existences between the white dominant culture and their families’ cultures and languages. Research has demonstrated the value of remaining connected to the minority part of oneself, of *not forgetting* it, in order to gain resilience and self-worth (Dance, 2005).

In the process of assimilation to the American culture, borderlands students may eventually distance themselves, start forgetting, or suppress their heritage language and cultures. Helping them *remember* and become reacquainted with their first language and culture, may help them compensate and add value to their lives and provide for a more positive sense of identity. While that issue remains a highly political one, research has found the benefits of remaining connected with one’s roots. Caplan, Choy and Whitmore’s (1992) inquiry on Asian students led them to conclude that, for those students, keeping their ancestral knowledge made a difference. The

students who kept contact with their ancestral knowledge succeeded academically and even performed better than their more affluent peers. Moreover, Machado-Casas (2009) interviewed Indigenous Latin American immigrants who expressed that forgetting their languages would be like losing their identities; that passing on their languages to younger generations served as an important source of survival. In that study the researcher found a strong connection between heritage language, culture, and identity.

Giroux (1992) has explained the importance of the *language of remembrance* when it comes to the educational reform of minority youth:

[...] educational leaders need to be skilled in the language of remembrance.

Remembrance rejects knowledge as merely an inheritance, with transmission as its only form of practice. Remembrance sees knowledge as a social and historical construction that is always the subject of struggle. (p. 10)

A study that has to do with student exploration of ancestral heritage was done by Godina (2003). Godina studied a project involving 92 seventh and eighth graders. The name of this project was called the *Xinachtli Project*. Xinachtli, according to Godina, means *culture being nurtured to grow*. Godina maintained that introducing Mexican-American students to important elements of their ancestral Aztec culture could create a needed connection to their roots which would impact their educational experiences. In a quasi-experiment, Godina administered a survey before and after the students were exposed to two days of lectures, and one day of Aztec dances and exposure to illustrations of the Aztec culture. Some of the questions had to do with reading preferences, cultural awareness, self-esteem, and self-concept. The data

suggested that those students gained a better self-concept, stronger cultural awareness, and more motivation to read.

Godina's (2003) study is meaningful in regards to the importance of exposing students to significant aspects of their heritage culture and language and how those may impact their sense of self-esteem, reading motivation, and appreciation of their heritage. However, Godina's claimed finding that three days of an intervention impacted these students may be too preliminary. More longitudinal exposure to fundamental aspects of the students' culture is probably needed. Students most likely need repeated opportunities to reflect on their experiences. Moreover, Godina's way of collecting information was limited to a few questions and only a limited number of journal entries were analyzed. In addition, there was not enough support for findings from multiple sources of data. Other methods of gathering data such as field notes during group discussions, focus groups, and questionnaires may have provided more comprehensive evidence. A long-term study in which students are given plenty of exposure to their heritage language and culture, in combination with many opportunities for reflection, may add more value to the research on this topic. While the methodology of Godina's study is weak, it makes reference to a topic that deserves further exploration: the possible impact of exposing Latino students to readings about their ancestral or heritage culture and language on their social identity and interest in literacy.

#### Borderlands Language Experience

This next topic for exploration is a major source of identity studied by sociolinguists: language. According to Gee (1996), discourses display a certain social identity, membership in a particular social group or network. Gee states that,



“Discourses create ‘social positions’ from which people are ‘invited’ (‘summoned’) to speak, listen, act, read and write, think, feel, believe and value in certain characteristic, historically recognizable ways, combined with their own styles and creativity” (p. 128).

In regards to the language of Latinos in the United States, Lopez and Estrada (2007) make an important observation. While Latinos’ main language tends to become English by the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, their linguistic situation is unique since, in contrast to other migratory groups, *intergenerational bilingualism* tends to persist after several generations due to a pattern of continuous immigration.

Arriagada (2005) explored the use of Spanish among Latino children. For her study, Arriagada used the first wave of data generated in the two-year 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS). The NELS data included a large, nationally representative sample of first, second, and third generation eight graders with an oversample of minority students. Many of those children were born in the United States. One of the parents of each child was also surveyed.

The data gathered reflected that family context strongly impacts Spanish usage and proficiency. Spanish is normally confined to *the most intimate social spheres*, and the higher the level of discussion and family closeness, the more fluent children are in Spanish. Arriagada (2005) also concluded that girls tend to be more fluent bilinguals since they normally spend more time at home than boys. The phenomenon of the extended family from generation to generation was an additional factor in the Spanish fluency of the students. The author also detected a correlation between higher socioeconomic status and the preferred use of English for parents who want their children to attain cultural capital.

A problem with the study was that a Spanish language questionnaire was not introduced until the 1990 follow-up survey. Thus, some of the participants in the second round could not participate in the first one since they did not speak enough English. Therefore, the 1988 sample of Latino students examined here is somewhat biased by the inclusion of only Latino students with at least a minimal English knowledge. Moreover, the sample number depends on the number of parents who decided to return the surveys. That input was crucial for Arriagada's study. The final sample consisted of 2,736 Latino children, 435 less children than the NELS study originally included. The sample bias may have skewed the answers by having fewer 1<sup>st</sup> generation children share their experiences and a smaller sample from which to derive conclusions.

The findings of this study may have strong implications especially in regards to male students. I often wonder about my male students who can barely speak Spanish and don't like to read. The experiences of children who may have experienced less closeness to their families and thus lack the language that is confined to *the most intimate of social spheres* should be explored. Students who may have lacked needed emotional intimacy may be in need of help reconnecting or remembering their cultural and linguistic roots. Arraigada's study is also meaningful in demonstrating that Spanish is still an important part of the lived experience of many 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Latinos. The findings of my study will be compared to the findings of this survey since I closely examined the preference of my 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant students' language. I did that after I acquainted them with readings in their heritage language which have to do with borderlands and culturally relevant topics.

*Spanglish: A Borderlands Language of a Complicated Identity*

*Student: "People say that I speak ghetto Spanish"*

*Teacher: "What does that mean?"*

*Student: "Spanish and English mixed together."*

*(Magda Cabrero's Student and Magda Cabrero)*

As Esmeralda Santiago did in her prologue of *When I was Puerto Rican* (1993), Gloria Anzaldúa describes her perspective about her borderlands language in her essay "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (1999). She starts her essay with a story of when she was sitting at a dentist chair. She needs to be pinned down because her tongue will not stop moving. With this metaphor, she illustrates her refusal to let her many forms of expression be tied down to just one form. Anzaldúa lists the dialects she speaks in order of importance: Pachuco, Tex-Mex, Chicano Spanish, North Mexican Spanish, Standard Mexican Spanish, Standard Spanish, Slang English, and Standard English. It is interesting that she grants the least importance to Standard Spanish, Slang English, and Standard English. The writer ends her essay with, "So if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (p. 81).

Spanglish, or what Esmeralda Santiago has nominated *espanglés*, has been defined by Stavans (2003) as a hybrid form of Spanish which combines lexically and syntactically with English.

While there are strong benefits to studying the heritage language in its standard form, teachers need to acknowledge and accept that diglossia, or the separate use of each language in bilingual people, is not always realistic for students who live

borderlands existences. In fact, research suggests that Spanglish expresses who borderlands students really are due to the complexity of their borderlands experiences. Spanish teachers who transmit a negative message about speaking Spanglish, may be neglecting to understand the complex, borderlands experience of the Latino child (Chappell & Faltis, 2007; Freeman, 2000; McCollum, 1999; Sayer, 2008). Those teachers may not understand that Spanglish might indeed be the only way to communicate, the most legitimate way that helps students continue feeling real (Carter, 2005). Ramos (2000) explains that Spanglish is OK. There is no shame in Spanglish. Spanish, likewise, has nothing to fear. Spanish can handle everything: technical terms, anglicisms, and even the elimination of accents. There are 400 million people around the world who speak it, which is why it should be a language that affects reality, not the whims of academics. Spanish is ‘a language that is bursting with richness,’ as Garcia Marquez said. Therefore Spanish should not fear Spanglish, on the contrary, Spanglish is a cousin of Spanish. The point is not to make Spanglish a new language...the point is that Spanish must be completely open to the contributions of Spanglish. (p. 203)

### *The Benefits of Studying Spanish*

According to Sleeter (1991), many Spanish-speaking students quickly realize that their heritage language is not valued in American society. Thus many of these students soon stop speaking it. This is something I experienced the entire school year despite my many efforts to make my students speak only in Spanish. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), immigrant students go through a language dilemma: “[...] the languages they bring are close to their sense of self and national pride. On the other hand those languages clash with the new environment” (p.113). Portes and

Rumbaut (2001) argue that, of all the important legacies, while language may be the most important to keep, it may be the most difficult to transmit from generation to generation.

Students who are going through the English acquisition process may feel that English has more cultural capital and may quickly start focusing on learning English instead of maintaining or continuing *to remember* their Spanish (Freeman, 2000; McCollum, 1999; Potowski, 2007). Also, students have shown to resist using their heritage language over English (Freeman, 2000). Other students feel much more comfortable speaking Spanglish (Chappell & Faltis, 2007; Sayer, 2008). Anzaldúa (1999) claims that “el anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua”<sup>7</sup> (p. 76).

While it is important to understand and accept the natural language choices of Latino children, sociolinguists see a great value in studying the mother tongue. They have acknowledged the existing equivalence between dialects and languages. Other researchers like Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) openly criticize the decision of Richard Rodriguez (1982) to abandon his mother tongue:

[...] we question whether it is necessary to give up one’s native language, one’s affective language in order to succeed. One should not have to choose one or the other. An analogy here is that one does not have to forget how to play the piano before learning to play the violin. Rodriguez’s devastating account goes directly to the symbolic and affective aspects of language. To see language as a mere instrumental tool for communication is to miss its deep affective roots. Giving up Spanish to acquire English is a symbolic act of ethnic renunciation: it is giving up the mother tongue for the instrumental tongue of the dominant group. We contend that in such contexts, when

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<sup>7</sup> the Anglo with an innocent face tore out our language

learning the language and culture of a dominant group is symbolically equated with giving up one's own ethnic identity, learning becomes a problem. (p. 73)

Even though acquiring English and *forgetting* their Spanish may seem like a natural process for Latino students, research has demonstrated that studying Spanish has many benefits. For instance, using Spanish to teach younger Latino children in Head Start programs has had a positive impact on the improvement of their English literacy (Youngquist & Martinez-Griego, 2009). Research has also explored the possibility of providing instruction for the gifted in heritage speakers classes (Matthews & Matthews, 200). At least one researcher has also recommended the importance of *Spanish for Heritage Speakers* classes (Salazar, 2008).

For too long in the history of American research, being bilingual tended to be equated with having lower intelligence. This happened because the characteristics of the compared groups did not generally match. Two researchers who finally researched comparable subjects were Canadians Peal and Lambert (1962). They researched a sample of 10 year-old Canadian children. The sample compared children matched by sex, age, and family status. The results indicated that the bilingual children outperformed the monolingual children in almost every cognitive category. They were especially adept at concept formation and symbolic flexibility. Eight years later, Leopold (1970) concluded that being bilingual liberates people from the *tyranny of words*, since more than one concept represents one thing. And almost twenty years later, Rumbaut (1990) suggested the importance of becoming fluent bilingual over limited bilingual or monolingual. He compared students in the entire San Diego school system. Without exception, the students who were fluent bilinguals had outperformed the other two groups in standardized tests and in GPA.

One of the most important proponents of the benefits of studying one's first language is Cummins (1996). According to his linguistic interdependence hypothesis, first and second language and literacy skills are interrelated. Thus, bilingual learners might utilize their knowledge in each language to assist themselves in the learning environment of the other language. The researcher argues that the level of verbal academic ability in students' mother tongue predicts the level of academic ability that they will obtain in the English language. Cummins (1981) also explains that a transfer of concepts occurs from one language to the next. In other words, he suggests that languages are cognitively connected (1981; 1993). In Cummins' (1979) point of view, a student who receives good instruction in his/her heritage language and adequate exposure to the second language, should have a successful literate experience in both languages. In other words, *intensive* literacy in one language will naturally transfer to the next. Cummins (1996; 2006) also sees a connection between language, cultural identity, and academic achievement. In view of research and the well known achievement gap between the literacy of Latino students and White students, schools should try to strengthen their first language as much as it is possible (Matthews & Matthews, 2004; Salazar, 2008).

Kenner, Gregory, Mahera, and Al-Azami (2008) inquired about the use of the heritage language for the instruction of students who may have suppressed their heritage language in order to assimilate to the dominant culture and language. Kenner et al. (2008) conducted an action research project in an English school in which they used Bengali, the mother tongue of Bangladeshi children, to teach them literacy and numeracy through bilingual activities. Those activities were videotaped and the students were interviewed about their reactions to learning bilingually. The

researchers found cognitive and cultural benefits in using the heritage language for instruction. Those included conceptual transfer, enriched understanding through translation, metalinguistic awareness, bicultural knowledge, and building bilingual learner identities. The findings suggested that second and third generation children should be supported to learn through bilingual activities and that similar activities should be used in mainstream classrooms.

Kenner et al. (2008) also found that the heritage language was a key aspect of the Bengali students' identity and that the connection between language and cultural identity brought them self-esteem. While the students had previously felt they should not speak Bengali at school, they now felt more comfortable about their linguistic identity which, according to the authors, transferred to self-esteem.

The value of bilingual two-way-immersion (TWI) programs which aim to equalize the status of Spanish and English was explored by Bearse and Jong (2008). That study inquired into secondary adolescents' perceptions of a K-12 TWI program. The analysis of 24 focus groups and 166 student surveys demonstrated certain patterns related to how Latino and Anglo adolescent students sensed their experiences in their secondary TWI program. TWI students gained positive attitudes toward bilingualism, people from diverse backgrounds and school in general. They acquired strong oral and writing skills in both languages. The Anglo students perceived college entry or job opportunities as benefits for learning Spanish. On the other hand, although Latino students also felt that being bilingual could bring them economic advantages, they gave more importance to their cultural identity and *staying true to their roots* and family. Even though the Latino students were second or third



generation Americans, they valued the connection between Spanish, culture, and family. Bearse and Jong (2008) explained that

Few of the Anglos self-identified as bicultural, although they felt more sensitive to the Latino culture and had friends from diverse backgrounds. In contrast, the Latino students identified themselves as bicultural, but their biculturalism was primarily the outcome of life circumstances as they had been born in a Spanish-speaking household in an American English-dominant society. (p. 335)

While research has found the benefits of being bilingual, more recent research has found that many second and 1.5 generation immigrants can barely communicate with the older generations:

[...] children are caught in a fog where confusion about self-identity and disorientation in school couple with a growing stigma about speaking a foreign language. The result is a limited bilingualism, at least in the short run, as imperfect English acquisition accompanies the rapid loss of the language brought from home. Some actually remain in this situation, which for children represents a telling indicator of dissonant acculturation - being increasingly unable and unwilling to communicate with parents in their native language while still lacking full English fluency. (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 130)

This lack of bilingualism may cause *dissonant acculturation* (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Fluent bilingualism, on the other hand, may facilitate *selective acculturation*, benefiting students and their families. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), “fluent bilinguals are the least embarrassed by their parents, have the least conflictive relationship with them, and are more prone to maintain friendships with co-ethnic children” (p. 134). English monolinguals and limited

bilinguals demonstrate the strongest tendencies toward *dissonant acculturation* and the *worst psychological profiles* (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

In my role as Dean of Students I have witnessed first-hand the consequences that result from lack of communication between 1<sup>st</sup> generation Latin American parents who can't speak English and their 1.5 or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Latino/a students who can't speak Spanish. This communication gap may add to the cultural gap that might exist between parent and child, often resulting in serious family conflicts which don't academically benefit the traditionally marginalized student. Thus, developing the fluent bilingualism of children of immigrants could potentially be beneficial. However, becoming fluent bilingual is extremely challenging for the immigrant child since it requires maintaining and enriching one language while learning the other, which means that forces towards (being English monolingual) and against assimilation (maintaining the heritage language) are working simultaneously against each other. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), schools are the first ones to be successful at achieving *subtractive bilingualism*. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) conclude their study with a strong recommendation to make what they refer to as *normative multilingualism* an educational objective for schools during these global times.

#### Borderlands Academic Experience

*“‘Regenerative knowledge’ is created, maintained, and re-created through the continuous interaction of people in a community setting. [It is] contextually based, meaning that understanding comes out of the specific historical context in which the actors are immersed (124-5).”* (Everhart, 1983, p. 424)

Historically speaking, it was not until the late 1980's that the concept of *discontinuity* between teacher and student was introduced by Shade (1989), who referred to the discontinuity between *analytical teachers* and *synergetic learners*. According to Shade (1989), synergetic learners prefer learning that is more personal and collaborative. They also do better when discussions and kinesthetic activities take place. They get bored by sequential activities and stimulated by multiple activities. Analytical teachers often misjudge the behavior of synergetic learners as misbehaving, being off-task or cheating. Shade (1989) recommended for those teachers to change their ways and perceptions about those students in order to best academically engage their learning experiences.

In the early 1990's the term *cultural synchronization* was introduced by Irvine (1990) as a way to address the discontinuity between African American students and their white teachers. The term alluded to the needed - and often lacking - interpersonal context between the teacher and African-American students. Irvine proposed that white teachers should step away from their cultural comfort zones in order to engage the African- American student. Irvine also described the communication patterns and cultural characteristics that teachers should respect and understand in those students: *mutuality, reciprocity, spirituality, deference, and responsibility*.

The first serious efforts for research to explore the best ways to reach minority children were mostly geared towards African-American students. That kind of pedagogy was first referred to as *Multicultural Pedagogy*, a label which eventually changed to *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*. An overview of the characteristics of these theories follows.

### *Multicultural Pedagogy and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

One of the strongest proponents of the implementation of the *Multicultural Pedagogy* is Banks (1994; 2004; 2006; 2007), who proposes a pedagogy that embraces the cultural perspectives, histories, and experiences of minority students. Banks emphasizes the need to transform the curriculum into one which reflects the lives of those children. He argues that students should assist in the *construction* of curriculum. Banks strongly recommends student *construction* as key for helping students develop a positive sense of identity and become academically engaged. As constructed, the curriculum should reflect the lives of minority students as much as the lives of mainstream Americans. Banks (2007) explains that national identification will naturally take place after individuals develop healthy cultural identifications:

I believe that cultural, national, and global identification are developmental in nature, that individuals can attain healthy and reflective national identifications only when they have acquired healthy and reflective cultural identifications and that individuals can develop reflective and positive identifications only after they have realistic, reflective and positive national identifications. These identifications are dynamic and interactive; they are not discrete. (p. 25)

Some of Banks' (1994) premises include that knowledge is not static, it is shared, recycled and constructed; that knowledge should be regarded critically; and that teachers should facilitate minority student learning through scaffolding and bridging between student and school cultures.

Another proponent of multicultural education is Sleeter (1991; 1993). Sleeter contrasts empowering and disabling education programs. Multicultural education is the way to empower minority students since it works with what the student brings. On

the other hand, disabling programs eradicate what the student brings to replace it with the knowledge and strengths of dominant society. Sleeter (1991) adds that schools blame students of having lower intelligence and motivation and being at-risk when they are not successful at learning *predigested* knowledge, in other words, knowledge that discards the agency of the learner. Students become less motivated when what they are taught is not relevant or personally interesting.

Nieto (2008) has also been a strong critic of a curriculum which is too *sanitized* to reflect what students really identify with. She proposes that curriculum should consider the history of immigration and the social injustice that has characterized the history of education. Students should be involved in explanations of issues that really matter to them, such as race, culture, religion, ethnicity and gender. Students should be helped to see major ideas instead of simply learn discrete facts.

In 1995, Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed the use of the term *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy* to replace the term *Multicultural Education*. She defended her proposition by explaining that the term *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy* alluded to “a more dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture” (467). According to Ladson-Billings, *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy* allows students to affirm their cultural integrity and develop critical perspectives that challenge schools’ inequities. Ladson-Billings explains that *Culturally Responsive* teachers perceive their work as imperative for preparing students to question and confront social and institutional injustice. Those teachers also question the establishment in order to create a more culturally responsive curriculum. Ladson-Billings presents the example of a teacher who asked and was

granted permission from the school board to implement a more culturally responsive curriculum.

Through her research, Ladson-Billings noticed how culturally responsive practices empowered African American students to identify as good students. Since the pedagogy of their teachers was culturally responsive, students did not relate being a good student with belonging to the dominant culture. They could *keep it real* (Carter, 2005) without needing to cross over to the dominant culture or act white in order to identify as a good student (Ogbu, 1992; Ogbu, 1994; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Those academically empowered students served as role models for other students:

Because these African-American male students were permitted, indeed encouraged, to be themselves in dress, language style, and interaction styles while achieving in school, the other students, who regarded them highly (because of their popularity), were able to see academic engagement as ‘cool’. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476)

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), the culturally responsive teachers she observed did not demonstrate a deficit perspective toward their students. On the contrary, they acknowledged their students’ agency. They considered themselves as part of their students’ community and their classrooms were true learning communities. “Students were not permitted to choose failure in their classrooms. They cajoled, nagged, pestered, and bribed the students to work at high intellectual levels” (p. 479). In *The Dreamkeepers* (1994), which depicted five African American and three white culturally responsive teachers, Ladson-Billings also demonstrated that teachers don’t necessarily need to belong to the same ethnic group of traditionally marginalized children to serve those students well. Both white and African American

teachers demonstrated that they cared about the African American community they worked for and used similar culturally responsive strategies which never made their students feel the need to choose between academics and racial identity.

Gay (2000; 2002; 2003; 2005; 2010) has also written extensively about *Culturally Responsive* teaching. Gay has predominantly presented general principles and recommendations for culturally responsive pedagogy and curricula. She has based these on her synthesis of scholarly research on topics mostly related to the social studies curriculum and teacher preparation programs. Gay highly recommends teachers' self-exploration of what they feel about ethnically diverse groups. She suggests that teachers build their critical skills. Gay (2005) argues that effective teaching of

The histories, cultures, experiences, and accomplishments of ethnically diverse groups requires the analytical lens of many different disciplines (history, sociology, economics, music, arts, political science, etc.); application at various levels of the educational enterprise (preschool, elementary, middle, and high school, college and university); the inclusion of both historical dimensions and contemporary connections; and challenging students to think deeply, examine feelings and emotions, develop critical cultural consciousness, and engage in transformative social and political activism. (p. 35)

According to Gay, being a *Culturally Responsive* teacher has as much to do with having a belief system which regards minority students as truly capable of learning as with the practices the teacher implements in the classroom. Gay (2000) recommends teaching through students' own *cultural* and *experiential filters* for their improved academic achievement. She also considers that teaching should not be

divided into discrete elements but, instead, should integrate the personal, moral, social, political, and cultural to academic knowledge and skills. Gay (2000) contends that *Culturally Responsive* teachers,

View learning as having intellectual, academic, personal, social, ethical, and political dimensions, all of which are developed in concert with one another. [They] validate, facilitate, liberate and empower ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities and academic success. (p. 43-44).

Gay (2000) has broadened the definition of cultural identity. She argues that the cultural identity of a student should not be limited to ethnicity. Gay (2000) explains that “culturally responsive teaching has many different shapes, forms and effects” (p.2). In other words, the cultural identity of borderlands students may be multiphasic.

In *Culture and Learning*, Educational Research Service (ERS, 2003) provides a description of the elements of the *culturally sensitive classroom*. ERS is a nonprofit organization which provides research-based information to school administrators. Based on a synthesis of scholarly research, ERS describes *the culturally sensitive classroom* as one in which students assist their teachers in the construction of curriculum. ERS also proposes that, since it is crucial to help students reach a high level of literacy, teachers should build bridges between the language of their students and the language used in the classroom. While ERS considers learning as a social activity, it recommends that teachers attend to individual students’ needs. In regards to Latino students, ERS considers that there is a cultural discontinuity between them



and teachers of European descent. Thus they recommend the presence of cultural mediators. The next section reviews literature on the voices of minority children.

*Voices of Children*

*“There are chapters in every life which are seldom read and certainly not aloud.”*

(Carol Shields)

Giroux (1986) argues that “schools do not allow students from subordinate groups to authenticate their problems and experiences through their own individual and collective voices” (p. 65). Nieto (2004), an advocate for immigrant children, maintains that one must listen to immigrant children who have often expressed the sense of alienation and marginalization they feel in schools. Nieto explains: Aside from the normal anxieties associated with adolescence, additional pressure for culturally subordinated students may be the result of several factors, including the physical and psychological climate of the schools they attend, the low status their native languages and cultures are accorded in the societies in which they live, the low expectations that society has of them, and their invisibility in traditional curricula. Students are the people most affected by school policies and practices, but they tend to be the least consulted about them. (p. 179)

In my own experience, I have found important information when I have listened to what students have to say. The more we listen to minority children in order to create portraits of their experiences, the less *invisible* they will become. Cammarota (2006; 2007) and his colleague (Cammarota & Romero, 2006) allude to the silencing and invisibility of Latino students and how we may make them more visible through praxis of ethnography and critical pedagogy. Cammarota and Romero

(2006) describe the Social Justice Education Project in Tucson, Arizona. In that project, Latino students use ethnographic research methods to explore how people experience social injustice. The students engage in participatory action research and praxis.

One topic in need of further research is the voices of immigrant children from Latin American countries other than Mexico and Puerto Rico. Bolivians, Peruvians, Salvadorians, Hondurans, Nicaraguans and Guatemalans, for example, now form a large number in my school. In my study I tried to step away from the tendency to homogenize the Latino culture by detecting any differentiating patterns among the different countries represented. I paid particular attention to my students of Salvadorian heritage since they were the largest group of students who shared the same heritage.

I intended to encourage my students to use their voices as much as possible. An important component of my action research project was listening to what my students had to say about their cultural and linguistic experiences and perspectives as well as about their experiences with reading. According to Giroux (1988), a strong proponent for listening to the voices of children, voices must become an important focus of action research. Research about the needs of and pedagogy for minority children in schools must be much more transformative. It would be useful, for example, to have more cultural inquiry action research done by schools' professional learning communities about the subject of minority children.

A researcher who listened to and strived to elicit and enhance Latino students' voices was Diaz-Greensberg (2003). Diaz-Greensberg conducted naturalistic qualitative research with 18 Latino/a students. She used sequential interviews in a

natural setting in order to develop the voices of her students. According to Diaz-Greensberg, she encouraged students to self-reflect and voice their opinions in as natural a way as possible. She found that the sequential interviews indeed developed the students' voices.

By listening to children we will learn from their cultural and linguistic perspectives and experiences and will empower them in the process. If we stay away from what Freire has called *the banking system of education* (1993) and listen to what those children have to say, if we let them show us the world as they see it when we give them the tools to critique it, if we really learn from their experiences, if we stop looking at them as objects, we will build not only their humanity, but our own as well (Freire, 1998). Listening to minority people's voices should not be limited to only students. Minority teachers may also have a great deal to say.

#### *The Voice of a Latina Teacher*

Delpit (1988; 2006) has written about the importance of listening to minority people's voices when it comes to understanding what it takes to reach minority children. Souto-Manning (2006) is one example of a teacher who has voiced the needs of Latino children and their families. In my experience as a Latina teacher researcher of Latino/a students, I wanted to represent the voices of the teachers of those children. I did that in order to dig for and utilize my students' cultural and linguistic experiences and perspectives, empower their social identity, and help them become readers. I used my voice as a minority educator who understood some of the ways to empower my students' social identity. Moreover, I was a learner from teachers who had more experience than I but had not had the chance to voice what they had learned to the wider community. My research should help spread their

words. Just as Sandra Cisneros did as the spokesperson for Chicanos who don't have a voice (Berg & Arnold, 2003), I tried to speak for, not only myself, but for my students and fellow teachers of *Spanish for Heritage Speakers*. The next section entails what the literature has to say about the connection between social identity and identity as a reader.

#### Borderlands Reading Experience

*“Teacher-student collaboration in the construction of knowledge will operate effectively only in contexts where students’ identities are being affirmed.”* (Cummins, 1991, p. 26)

Choosing mainstream, monocultural, and monolingual topics which deny or do not reflect borderlands adolescents’ multiple identities may not be optimally conducive to enhance their literacy. Adolescents with borderlands identities may be more inspired to initially develop their literacy through topics that have to do with more familiar cultural and linguistic topics. And as they become more literate through the exploration of their identity, their sense of identity may become less problematic. And then, perhaps, they may feel more ready to read, in any language. Perhaps, thanks to a more positive heritage language and cultural identity, they may have a more positive or less oppositional view towards mainstream literacy. In the end, literacy may simply empower them in more ways than one.

It is necessary to understand how Latino adolescents perceive themselves in relationship to reading. Do they see reading as a familiar activity? Does their interest depend on the language they read? What if they are not very literate in any language? What

if they perceive literacy as mostly attached to the dominant culture? Is their reading interest impacted when they don't see themselves as possessors of cultural and social capital in literature? I could only find one article about the reading interests of Latinos, which was written by a librarian (Cueta, 1990). While that article referred to the general reading interests of Latinos such as poetry, short stories, periodicals and comics, it did not refer to the more specific reading interests of first or second generation Latino adolescents.

A study that connects Asian students' cultural identity and reading was conducted by Vyas' (2004). Vyas studied several Asian high school students who liked to read and were interested in exploring their Asian identity through reading about related cultural topics. Reading about such topics helped them explore their identity in a positive manner. A significant aspect of this study and one that contrasts with mine is that those students were clearly interested in both reading and exploring their heritage. Many of my students clearly expressed at the beginning of the school year that they did not like reading. In addition, their interest in exploring their heritage is one of the aspects of my inquiry.

Bean, Cantu Valerio, Money Senior, and White (1999) researched the literacy experiences of 22 ninth-grade English students in an urban technical magnet school in the U.S. and a rural school in Hawaii. While most of the students were not Latino, they represented diverse ethnic backgrounds. The researchers intended to study how writing reflected engagement in literacy as a response to reading a multicultural novel, *Heartbeat, Drumbeat* (Hernandez, 1992). The researchers analyzed the students' free writing samples which explored character interpretation and authenticity. The entries demonstrated students' enhanced reading engagement. Their written reactions were personal and interpretive. They also demonstrated agency and

voice. Bean et al. (1999) suggested that “they [students] are able to find their critical voices through these experiences” (p. 37). Bean et al. (1999) chose seven student samples for analysis but the basis on which they were chosen was unclear. Moreover, the potential effects of characteristics such as gender or ethnic group were not considered. The authors recommended more research about how to engage students. Also they stated the need to further explore the impact of writing on students’ literacy understanding.

A more complete perspective could be reached on a topic like reader engagement through triangulation. In my research, I complemented student journal entries by class discussions, focus groups, and my own journal entries and field notes. Also, while the study by Bean et al. (1999) did not target any specific ethnic group, my study focused on one ethnic group, the Latino. More than multicultural literature, I attempted to expose my students to various reading materials that I thought were culturally responsive. As an action researcher, I experimented with finding reading topics which would engage my students in reading and writing and would hopefully help them explore their multiple identities. My culturally responsive strategies became more individual as I discovered what triggered their individual interests. I also encouraged my students’ expression of voice and agency while discussing literature and my strategies to teach literacy. As a result, my curriculum changed as my students helped me construct it. Another crucial element of my research had to do with exploring how literature impacted the identity of my students and elicited their joy of reading.

Another study by Mohr (2003) researched how Latino and non-Latino children identify with literature. The researcher studied 190 first graders who were

asked to choose one book among nine book choices. While some of the books had to do with cultural topics, others did not. The overwhelming majority chose informational books about animals and about mothers (*What moms can't do* by Douglas Moore, 2000). I felt that Mohr's conclusion was too preliminary since out of nine books, only two dealt with Latino topics. One had to do with tortillas which not all Latino children are familiar with, and one was about one Latino family. There are many kinds of Latino families. I felt that Mohr's choice of books may have been stereotypical which may have been the reason that Latino students did not choose them to start with. In addition, as Phinney (1989; 1993) has indicated, social identity exploration starts much later, during middle adolescence. And adolescence, the time students may start exploring their social identity, may be the best time to expose Latino students to borderlands topics.

Hinchman and Sheridan-Thomas (2008) argue that discussing texts with adolescents in *Culturally Responsive* ways, particularly with Latino and African American males, is one of the most important challenges faced by educators today. They add that, Classroom environments and curricula are not often structured to shape students' lives by engaging them with texts that they find meaningful and significant. This absence of meaningful texts is problematic because middle and high school students are striving to find their place in the world as they bump against academic, cultural, emotional, gender, historical, linguistic and social forces that inform their existence. I am especially concerned that students are being deprived of textual lineages; that is, texts that they will remember years into the future as being meaningful and central to their human development. (p. 3)

Hinchman and Sheridan-Thomas (2008) argue that the culture of adolescence in itself is a phenomenon worth considering when looking for ways to engage teenagers in reading. Similar to Gay (2000), those researchers argue that, since teenagers have multiple identities, they should be assisted to make “connections across their multiple identities” (p.17). That statement makes me remember when my student told me at the end of the school year, “Those readings in the textbook are for old people, not for teenagers.” Hinchman and Sheridan-Thomas (2008) suggest tapping into students’ voices in order to understand their multiple identities and the types of literacy they relate to. Those researchers also propose going beyond the use of books in order to explore alternative channels for teaching literacy. They express that there is limited engagement with texts in schools because students are generally not given the opportunity to choose what they read, they are not exposed to an extensive variety of reading topics, and the reading topics and texts imposed on them generally have nothing to do with their lives outside of school.

Classroom environments and the teaching occurring within these environments are not responding adequately to students’ multiple literacy needs, but are instead, anchored by an achievement-driven focus that is based on state standards and that lacks any serious regard to the content of texts used for meeting the standards. As a result, the meaningful encounters that adolescents would experience with books, poems and essays in schools during an optimal period of their development are severely compromised in middle and high school classrooms.” (p.4)

Hinchman and Sheridan-Thomas (2008) emphasize the important role that teachers play in creating those *meaningful encounters* and *partnerships* between their students and reading material. Teachers should introduce their students to enabling



texts that have connections with their social, cultural, political, and economic experiences.

### *Resistant Readers*

It is possible that Latino teenagers may resist reading literature that does not illustrate their life experiences or represent them in a positive light. It is also possible that they may resist literacy in a language which has *colonized* their native language. Enjoying reading in English may represent a sign of domestication. On the other hand, students may feel that reading in Spanish lacks cultural capital. Thus, for students living borderlands linguistic experiences between the *colonizer* and the *colonized* languages, reading in those two languages may further complicate their already complex sense of identity (Jimenez, 2002).

Macedo (2000) suggests that cultural identity among subordinated students may play a strong role on linguistic resistance. He also wonders if the devaluation of students' heritage culture and language affects their reading achievement. Moreover, according to Valenzuela (1999), Latinos may be viewed by *subtracting* school systems as not willing to assimilate to the American culture. That perception may influence Latinos to take on oppositional stances towards school. Nieto explains that some Latinos may either adopt the perspective of the school and risk undermining their cultural identity or resist the externally imposed academic culture at the risk of becoming marginalized from the school (Nieto, 2002). Research must inquire for ways to make resistant readers become less resistant towards the practice of reading and the development of their identity as readers.

### *Building less Resistant Readers*

Vyas (2004) argues that literacy can serve as an important source of construction, exploration, and expression of identity (p. 13). The researcher also suggests that there is a *bidirectional* relationship between literacy and identity. An individual's sense of identity influences the process of becoming literate and adopted reading behaviors and, vice versa, the experiences with literacy shape the individual's sense of identity.

Literature that mirrors minority people in a positive way seems to have a positive impact on their sense of identity. In an ethnographic study that examined the implementation of a multiethnic literature curriculum in two urban 10th-grade classrooms, Athanases (1998) found that students often experienced a heightened sense of pride and identity validation when they could identify culturally with people and events within literary works. Rosenblatt (1995) also suggested that the relationship between literature and students' cultural identity calls for more exploration. She added that students need a variety of contexts in which they can explore the relation between literature, culture, and identity.

A researcher who proposed alternative literary contexts to engage traditionally marginalized students was Moje (2000), who argued that the literacy practices of marginalized adolescents should not be consigned to a category of mere resistance or deviance. The researcher suggested that "practitioners need to acknowledge the power of unsanctioned literacy in the lives of marginalized youth and develop pedagogies that draw from, but also challenge and extend, those practices" (p. 652).

In an effort to convert resistant readers into less resistant ones, Leslie (2008) conducted an action research project in which she used literature that was not school-

sanctioned. Leslie argued that students can explore their own *marginalized positionalities* by using non-school reading material as a bridge between dominant and non-dominant forms of discourse. For her methodology she did discourse analysis of the conversational transcripts of six at-risk students who met with her weekly throughout one school year. The data suggested that “reading texts from a critical stance requires students to take on resistant discourse patterns” (p. 189), and that “...school-driven definitions of literacy need to be reexamined in light of adolescents’ authentic literacy practices” (p. 178).

Leslie’s (2008) main contribution consists of demonstrating how schools can implement alternative ways to inspire traditionally marginalized students to read. Schools also need to develop their critical literacy and find alternative ways to represent their multiple identities in positive ways. Earlier in the school year, our school’s librarian asked me to supply a list of classical works of Spanish literature. I commended her for what she was trying to do but also told her that my resistant readers would probably benefit more from reading books that reflected their marginalized lives.

As I looked at Leslie’s (2008) criteria for her students to be considered at-risk, I discerned how many Latinos in my school could be considered at-risk because of their eligibility to free/reduced lunch, failing a state-mandated standardized test, probation, current family crisis, failing two or more classes, or probability of dropping out of school. Through my research I attempted to engage my students in academics in an alternative way. Many of my students were in ninth or tenth grade, before the age that disengaged students tend to start dropping out of school. Therefore, this study could illustrate how to help build a strong, positive connection

for these students with high school. The last part of this review of literature has to do with the person who plays a strong role in helping students identify as readers, the teacher.

*Teachers of Readers and Non-Readers*

*“In a real sense, people who have read good literature have lived more than people who cannot or will not read. It is not true that we have only one life to live; if we can read, we can live as many more lives and as many kinds of lives as we wish.” (Hayakawa, S. I.)*

In my search for research that portrayed teachers who strived to convert non-readers into readers, I found one study by Flores-Dueñas (2005) and another by Cone (1994). Flores-Dueñas (2005) conducted a year-long qualitative study of the teaching practice of a first grade Mexican bilingual teacher. The researcher used students’ writing samples, audiotapes, videotapes, field notes, and formal and informal student-teacher interviews. According to Flores-Dueñas, that teacher was effective at mobilizing her students’ linguistic and cultural resources in Spanish for critical literacy and developing healthy literate identities and classroom communities. Additionally, she created a space for healthy literate identities through interactions with others. Community-oriented book discussions took place and the use of both languages was accepted. She shared her own stories as much as her students shared theirs.

In some ways Flores-Dueñas’ (2005) study resembled mine. While I used biliteracy in order to better reach my students, my goal was to make them much more literate in their heritage language. We also learned and talked about books in community as much as possible. I also tended to share with them my cultural and

linguistic identity, and my worthwhile life and reading experiences without making my life the center of my class. Both the teacher in Flores-Dueñas' study and I brought into our classes our students' cultural and linguistic perspectives and experiences.

The main difference between Flores-Dueñas' study and mine was the core of my research. As an action researcher and an inexperienced teacher of heritage speakers, I intended to document my experiences at trying to turn my students from non-readers to readers. Like the teacher described by Flores-Dueñas, I also tried to impact the identity of my students but the crucial difference was that I was doing it at a time of adolescence in which students tend to start exploring their social identities (Phinney, 1989; 1993). My goal was not just to impact their identity as readers but to do it through the exploration of their social identity and multiple identities. Another important contrast was the journal I kept on my own impressions, reflections, and growing-pains. Through my research I also intended to serve as a channel for my students' and other teachers' voices.

The second study, by Cone (1994), was strongly connected to mine since it had to do with the attempts of a teacher researcher to convert her non-readers into readers. Her article took its reader step-by-step through the processes of her learning curve, how she experimented with methods to cultivate readers. Cone used student journals, reading materials that matched the students' interests and cultural background, and collaborative reflections during group discussions. Like the teacher above, Cone wanted to create a community of readers in which students could "choose books, read them, talk about them, and encourage each other to read" (p. 466). I found Cone's following words quite significant for my study: "students become non-learners as a result of the teachers and their own low expectations" (p.

455). I often wondered if my own expectations for my students were too high. Was I wrong in expecting my non-readers to become readers, to suddenly fall in love with reading? I certainly hoped I was not wrong, that my high expectations for my students would bring about a positive improvement in their interest in reading and their identity as readers.

Like Cone (1994), I also wanted my students to stop interpreting their academic abilities *unidimensionally*, perhaps generated by schools' unidimensional perspectives about literacy. Last but not least, an important part of my study involved my students' own independent reading which they discussed every two weeks during *La Tertulia*, our book club. Cone wrote, "But independent reading was not part of my curriculum, mainly because readers read the books and non-readers did not - students who needed no motivation to read got A's, the rest got F's" (p. 470). I also wondered about whether I was treating all of my students as gifted learners when perhaps I should not have. Maybe I should have taken them step-by-step through reading activities. But Cone had made me think more deeply thanks to her following words about the difference in reading assignments given to gifted and remedial students: "Which students are asked to read on their own and which are not given independent reading assignments?" (p. 472).

### *Booklovers*

In my twenty-two years of experience working in schools, I have often heard teachers talk about student motivation as a fixed quality that students either come to school with or simply don't have. Seldom have I heard about the role of teachers in motivating their students to enjoy academics, especially reading and writing. Accordingly, Hinchman and Sheridan-Thomas (2008) have argued that

Motivation [has been] constructed as something that is magically present or that mysteriously disappears in some students regardless of their instructional environment, quality of teaching, specific strategies that good teachers employ. Some statements also portray motivation as something that is elusive – beyond teachers' control. (p. 79)

Likewise, as with the subject matter of math, many students seem to have decided too early in their life that they are either readers or they are not. In other words, they see few possibilities in between and very little room for growth. I believe that it is teachers' responsibility to understand the malleability of their student's reader identities and the great impact that they may have on their students' interest in reading. As Hinchman and Sheridan-Thomas (2008) stated, teachers are responsible for creating meaningful *encounters* – which should unfold into *partnerships* - between texts and students. Those partnerships are key to bringing about reader identities.

In my teaching experience, the most significant sign of truly influential teaching is the love for learning instilled in children. Improving the literacy of students with low literacy levels has a lot to do with helping students construct their own identity as readers. The reading topics should also help students construct their social identity at a critical time when they are trying to explore their social identity. The social identity they end up having will have an important impact on their self-esteem and, ultimately, their academic achievement. In my literature review I have found very limited research about how to increase interest in reading through the exploration of borderlands and culturally relevant literature in the heritage language. The importance of this research lies in a stronger sense of social identity, the possible

academic impact, and the germination of healthy reading identities. In the end, students may become more interested in just plain reading, in any language, as it happened to me. But in the meantime, we need to start with what seems most familiar, what students may be most intimately connected to, their heritage language and culture, even if students have suppressed or forgotten them. The long term goal of my study was simple: impacting my students' reader identities through the exploration of culturally responsive literary topics which may facilitate the exploration of their multiple identities.



## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I provide detailed information about how I conducted my research and the setting in which it occurred. I describe action research methods I used and the multiple sources I drew on to gather data. I also explain and provide examples about how I analyzed the data. As the teacher of my own classes that dealt with culture and as a participant in my research, my methodology consisted of action research combined with ethnography. Below, I describe the characteristics of my action research.

### Action Research and Ethnography

Action research can serve as a valuable tool for both pre-service and in-service teachers. That form of inquiry has been defined by Mills (2007) in the following manner:

Action research is a systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn. This information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment (and on educational practices in general), and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved. (p. 5)

Action research has a spiral nature. Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) refer to action research as the “plan-act-observe-reflect cycle” (p.20). A research topic may elicit questions, action plans, observations, and reflections which may bring forth

further questions, thus generating new cycles. In contrast to other forms of naturalistic research, the goal of action research is the transformation of what happens in schools, with reflection as its *driving force*.

As a participant in my research, I possessed some tacit understandings which led me to take certain actions. A significant element of action research is the vantage point facilitated by the participatory role of the researcher.

Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) explain that:

As insiders in the system, practitioners have a unique vantage point from which to problem solve. In fact, in this age of mandating evidence-based practices, who better than school insiders to produce evidence about what works for diverse groups of students. And what better way to communicate this evidence than through educators narrating their findings through their research. (p.15)

While action research is used to inquire about a variety of research questions by educators, joining action research with ethnography can be used to better understand the cultural and linguistic experiences of borderlands children.

The action researcher who inquires about and attempts to impact the learning of borderlands students may do it by combining action research and ethnography (Jacob, 1995). Jacob's (1995) goal for her approach, which she calls the *Cultural Inquiry Process*, is helping teachers better understand the cultural characteristics of their students. Jacob (1995) proposes the combination of reflective practices (Schön, 1987) and an anthropological framework of inquiry. She explains that one-size-fits-all professional development presentations about student cultures reinforce stereotypes and don't really respond to the challenges encountered by teachers in their

classrooms. Instead, Jacob suggests teacher research that uses the anthropological concepts of culture, instructional context, social structure, and power as a framework to better inquire and find solutions to culture-related research questions. Jacob also recommends using anthropological methods such as observation, open-ended interviews, and artifact analysis. But one idea that Jacob does not discuss is research positionality: what happens when the action researcher belongs to the same culture as her subjects, as I did in many respects.

As an action researcher I was closely involved with my participants since I was their teacher (Dupre 2005). And because I was part of my students' ethnic and linguistic group, knowing my students' heritage language and sharing some of their cultural understandings provided me with tacit cultural and linguistic knowledge. In a sense I was *one of them* culturally and linguistically. I was also supporting my own culture (Hayano, 2001) since through my research I aimed to facilitate the academic engagement and a more positive sense of identity of students who belonged to my own ethnicity.

Nevertheless, one challenge I faced was understanding the positionalities of my students. Guiding them in their identity exploration, and knowing how to reach them was not always simple. Unlike most of them, I grew up in a middle class household in a part of the world where I possessed social and cultural capital. As a young student, I did not identify with literary topics or characters who lived socioeconomically marginalized existences. Another challenge was that, contrary to most of my students, I identify as a "reader" in both English and Spanish and have taught the highest levels of literacy in Spanish to my former Spanish AP Literature students.

## My Spanish for Heritage Speakers Classes and My Homeroom

The Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 classes serve as a continuation of Spanish for Heritage Speakers 1 before students enter the next level of Spanish for Heritage Speakers 3. Spanish for Heritage Speakers 1 serves students who command some fluency in the spoken language but can barely read and write in Spanish. Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 is for students who can read and write in Spanish with limited fluency. Spanish for Heritage Speakers 3 is meant for students who have more command of speaking, reading and writing in Spanish. Many of my school's students who take Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes end up taking AP Spanish Language and/or AP Spanish Literature. In fact our Spanish AP program consists mostly of our Latino students. The students who take the two lower levels of Spanish for Heritage Speakers are generally ninth graders. Our feeder middle school offers Spanish for Heritage Speakers for eighth graders. Therefore, many of the students coming from middle school take Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 in their ninth grade. The syllabus was provided to me by one of the teachers I interviewed who had been teaching the same class at my school for several years (Appendix B).

My fifth period class consisted of 23 students and met every day. My seventh period class met every other day and comprised 20 students. Early in the year an assistant came to help me about two times a week during my 5<sup>th</sup> period class. He was a young Peruvian, recently immigrated to the United States, who had graduated with a bachelor's degree in Journalism from a Peruvian university. He was well versed in literature and added a Peruvian perspective to my class. He is now my school's only Spanish for Heritage Speakers 3 teacher, which means that he teaches all of my former students.

My role as a teacher did not end with my two classes as my Dean of Students office eventually served as an extension of my classroom. Since I did not have my own classroom, a lot of the activities that tend to happen in a classroom after class happened in my office. As dean I dealt with attendance, discipline and academic issues.

In relation to my research the most important activity that took place in my office was the daily mentoring of five of my freshmen Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 students during homeroom. Homeroom met every day for approximately 30 minutes. While my dean's role did not include homeroom, those students eventually started reporting to my office during that period instead of to their homeroom teachers. The reason I decided to keep those five students during homeroom was because they were underachieving and our close relationship facilitated my mentoring them. The most we did during homeroom was read and talk about books. That group also became one of my focus groups. Another one of my Spanish for Heritage Speakers students, Nolo, visited often during that period. In Chapter five I give a detailed account about the literary activities we did during that period.

The Program of Studies for Spanish for Heritage Speakers had been in draft form at my school division for about 15 years. When the Spanish for Heritage Speakers program started more than 20 years ago, there was no Program of Studies. With no common books or curriculum, teachers created curriculum as they saw fit and taught random literary topics. Currently teachers are expected to use one of two textbooks, which means that there is still no consensus on what should be taught in this program.

The current Program of Studies for the three levels of Spanish for Heritage Speakers is no different from the Program of Studies for regular Spanish classes. The Program of Studies for both groups of students consists of the same four general themes which are divided into subtopics. The first theme, home life, is divided into daily routine, rooms of the house and household chores, food, and childhood experiences. The second theme, student life, consists of classes and school routines, school-related activities and health and fitness. The third theme, leisure time, includes indoor and outdoor activities, shopping, and special events. The last theme is vacation and travel. It comprises travel plans and activities, countries and nationalities and asking for and giving directions (Appendix C). Few of these topics explicitly help Latino students explore their cultural identity, which, according to the teachers I interviewed, should be integrated fully into the curriculum. As the teachers I interviewed explained, it is up to the teachers in those classes to make the curriculum culturally responsive to those students. In other words, the Program of Studies for Spanish for Heritage Speakers does not consider the unique characteristics and needs of the Latino student. It does not maximize all of the possibilities to fully engage them. In *My Actions* section below I illustrate how I attempted to bring more cultural relevance to my classes by adding literary topics that would help my students explore their cultural and linguistic identities.

### My Pedagogy

As a new teacher of heritage speakers my pedagogy changed significantly. For most of the eighteen years I had previously taught regular Spanish I did not allow the use of English except for certain controlled situations such as group work or the utterance of questions that could not otherwise be asked in Spanish. My classes were

also pretty structured and my students were expected to raise their hand anytime they attempted to speak. Moreover, while I tended to see my students as individuals and liked to learn from them, I never considered myself a culturally responsive teacher.

In my new experience teaching heritage speakers I soon became more flexible in my Spanish only expectations, especially after I noticed my students' persistent use of Spanglish and English. By the second quarter my classroom management had also become much less structured as I intended to bridge home and classroom cultures according to the literature I had reviewed on cultural responsiveness. I then stopped asking my students to raise their hand and the tone from teacher to student became much more conversational than authoritative. From the beginning of the academic year I also made a concerted effort to allow my students' agency, experiences, perspectives, and voices to guide my pedagogy since I had made the decision to become an ethnographic action researcher. My learning curve ran parallel to my students' learning curve. Moreover, when I became well-versed on the topic of the at-risk identity of the Latino teenager, the exploration and creation of identity through borderland literary topics, research, and writing exercises became intrinsic components of my pedagogy. Furthermore my growing awareness about my students' limited knowledge of their heritage led me to my decision to get them extensively acquainted with borderlands topics. And thanks to what I learned from Cone's (1994) research on the use of independent reading for reluctant readers, I decided to include such an exercise. Last, the more I learned about my students' communal experiences, the more I acted like a godmother, mediator, and agent who emphasized the typical Latino communal quality and oral tradition.

## My Actions

I engaged my students in a variety of culturally relevant literary topics and activities. My goal was to help them explore their cultural and linguistic identities as they identified with the reading topics I acquainted them with while their interest in reading, writing and speaking literacy increased. As a teacher, I started the school year with a list of textbook readings that I was supposed to cover according to the Program of Studies. However, in my role as an action researcher, I eventually added an extensive list of readings that had to do with the culturally relevant topics of language, roots, borderlands experiences, marginal experiences, voices, and cultural gender roles. I worked closely with the librarian and with the English department chair to help me find reading material that would perhaps interest my students, especially the ones who did not like to read. I also consulted the five teachers of Spanish for Heritage Speakers on reading choices that would possibly engage my students. While several of the textbook readings were culturally relevant, several others were not, as Tables 1 and 2 indicate.

The textbook readings in the Table 2 below had to do with the culturally relevant topics which I coded as *roots*, *borderlands experiences*, and *marginal experiences*.

As the year progressed, I exposed my students to an extensive number of reading topics through fictional and non-fictional literature. The literature included prose and poetry. Many of the readings had to do with various aspects of the Latino culture in and outside of the United States as noted by the coding terms *language*, *roots*, *borderlands experiences*, *marginal experiences*, *voices of Latino teenagers*, and *cultural gender roles*.



Non-culturally responsive textbook topics	Readings	Description
Nature	“Valle de Fuego”	The description of a trip through the Peruvian canons.
Friendship	“Poema XLIV” in <i>Versos Sencillos</i>	The value in having a good friend <sup>8</sup> .
The experience of a poet	“Mis Primeros Versos”	A young man publishes his first poem and people do not like it.
Interest in art	<i>Paula</i>	The author explains how her interest in art started.
Animals	“Platero y Yo”. “La tortuga”	The highly lyrical description of the relationship between a man and his donkey. Poem describing a turtle.
Boredom	“Un cuentecillo triste”	A bored young man puts an ad in the paper to find a young woman to go out with.
Myths, legends, popular short stories and fables	“La guerra de los yacarés” “Güeso y Pellejo”	Fable about the war between alligators. Short story about the wisdom of the elderly <sup>9</sup> .

*Table 1: Non-Culturally Responsive Textbook Topics*

For example, one of the books I used to read about the language topic was *Spanglish* (Stavans, 2003) and *Borderlands/La frontera* (Anzaldúa, 1999) (Appendix D).

Before, during, and/or after the readings, I used questions to prompt discussions. About once a week I asked students to write about those topics (See Appendix M for *Student Journal Entries*). On several occasions I took them to the computer lab or brought portable computers to the classroom so they would research different aspects of Latino and/or Latin American culture. I also tasked the students with interviewing a member of their family or a friend who had immigrated to the United States. The questions had to do with specific cultural and linguistic

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<sup>8</sup> I consider friendship a universal experience more than a borderlands cultural experience.

<sup>9</sup> This short story which takes place in Latin America is a fable that illustrates a universal lesson more than a borderlands experience.

immigration experiences (Appendix H). Subsequently, students created a children's book with the information they gathered through the interviews. Moreover, I used my knowledge about their countries of origin to bring reading material that would enrich the knowledge of their heritage culture and language. We also studied how the Spanish language has impacted world languages and about the existence of Spanglish. I started several classes with Stavans' (2003) lists of Spanglish words for students to decipher their definitions in Spanish or English. I discovered some of their heritage cultural characteristics as a result of what they shared during their participation throughout class and focus group discussions, their answers to questionnaires, and their journal entries.

At the beginning of each quarter, I took the students to the library to check out books about any topic of their interest. Although during every visit I allowed them to choose any book of their interest, I also asked the librarian to place all the books on specific subjects I requested on a separate section for students to look at. I also allowed them to find books outside of the library if they so desired. During the first semester the topics were mostly about ethnicity such as the experiences of being Latino in the United States. During the second semester, varied Program of Studies topics were added to the ethnicity topics. These included travel, fiction and non-fiction books about Latin America, health and fitness, and school experiences.

Culturally-responsive textbook topics	Readings	Description
Roots	“Nicaragua” “Uruguay” “Argentina” “Peru” “Chile”  <i>Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú.</i>	Non-fictional readings that summarize different demographic, historic, political and folkloric characteristics of those nations.  An excerpt of the autobiography of Rigoberta Menchú that describes her indigenous culture.
Borderlands Topics	“El forastero gentil”  “Verde luz”  “Los hispanos en los Estados Unidos”.  “Primero de secundaria”	Highly lyrical short story about a white man who lives for a while with a Mexican American family.  Song about the poet’s wish for Puerto Rico’s independence from the United States.  Statistical information about the presence of Latinos in the United States.  A Latino young man wants to impress a young Latina woman in high school <sup>10</sup> .
Marginal Topics	“La puerta del infierno”	Salvadoran legend about social injustice.

Table 2: Culturally Responsive Textbook Topics

Every two weeks students discussed their independent readings during *La Tertulia* or book club. Each *Tertulia* session lasted about half an hour. I divided each class into groups of four or five students and grouped the participants based on students who sat next to each other. Since I changed seating arrangements every quarter, groups changed accordingly. While sometimes students orally answered questions I provided (see Appendix L), at other times they talked freely, without following any defined structure, about aspects of their books that interested them. At

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<sup>10</sup> “Primero de secundaria” was written by Gary Soto, author whose writings several students enjoyed as I will explain in chapters five and six.

the beginning of each Tertulia I picked the starters for each group and used a bell to signal the following students' turn. In order to make Tertulias resemble family gatherings I brought freshly baked cookies for the Tertulia participants.

Each quarter I asked students to write an essay about their independent reading. I recommended several topics to write about and asked them to write about three topics of their choice, including ones I did not mention but were important for them. While students were allowed to read in any language of their choice (i.e., Spanish, English or Spanglish), they were required to write in Spanish and were strongly encouraged to speak only in Spanish about their readings during Tertulia times. In chapter five I explain my reasoning behind allowing my students to read in English or Spanglish if they so desired.

I devoted each week of my regular class meetings to a different theme. The majority of the themes had to do with identity exploration: language, roots, borderlands experiences, marginal experiences, voices of Latino children and cultural gender roles. I started many classes with discussions related to these topics and connected them to readings before, during, or after students read them. Every Monday or Tuesday the students wrote about these topics. Every Monday we also read *Cuando era puertorriqueña* (*When I was Puerto Rican*) or *Cajas de cartón* (*Boxes of Cardboard*), an autobiographical account by an adult reminiscing about his childhood as the son of migrant Latino workers in the United States. Later in the week we read some of the selections from the textbook. Fridays were dedicated to more alternative literature such as poetry, yoga-related readings in Spanish<sup>11</sup>, and music. About every two or three weeks the students worked on mostly research-

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<sup>11</sup> While yoga-related readings were not related to borderlands topics, some students expressed interest in more global topics such as yoga.

related projects about culturally relevant topics such as cultural characteristics, current and historical issues, influential Latinos, the benefits of Latin American food, and Latino music. Their final project consisted of creating a children's book based on an interview with an immigrant (Appendix I). The last set of activities I used that was relevant to my research on cultural identity involved movies which I describe below.

I showed three movies to my students with the purpose of helping them explore their borderlands identity through an alternative literacy venue. The first one was "Stand and Deliver," a true story about Latino students taking AP Calculus in a *subtracting* kind of school environment (Valenzuela, 1999) where they were regarded from a deficit perspective. Initially, administrators and teachers perceived Latino students as lacking in potential. Those students did not know that they had it in them to do well academically until a new teacher, Jaime Escalante, guided them to believe in themselves. At the end of the movie, after much struggle, they had all developed a more positive sense of identity in addition to higher academic achievement. Through that movie I guided my students to notice how Escalante, contrary to other teachers, acknowledged their agency and believed in them. The follow-up activity had to do with answering questions, mostly about that teacher's belief in his students.

The second movie I showed my students was "Casi una mujer" (Almost a woman) based on the book *Casi una mujer* (Santiago, 1999), a sequel of *Cuando era puertorriqueña*. *Casi una mujer* continues illustrating the borderlands experience of Esmeralda Santiago as she becomes a teenager in New York City. After watching that movie, the students answered questions and engaged in discussions regarding the experience of becoming a teenager while living between two different worlds.

The last movie the students watched was “Bajo la misma luna” (Under the Same Moon) about a child who stays in Mexico while his mother settles down in the United States, an experience commonly lived by 1<sup>st</sup> and 1.5 generation students. As a follow-up activity to that movie, I held a short discussion and asked students to write a journal entry on their perceptions and reflections about the movie.

Throughout all of my actions, I documented the challenges I faced, my reflections on how to overcome them, and my attempts to provide optimum learning experiences for my students. Some of the challenges I faced were making sure that all students were reading independently, making our Tertulia book discussions more productive, helping my most resistant readers find readings that interested them, and keeping up my high expectations and belief that all of my students could become more engaged with reading. I started several classes asking my students questions that had to do with my own teaching or about how interesting they found what we did the previous class. I kept a record of my own learning experiences and the changes that took place as I implemented action. Moreover, as I have stated earlier, I interviewed and often sought the advice from the five Spanish for Heritage Speakers teachers.

My research took place over the course of the 2009-10 academic school year. The first semester served mostly as a time to establish relationships and routines around culturally relevant teaching and data gathering. During the first semester, I made a concerted effort to become acquainted with my students and to develop a strong sense of trust and connection between us. From the beginning I also documented the levels of interest in reading of all of my students as well as the characteristics of their cultural and linguistic identity. I also documented whether the students perceived themselves as readers or non-readers (Cone, 1994). As an

inexperienced teacher of Heritage Speakers classes, I also documented the manifestations of my own inexperience and learning curve. During the second semester I delved into all aspects of my research as I describe next.

### Data Gathering

As indicated in the Triangulation Matrix Table (Table 3), I used a variety of data sources to answer my research questions, including teacher interviews and individual focus group interviews, questionnaires, journal entries, documentation of whole class and group discussions, independent reading choices and student essays on those choices, and student projects. Each of these sources of data is described below.

### *Interviews*

As a preliminary step I interviewed five female teachers who had extensive experience as teachers of *Spanish for Heritage Speakers* classes (Appendix G). Four of those teachers are Latinas and one is Caucasian. All of them are members of my Spanish book club, a place where mostly Spanish teachers discuss literature written in Spanish. Those teachers have taught at my school district for varied number of years, two of them at my school. One of them recently retired from my school. I have known the five teachers for several years, ranging from six to seventeen years.

I asked those teachers questions that had to do with culturally responsive pedagogy and with their students' linguistic, cultural and reader identities. I also inquired about their students' agency and voice and what those teachers considered their students' most positive cultural characteristics. Moreover, I asked them for reading recommendations and queried about how they used this literature to cultivate their

Research Questions & Timetable	Data Sources						
	Interviews Teachers	Focus Groups	Questionnaires	Journal Entries	Field Notes of Class/Homeroom Discussions	Independent Reading Choices & Essays	Identity Projects
<i>Cultural &amp; linguistic identity exploration</i>	Interview teachers	Conduct focus groups with students	Students will complete two questionnaires about this topic	Students will complete several journal entries to explore this topic	I will document what I hear and observe during class/reading discussions	Students independently choose the readings they may identify with	Students explore & construct their identity through project
<i>Impact of exploration of culturally relevant &amp; borderlands literature on interest in reading</i>	Interview teachers	Conduct focus groups with students	Some of the questions in one questionnaire explore this topic	The length and content of the entries will inform me about their level of interest	I will document what I hear and observe during class/reading discussions	The topics most widely chosen will inform me about their preferred topics & the length and content of the entries will inform me about their level of interest	Their exploration may lead them to identify more deeply with culturally relevant literary topics
<i>Timetable</i>	Beginning of school year and as needed	About one hour and a half	Near the end of school year	About once a Week	The entire school year	Once a quarter	Once in the spring semester
<i>My role as a participant</i>	Apply what I learn from them	Learn from listening to students' voices	Learn from listening to students' voices	Write my own journal entries to reflect about my daily experiences	Document what I hear and observe in the classroom	Becoming informed by their choices and essays in order to take new courses of action	

Table 3: Triangulation Matrix



students' interest in reading. Perhaps most importantly, I asked for ideas on how I could empower my students through the exploration of literary, cultural, and linguistic topics.

I formed five focus groups mostly based on availability and my perception of the levels of comfort of my students. I had observed the socialization patterns among my students and had a pretty good sense of my students' comfort level with each other. The first group consisted of five freshmen, one male and four females. The second group consisted of one male and three females. The male and one of the females were seniors. The other two females were a junior (who failed one grade) and a sophomore. The third focus group consisted of four males, one freshman, and three juniors. The fourth group consisted of five students, two males and three females. One of the males was a tenth grader and the others were ninth graders. The fifth focus group consisted of five ninth-grade students, one male and four females. There were a total of 14 females and nine males with 15 freshmen, two sophomores, four juniors and two seniors. Most of my students were freshmen which made my focus groups quite representative of the composition of my classes as far as grade level. Females were slightly overrepresented since my total number of students consisted of 21 males and 22 females.

While I had a list of eight questions for the focus group interviews, (Appendix H), most of the meetings were quite conversational and without a consistent structure. For the most part, I let students guide the direction of the conversations and, in fact, each conversation took a different turn. With my homeroom students I met almost every school day starting the second quarter. With the other groups I met no more than one hour-and-a-half which I divided into two segments of varied lengths. I

started each meeting with the first question of the interview (Appendix H), but let the conversation evolve naturally after that, returning to the interview protocol only when I needed to refocus the discussion

Through my focus group interviews I tried to understand if and how those students identified with the literary topics I acquainted them with, and what motivated them to learn and engage in reading. I also inquired about their reflections regarding the positive aspects of their heritage and literacy (Appendix H). From the beginning, I made sure that students fully understood that their voices and agency were an essential element of my research. I communicated to them that, while confidentiality would be guaranteed, whatever they expressed would be shared with a larger audience of school practitioners. The questions were drawn from the following sources: social identity development (Phinney, 1989; 1993); sociolinguistic theory (Gee, 1996); reader self-perception (Rosenholtz, 1984); voice development (Giroux, 1988; 2007); *down* teachers for street-savvy students (Dance, 2005); keeping it real for minority students (Carter, 2005); social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990); voluntary and involuntary minorities (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998); praxis through studying the world and the word (Freire & Macedo, 1987); and *culturally responsive pedagogy* (Educational Research Service, 2003; Gay, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

### *Questionnaires*

I used a questionnaire to understand important aspects of my students' sense of cultural and linguistic identity (Appendix J) as well as a questionnaire to inquire about their interest in Spanish reading and writing (Appendix K). In my review of

literature I found the 1988 NELS study from which Arriagada (2005) drew a sub-sample of questions.

In the 1988 NELS study from which Arriagada drew question samples, reference to spoken language/s never addressed their combined use, as if the respondents were assumed to be monolingual. One question addressed the choice of language in communication with different members of the family, including the extended family. That question influenced me to include a question that inquired about what language my students chose to use with different family members. I found that question important since it illustrated the borderlands, transitional nature of the lives of immigrants. Immigrants need or choose to speak differently – that is, in different languages or combination of languages – according to whom they are speaking with. Another noteworthy point about the NELS survey was its lack of reference to immigrant children’s borderlands cultural experiences or identity. Moreover, in regards to reading, I could only find two questions. One had to do with how much time students spent reading material not related to school assignments. The other asked how much they read and wrote in a language other than English. One last important question had to do with the kinds of literacy materials students had in their homes. I was hesitant about asking such questions to my students since I did not intend to make them feel that I considered their home lives to be deficient in literacy. In fact, I never asked them such questions.

With these ideas in mind, I developed the questionnaires. I based them on the premise that my students would explore their sense of cultural and linguistic identity as they became more acquainted with borderlands and culturally relevant literature in their heritage language throughout the course of the year. Secondly, my questions

assumed that their interest in literacy and identity as readers could change due to the exploration of literary borderlands and culturally relevant topics. Through the questionnaires, I tried to detect any changes in their cultural and linguistic identities and their interest in literacy. Because I was only able to administer the questionnaire once, toward the end of the year, I did that through questions that referred to their gained cultural/linguistic appreciation and to gained interest in literacy as compared to the beginning of the school year. I also assigned all of my students to use questionnaires with their parents/guardians, siblings, or friends in order to find out more about their cultural and linguistic identity (Appendix I). Students then created a book for children with such information. My intention for that activity was leading them to perceive a connection between the borderlands experience, cultural and linguistic characteristics, and literacy.

### *Journal Writing*

Students kept a journal in which they wrote about several topics related to my research questions. Several of the topics had to do with culturally relevant themes such as linguistic and cultural identity, roots, borderlands experiences, marginal experiences, and cultural gender roles (See Appendix M for Example Entries). At several points throughout the year, I read all of my students' journal entries in order to detect themes related to the exploration of their cultural and linguistic identity and to their interest in literacy. I coded those themes in the form of an evolving, descriptive catalog of themes.

The reflections in my journal were of equal importance to my students' journals (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I wrote my own reflections on my course of actions which led to further actions and reflections. I

wrote my own reactions to the books we read, mostly in relation to my students' reactions. I also read my own journal entries to detect common themes which I coded in the form of an evolving, descriptive catalog of themes.

#### *Whole Class and Group Discussions*

At the end of each day, I wrote field notes about the important elements I detected during whole class and group discussions in my classroom as well as in my homeroom. The important elements had to do with my students' linguistic and cultural identity perceptions and exploration, how students identified (or failed to identify) with the readings I presented to them, and how their interest in reading might be changing. I systematically collected and coded the data that I gathered during the discussions in the form of an evolving, descriptive catalog of themes. This catalog of themes developed as my reflections on those discussions led me to detect patterns based on the kinds of literacy activities and reading topics that seemed to interest the majority of my students (Appendix E).

#### *Independent Reading Choices and Essays*

Another part of my research had to do with my students' preferred reading topics as indicated by the three independent readings they chose to read and write essays about during the second, third, and fourth quarters. Twenty males (thirteen 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and seven 1.5 generation) and twenty females (fourteen 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and six 1.5 generation) chose three books each and wrote one essay about each reading. Hence, there were a total of 120 books read and 120 essays written by my students. I documented the titles and topics of each book, and read all of the essays in an effort to detect their most prevalent choices and how students identified with them.

### *Projects*

Throughout the year I assigned my students with creating numerous projects. Several of the projects had to do with cultural/national exploration. Several others had to do with literary exploration. Two other projects had to do with their favorite music piece and with health benefits in Latino food products. The project which directly guided my students to explore their identity was the identity project. For that project students were required to provide at least eight visual and written representations of how they perceived themselves. They were to provide at least one cultural or national representation and one linguistic representation. Besides facilitating my students' identity exploration and construction, my goal for that project was also discerning their cultural self-perceptions and exploration. Moreover, I meant to learn about their multiple identities.

### *On-Going Data Gathering*

I started gathering data the first week of school by taking field notes of my daily observations and by writing about my reflections in my journal. I also read all of my students' journal entries from the beginning. I closely monitored their independent reading choices and thoroughly read their essays starting on the second quarter. Throughout the school year I also paid close attention to all the projects, especially to the one about self-labels. I interviewed the expert teachers during the first quarter. The focus group interviews and the completion of student questionnaires took place in late spring after my school district granted me permission.

I periodically reviewed rounds of gathered data and, based on my findings on each round, planned new courses of data gathering. For example, after reading my field notes on the class discussions I was conducting, I decided to gather more data on

those topics through students' journal entries and the recordings of our focus group discussions. I narrowed down the data I gathered, guided by Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) image of a funnel. That is, I had gathered a tremendous amount of data in the form of questionnaires, numerous journal entries (my students' and mine), student essays, field notes on class and homeroom discussions and events, student projects, and recordings of focus group discussions. So I engaged in the process of discarding redundant or irrelevant information (e.g. minute administrative details) which did not directly apply to my questions.

As an ethnographer, I had gathered data which helped me understand my students' cultural and linguistic identities and their perspectives on their position in the world. The data also guided the way I used and developed my students' voices and agency to explore their cultural and linguistic identity; how we jointly constructed a curriculum that would make sense to them, empower them, and motivate them to read and write (Jacob, 1995). Sharing my students' cultural background, I explored my connection with my students through my journal and field notes. Moreover, I delved into how my perceptions about my students changed. I also looked at how I attempted to empower my students as members of my own ethnic group and how I used my tacit knowledge to influence their cultural, linguistic, and reader identities. The data I gathered illustrated how my students and I constructed curriculum together in the emic sense<sup>12</sup> (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). As a participant and instrument of my own research (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007) and as a member of my students' ethnic group, I needed to explicitly acknowledge and be

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<sup>12</sup> In contrast to the *etic* concept, which means that the researcher has an outsider perspective on the research (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007).

fully aware of my own subjectivity and tacit knowledge as I will explain in the section on trustworthiness below.

A critical step in data management was to periodically go through all my files and get them in order. I reread initial questions and all data which I eventually matched, compared, and contrasted. It was essential to get a complete sense of the totality of the data in order to devise units of data which fit into a preliminary list of coding categories. In the following section on data analysis I describe how I coded the data I gathered.

### Data Analysis

As I was starting my data analysis, I visualized my ideas in the form of either text or diagrams according to their feasibility to help me understand the relationships, contrasts, and commonalities in the data I gathered through different instruments. While the text in some of those diagrams simply consisted of single words, in some others the text consisted of phrases or short sentences. I also looked for patterns in my students' oral and written expression (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), for example, in their use of national, panethnic, or hyphenated labels such as Hispanic-American. Moreover, I looked for outliers or negative cases (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) such as students who were quite unique in the way they identified linguistically, culturally, or as readers. Another example of outliers had to do with students who openly expressed that their identity had nothing to do with linguistic or ethnic identity.

As I compared earlier and newly collected data, new categories became apparent in regards to how my students perceived their cultural heritage and how their sense of cultural, linguistic, and reader identity might be changing. For example, the



data I gathered in the form of their weekly journals led me to notice how student perspectives about their heritage changed. Moreover, new relationships became apparent between their voice and my practice, for example, when they informed me that they preferred a circular sitting arrangement to discuss readings.

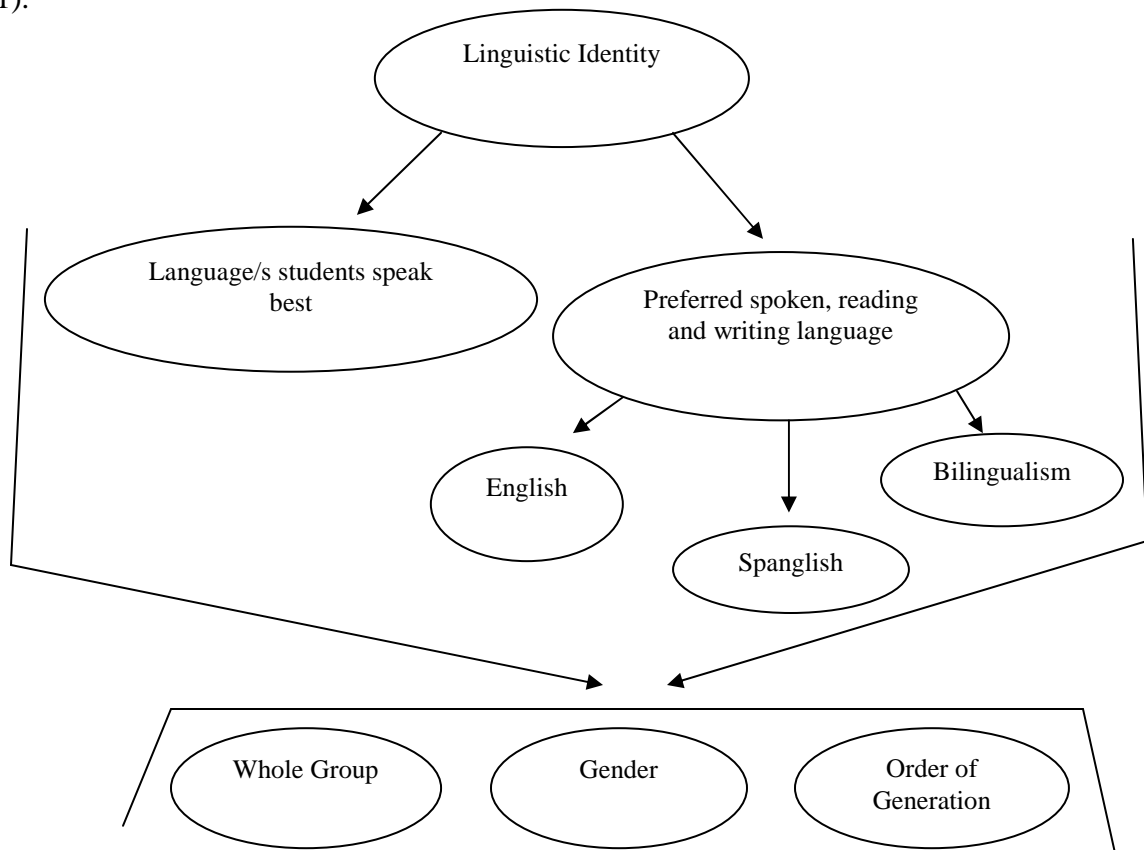
### *Coding*

As I read and reread my data, I started to detect common themes across the different sources I had gathered. After identifying the themes that were the most prevalent, I started creating codes. For example, after reading the journal entries, the transcripts of focus group conversations and teacher interviews, as well as field notes, I perceived a clear pattern of students who lived borderlands experiences between a Latino home culture and a very different American culture. When I detected that pattern, I color coded all of that data and cut and pasted it to form its own category, which I labeled *Data on Borderlands Experiences* (Appendix F).

Under the major theme of culturally responsive pedagogy I came up with the following codes: linguistic identity exploration; cultural identity exploration; literary topics; connection to roots, family and community; literacy; cultural gender exploration; voices; agency; and classroom culture. Some of those codes comprised several subcodes. For instance, literary topics encompassed the subcodes of language, roots, borderlands experiences, marginal experiences, voices, and cultural gender roles. In the following sections I explain how I framed chapters four, five and six according to my coding processes. Subsequently, I describe what I did to make sure my research was trustworthy.

*Data Analysis of Student Linguistic and Cultural Identity*

I base my findings in chapter four on my data analysis regarding my students' linguistic and cultural identities and experiences. My analysis led me to the identity code, which comprised the subcodes of linguistic identity and cultural identity. For the linguistic code I generated the subcodes of language/s students speak best; and gained comfort in spoken, written, and reading language. I then subcoded the latter code into English monolingualism, Spanglish, and Spanish/English bilingualism. I also coded the linguistic data in terms of patterns of whole group, gender and order of generation. The web below depicts the elaboration of the linguistic code (See Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Linguistic Identity Web*

As I also illustrate in chapter four, I divided the cultural identity code into the subcodes of identity exploration, borderlands cultural experiences, and cultural and

linguistic appreciation. I divided identity exploration into the subcodes of exploration according to grade level, connection between labels, identity and identification, ethnicity and beyond, and cultural gender roles. I partitioned the borderlands subcode into gap between home and school cultures, complex and tricultural identities, immigrant experiences, split families, and conflict. I further subcoded gap between home and school cultures into order of generation. Under cultural and linguistic appreciation I came up with *gain in linguistic and cultural appreciation* and *finding cultural value in connections to the past*. I further subcoded the subcode of cultural and linguistic appreciation into gender and order of immigration. The web below (Figure 2) illustrates my coding system for cultural identity.

#### *Data Analysis of Student Interest in Reading*

As I illustrate in chapter 6, my data analysis led me to detect changes in my students' interest in reading. Accordingly, under the code interest in reading I generated the subcodes increased, stayed the same, and decreased. I also subcoded the different reasons my students' interest had increased, stayed the same, or decreased according to the reasons presented in *Questionnaire for Students about their Reading Interests* (Appendix K). Moreover, as I was looking into my students' independent reading choices, I created codes according to the patterns I discerned in the kinds of readings preferred by my students. And as I inquired into the reactions my students had towards the textbook readings, I generated the subcode textbook readings. I then analyzed all the reading-related data on the basis of gender and order of generation. Last, I preliminarily explored a possible connection between increased comfort and increased interest.

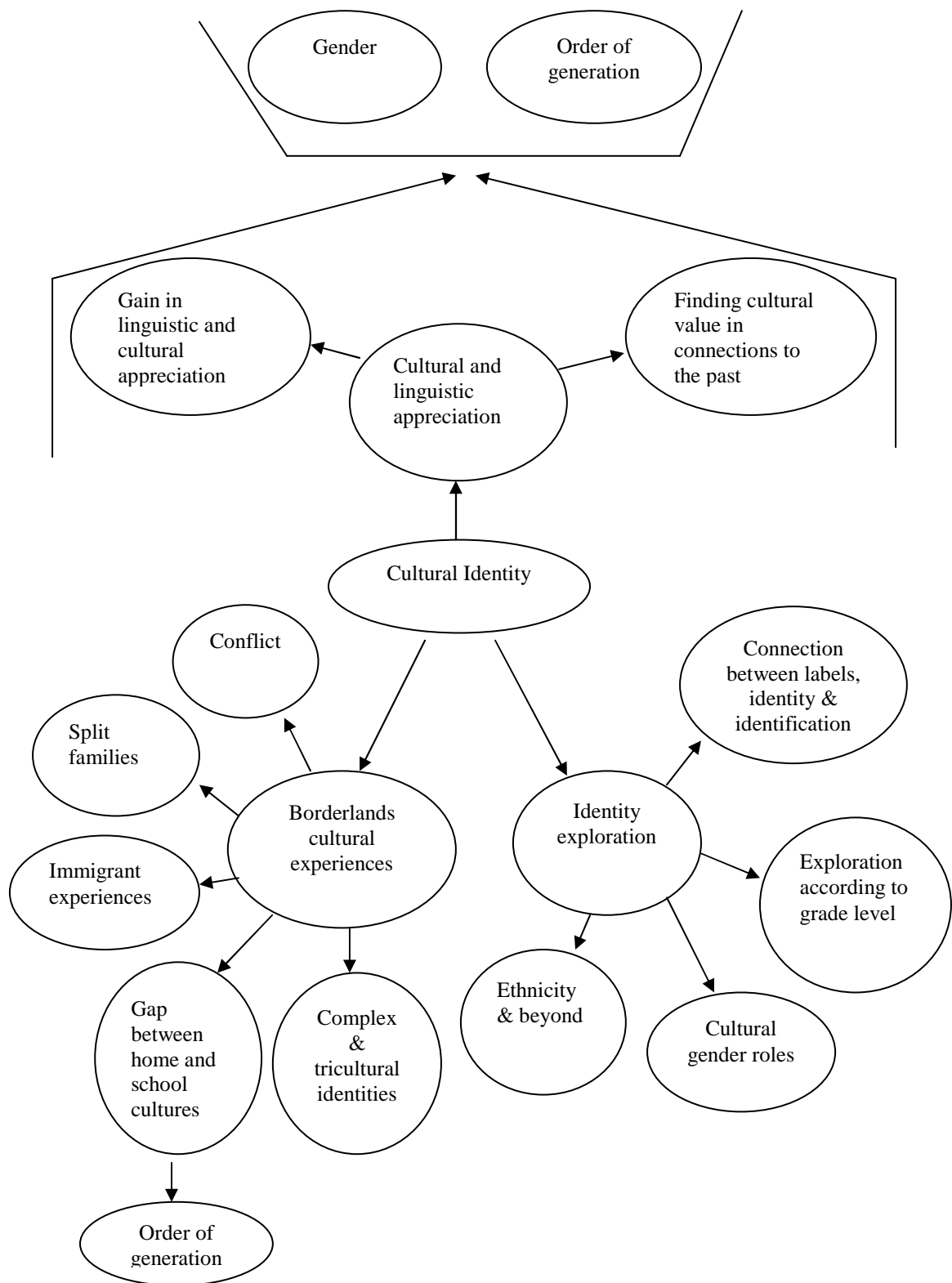
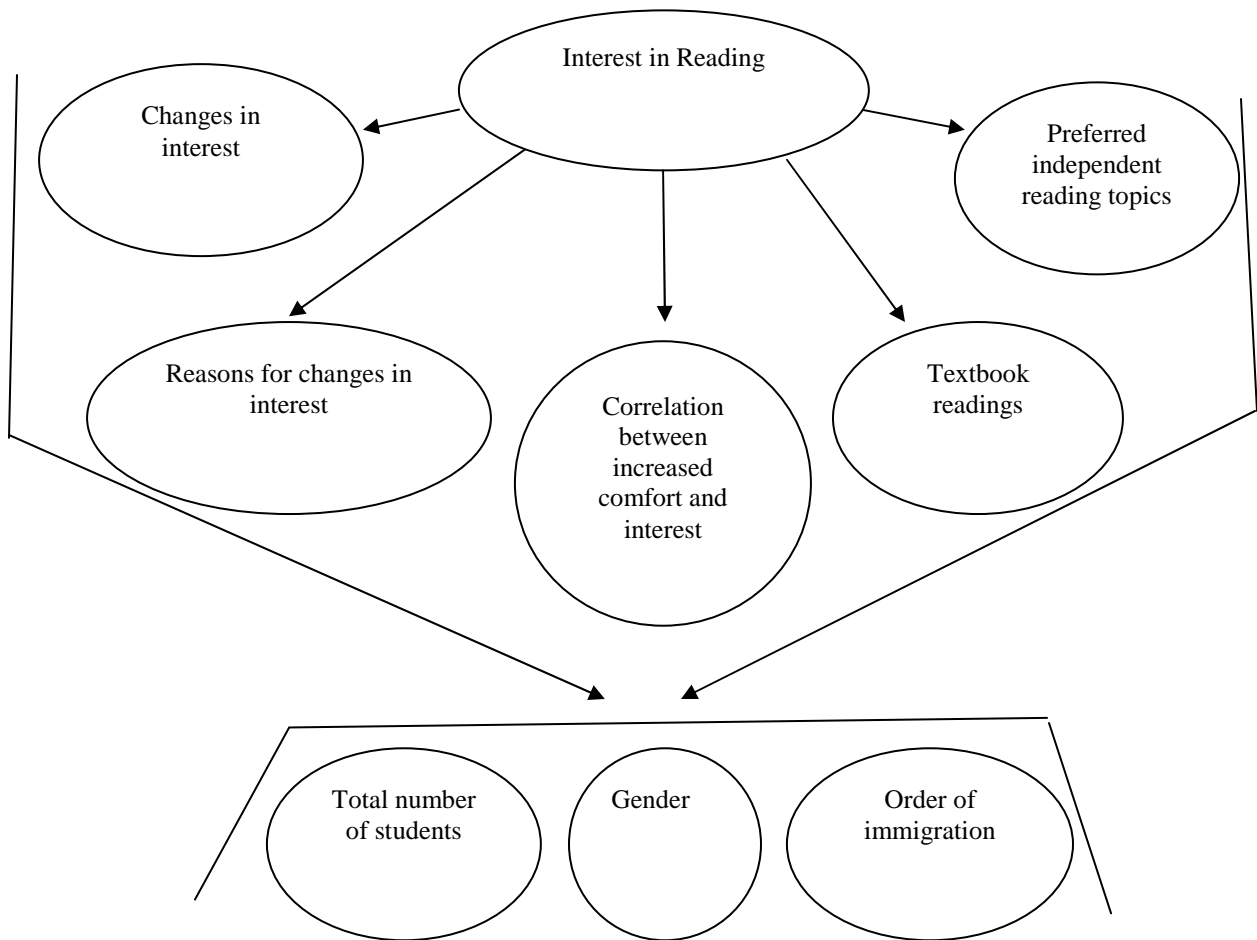


Figure 2: Cultural Identity Web

In Figure 3 below, I illustrate my coding system regarding my students' reading interest. I based my coding system mostly on the questionnaires, focus group discussions and independent reading choices (Appendices H, J, K).



*Figure 3: Interest in Reading Web*

#### *Action Research Data Analysis*

As I illustrate in chapter five, I analyzed my role as an action researcher through the whole process of my research. According to the cyclical nature of action research, the input I received, perceived, and interpreted throughout the extent of my study determined new and subsequent actions to undertake. For instance, my discovery that the marginalization topic was popular among many of my students

guided me to start bringing readings about that topic to share and discuss in class. I also wanted my students to experience a sense of liberation through literature, which guided me to bring certain types of literature to the class. My data analysis mostly consisted of evaluating if and how change took place: how I attempted to become a more culturally relevant teacher so that my students would identify with the literary topics; how I guided my students through cultural and linguistic exploration; and if/how linguistic and cultural identity exploration and interest in literacy impacted each other. For example, one of the changes I detected had to do with how some of my low readers' self-perception as readers improved when they were acquainted with literary topics that had to do with marginalization.

As a catalyst for my own research, I periodically read my journal reflections, field notes, and side comments (on my field notes) in order to understand the reasons behind the actions and to develop further questions and actions to impact my students' reading and literacy interest. For instance, my students' heightened class engagement after discussions in Spanish about topics such as identity exploration made me wonder if those topics would continue to have an impact on my students' participation and interest. Thus I began conducting more class discussions on targeted topics and, with students' permission, providing an oral summary of their journal entries and reading aloud entries that dealt with engaging topics. Moreover, the perceptions I gained from the input generated by my students' class and homeroom discussions, journal entries, questionnaires, and focus groups guided me towards new courses of action.

I mapped the main elements of my action research in the form of visual organizers (MacClean & Mohr, 1999). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), these

organizers “visualize complexities that are difficult to grasp with words” (p. 157). Thus, I resorted to the use of webs in order to better understand the different occurring phenomena and their relationships with each other. The webs consisted of main concepts and subconcepts that sometimes showed connections with each other. Through those webs, presented throughout this chapter, I synthesized the complexities I perceived by making as many connections as possible.

In my role as an action researcher I looked for major changes as I attempted to engage my students in literacy experiences. I broke the changes I detected into stages. The stages were connected to any marked changes in my students’ cultural and linguistic self-perspectives and identity exploration, with their identity as readers and with their interest in Spanish literacy. I divided the stages into beginning, middle, and final. In regards to their cultural and linguistic identity, I came up with the following ascending coded stages: unexplored identity; beginning of identity exploration; and identity exploration. I considered those stages to be ascending since my attempt was to move students who had not gone through identity exploration from lower stages of exploration to higher stages.

As far as interest in literacy, the following were the three ascending stages I detected for coding purposes: low interest in Spanish literacy; exploration of different culturally relevant literary topics; and developed preference for specific literacy topics. In regards to their reader and writer identities, the ascending stages I coded for were the following: low or limited identity due to limited acquaintance with topics; exploration of identity due to extensive acquaintance with topics students identified with; and higher identity as readers and writers.

I also coded the changes I went through in becoming a more culturally responsive teacher. The changes involved how I listened to their voices, acquainted them with borderlands literature, attempted to help them explore their identities, and strove to impact their reading and writing interest. For instance, the ascending stage codes I developed for guiding students to explore their cultural and linguistic identity were: limited awareness of what was culturally relevant to them; exploration on how to guide them through culturally responsive topics; and discovery of the best ways to become the most culturally relevant teacher I could be. A main source of understanding my own change was my journal reflections.

I created three webs as I was pondering my most all encompassing action research code: *processes*, and two of its subcodes, *perspectives* and *strategies* (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The overarching web I created has to do with the different processes that took place during the time I engaged in action research (See Figure 4). This web refers to my research sub-question “How do I attempt to draw on my students’ linguistic and cultural heritage, voice, and agency as a guide to teach them literacy?”

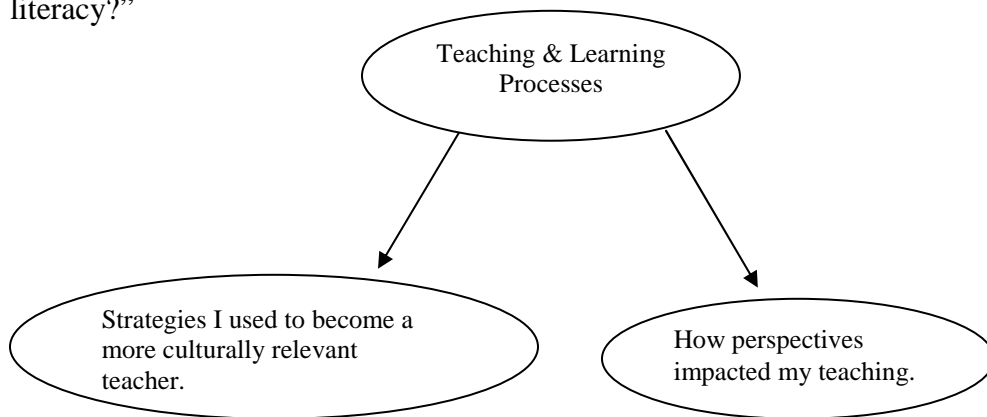


Figure 4: Processes Web

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define *the processes* code as “words and phrases that facilitate categorizing sequences of events, changes over time, or passages from



one type or kind of status to another. In order to use a process code, the researcher must view a person, group, organization or activity over time and perceive change occurring in a sequence of at least two parts” (p. 164). The *process* code was important since, in my action research, the coding of pedagogical and curricular processes, especially the ones which consisted of catalyst elements, were key. This code included the changing processes I went through as I gathered data and formulated new questions which led me to generate changes in the reading topics I chose and discussions I led. This code also had to do with changes in my students’ sense of cultural, linguistic, and reader identities as well as with changes in their interest in reading, as indicated earlier in this chapter (Figures 1, 2, 3)

The following web maps one of the subcodes of the processes code, *perspectives*. The perspectives subcode addresses the components of my first research sub-question “How do I attempt to draw on my students’ linguistic and cultural heritage, voice, and agency as a guide to teach them literacy?” (See Figure 5)

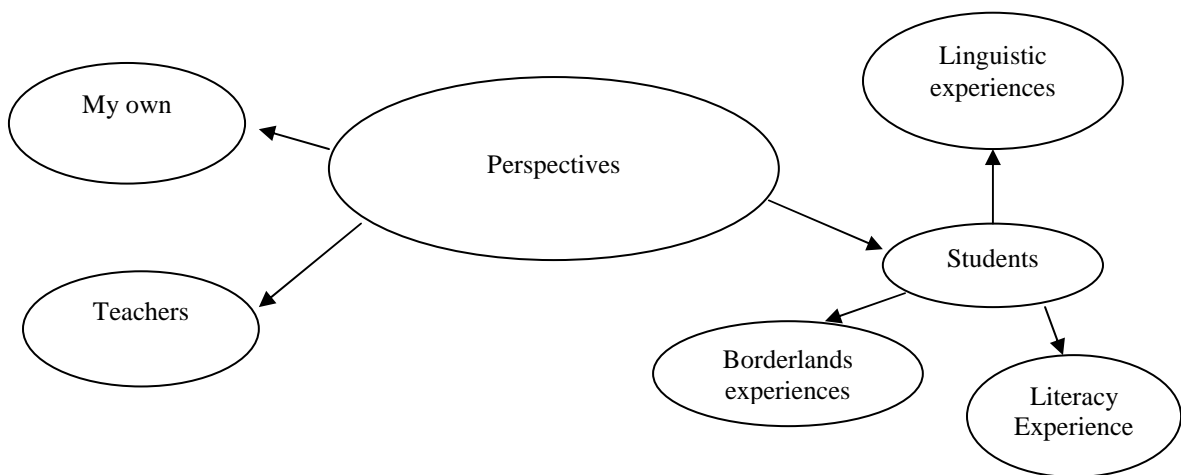


Figure 5 Perspectives Web

Becoming aware of the perspectives of all of the participants was a key process to my action research in order to become more culturally responsive. As I

illustrated in Figure 5, that multidimensional code included the perspectives of the students and the teachers I interviewed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I learned from my students' perspectives as I dug into their linguistic, borderlands, and reading experiences by welcoming their agency and listening to their voices. The way my students used language, such as terms they used to label themselves, was a good way to detect the perspectives encapsulated in some of their words or phrases (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

I also acquired important information by listening to what the expert teachers had to say about the importance of helping Latino/a students build connections with their heritage and develop a stronger sense of identity. Moreover, as one of the participants in my action research, my perspectives were important. My perspectives were based on my knowledge about and experiences with my heritage as well as on my borderlands existence. My perspectives were also channeled through my dual Puerto Rican and Venezuelan national heritage.

The next web maps *strategies*, another subcode of the processes code. Each part of the web illustrates strategies that I originally or eventually used as I listened to the different perspectives and evaluated all of the processes (Figure 6).

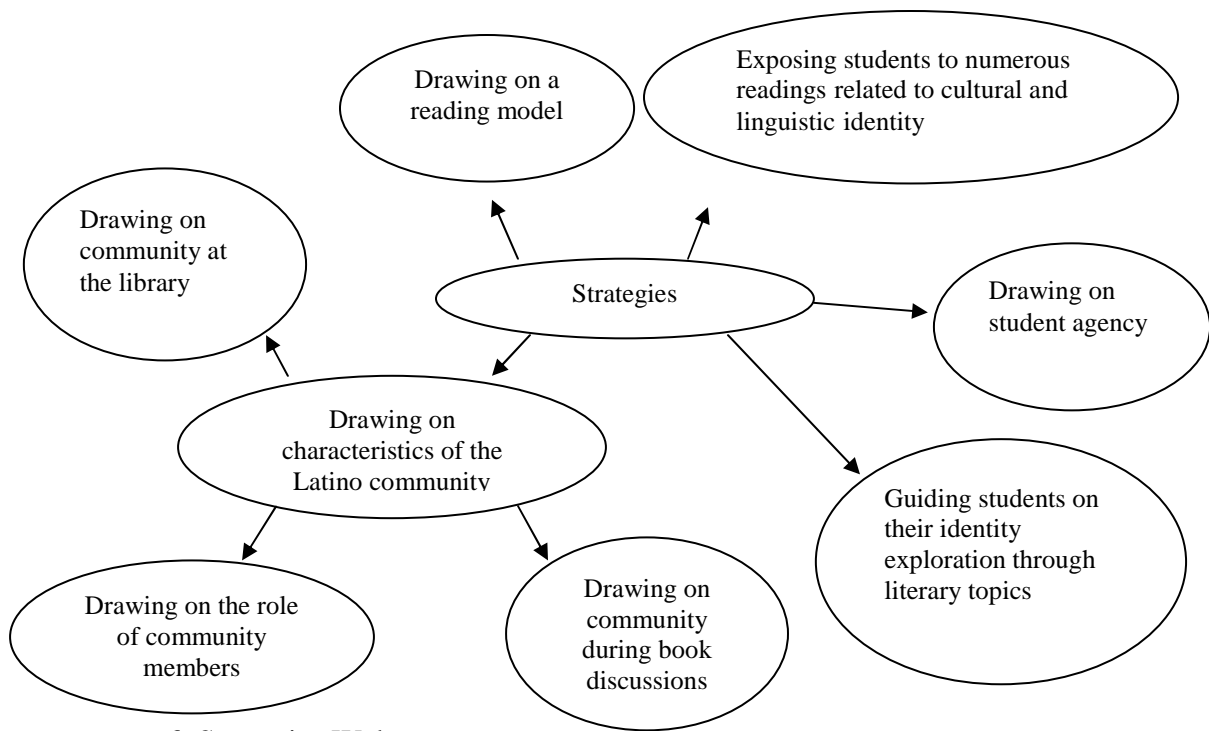


Figure 6: Strategies Web

For space purposes I illustrate the subcode of guiding students on their identity exploration through literary topics below (See Figure 7):

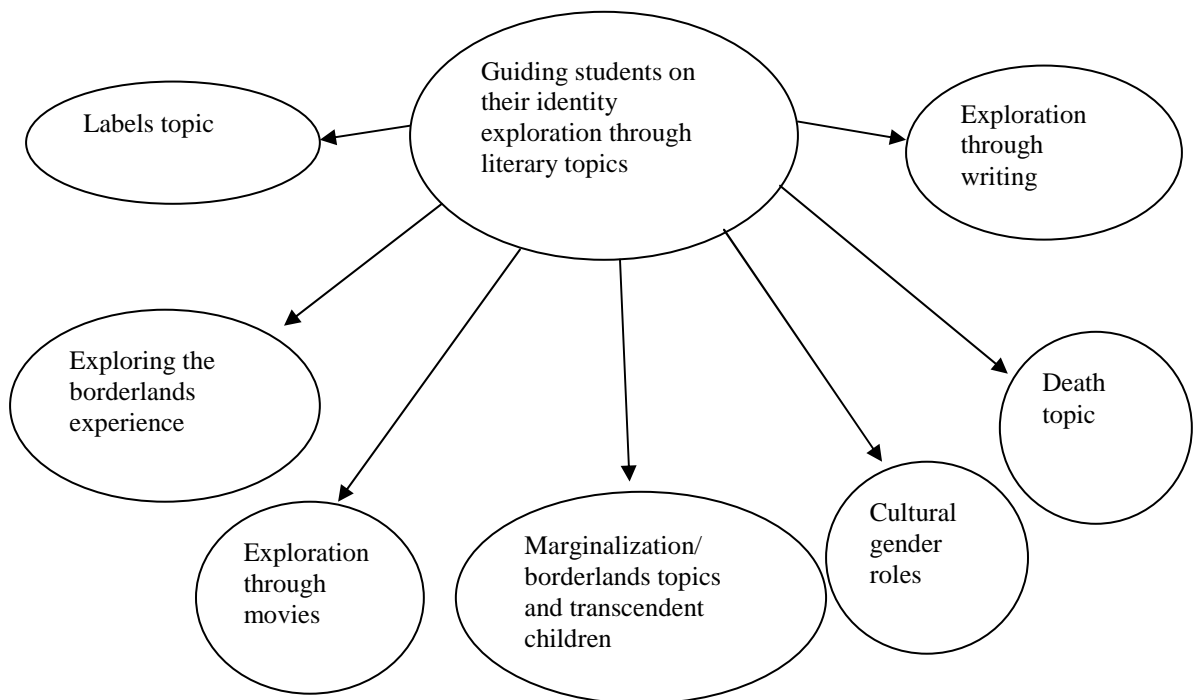
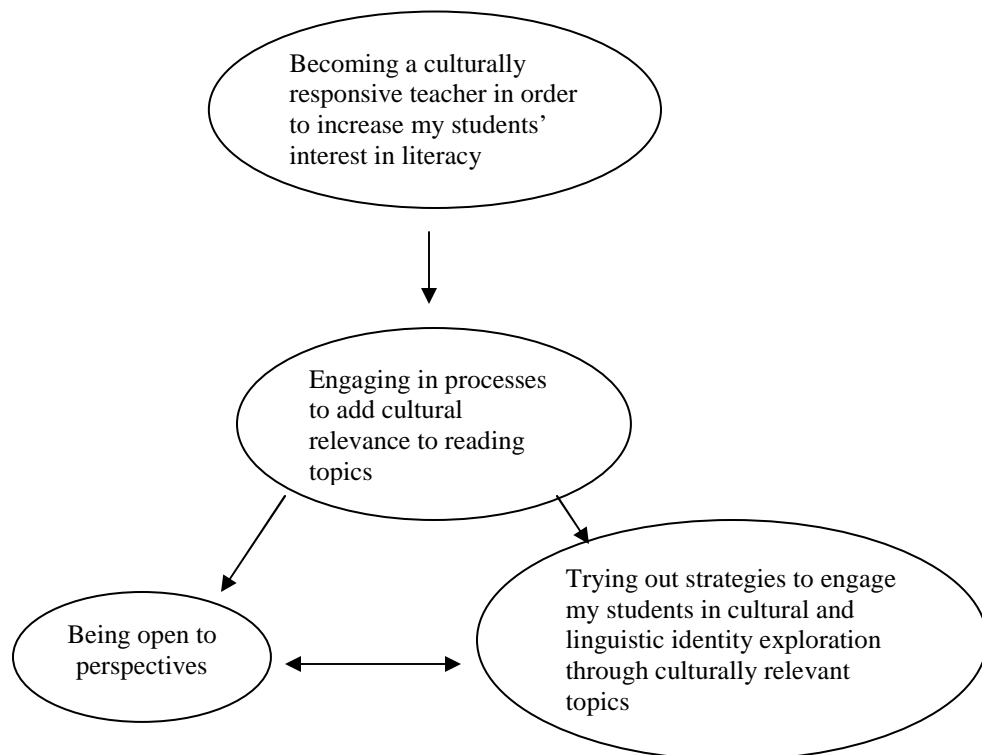


Figure 7: Guiding Students on their Identity Exploration through Literary Topics

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) have explained that strategy codes “refer to the tactics, methods, techniques, maneuvers, ploys, and other conscious ways people accomplish various things” (p. 165). This subcode was important because as an action researcher, I was constantly looking for, experimenting with, and evaluating different strategies to make my class more culturally responsive in order to increase my students’ interest in literacy. Thus, that code included strategies I used to choose and discuss culturally relevant and borderlands reading topics; to help my students explore their sense of cultural, linguistic and reader identities; to develop their fluency in Spanish; and to impact their interest in reading.

As I explored all of the possible relationships between the elements of my action research which could potentially lead me to become a culturally responsive teacher, I created the following integrated web (See Figure 8).



*Figure 8: Integrated Web for Culturally Responsive Teaching*

As a participant of my own research, my own subjectivity was an important factor for me to examine. In the remaining section I explain how my data gathering methods, data gathering instruments, data analysis, and presentation of findings follow action research criteria for establishing trustworthiness.

### Trustworthiness

In my role as a participant in my research, I critically examined my own subjectivity (Creswell, 2003; MacLean, 1999). I recognized my own subjectivity while I remained as objective as I could. I compared my own perceptions with the data I gathered from other sources such as class and homeroom discussion, student journals, student essays, questionnaires, projects and focus groups. I also recognized my own tacit knowledge and represented the taken-for-granted aspects of my study as clearly as possible to the eye of the outsider. For example, I supplied detailed descriptions of my classes, the national heritage of my students, the books they read, and the movies they watched. I also provided a thorough account of my actions and what triggered further actions. I supplied enough descriptive data in order for the readers of my research to understand the applicability of my study to other studies with similar settings or general characteristics (Creswell, 2003).

In regards to the perspectives of my subjects, I did member checks with them in order to make sure my impressions were accurate. I spoke with individual students about my general perceptions of their answers to the questionnaires. Moreover, I met with each focus group for about half-an-hour to share with them my impressions on the possible connections between borderlands topics, identity exploration and interest in literacy. I conducted the member checks toward the end of the course. My students

did not find any discrepancies between their own perceptions and what they meant to express and what I understood and documented.

As an action researcher, I did my best to make my study as trustworthy as possible. As Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) explain, when it comes to action research, “a study’s trustworthiness involves the demonstration that the researcher’s interpretations of the data are credible or ring true to those who provided the data and that multiple data sources have been compared or ‘triangulated’” (p. 3). Accordingly, I triangulated the data I gathered regarding my students’ cultural and linguistic identity and the connection between culturally relevant and borderlands literature and their interest in reading. I did that in order to make my research as trustworthy as possible by looking at the same questions from as many perspectives as possible in order to have a more complete perception about my data (Creswell, 2003).

To triangulate, I compared the data collected through my journal entries and field notes to the data compiled through my students’ journal entries, focus groups, and questionnaires. Moreover, my newly generated questions and actions were based, not only on my field notes (and comments on my field notes) and journal entries, but also on what my students expressed through their journal entries, questionnaires, class and homeroom discussions, and focus groups. An example of a discrepancy I found as I triangulated my data was in regards to the readings of *Cuando era puertorriqueña* and *Cajas de cartón*. My journal entries and field notes about class discussions led me to believe that most of the students were connecting to those readings. I was surprised to find later in their answers to the reading questionnaire that few students had considered those texts to increase their reading interest. What some of the students in the focus groups shared helped me realize that, if I had asked separate

questions about each book, I would have probably come up with different results since, as I found out through our conversations, they considered the books to be quite different from each other.

To further ensure the trustworthiness of my research, I focused on the following kinds of validity suggested by Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007): *democratic validity, process validity, and outcome validity*. According to Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007), *democratic validity* refers to “the extent to which research is done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation” (p. 41). I made sure that my students were full participants of my research. Their voice, agency, and cultural perspectives and experiences became as integral to my research as my own voice and reflections. I also made sure that my students understood that I would disseminate what their voices expressed to a wider audience of educators; that their experiences and perceptions indeed could make a difference to other students with cultural and linguistic experiences similar to theirs. An example of how my students’ voices impacted my research was when they recommended independent reading as the most important motivating factor in helping them become more interested in reading.

Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) also present *process validity* as a means of ensuring that the problems generating the action research processes are framed and solved in a manner which ensures ongoing learning. I have been careful in establishing processes that provide learning experiences for my students by carefully delineating the initial and further questions and actions and by conscientiously gathering and analyzing data. The ethnographic action research processes I drew on

facilitated my students' literacy learning as well as my own learning to become a more culturally responsive teacher.

In regards to *outcome validity*, Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) explain that “one test of the validity or trustworthiness of practitioner action research is the extent to which actions occur that lead to a resolution of the problem or a deeper understanding of the problem and how to go about resolving it in the future” (p. 40). Throughout the process I have made sure to illustrate how my questions have impacted my students' learning experiences. For instance, the writing ability in Spanish of most of my students increased considerably as was evident by the changes in the length and complexity of their journal entries. Their essays about their independent readings also improved significantly. The data I gathered through the focus groups and questionnaires confirmed that their interest in writing in Spanish had substantially increased. The increasing length and complexity of their writing samples correlated with those two data sources.

It was key to the trustworthiness of my research to clearly illustrate the actions I took in order to impact my students' sense of cultural and linguistic identity and interest in reading, that there was a marked difference between the onset of the process and the outcome. The end result of my research evinced a transformation elicited by the cyclical implementation of essential changes. In chapter five I will provide a detailed description of how that happened. But first, in the following chapter I present my findings on the linguistic and cultural identity of my students.



## CHAPTER 4 – BORDERLANDS LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE LATINO TEENAGER

In this chapter I present my findings regarding my students' linguistic and cultural identities. I divide the chapter into two main corresponding sections: Language Identity and Cultural Identity. Each of those sections includes detailed findings which culminate in summaries of the main conclusions. The first part of the chapter has to do with the way my Latino/a students viewed their linguistic identity. The second part regards their perceptions about their cultural identity. My primary sources of data were my students' answers to the *Questionnaire for Students about Linguistic Identity and Cultural Identity* (Appendix J), the transcripts of the focus group discussions, and some of their journal entries.

### Language Identity

In this section I present my findings on the language/s my students speak best as well as the language/s in which they prefer to speak. I also present my findings about the language/s in which my students prefer to read and write.

#### *Language/s Latino Students Speak Best*

Of the thirty-six students -- 19 females and 17 males -- who completed the questionnaire on their linguistic identity (Appendix J) no students indicated that they spoke Spanish better than English. Slightly more than half (56%) indicated that they spoke English better than Spanish. A higher percentage of males (65%) than females (47%) indicated that they spoke English better than Spanish. The remaining students believed they were about equally proficient in the two languages.

During focus group conversations, some students referred to their English monolingualism as something over which they had little control. For example, Nadine, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female from Bolivian/Guatemalan descent who is an avid Bolivian dancer, remarked that, “We speak in English because everyone speaks in English” (May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010). Santos, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation senior male of Salvadorian heritage who spoke much more English than Spanish at the beginning of the school year explained: “My parents let us speak in English at home. We kind of got robbed into the deal, like they learned a language (English) but we did not learn one (Spanish)” (May 10, 2010). And others like Margarita demonstrated interest in speaking more fluently with the Latino community despite their limited fluency: Sometimes people assume that I am Spanish and ask me questions and I am like I try to speak to them to the best of my ability, like I try not to have an accent or speak Spanglish to them, and sometimes you know, in my neighborhood there are a lot of Spanish people, my mother’s friends. I try to talk to them to the best of my ability. (May 10, 2010)

Margarita’s remarkable progress in my Spanish for Heritage Speakers II class qualified her to skip one level of Spanish. She is now taking Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish Language despite her limited fluency in Spanish at the beginning of my class.

Forty four percent of students indicated no significant difference between the way they spoke English and Spanish. A higher percentage of females (53%) than males (35%) considered themselves bilingual, which confirmed the literature I had reviewed (Arriagada, 2005). According to Arriagada, females spent more time at

home which naturally made them more fluent in Spanish. Moreover, a higher percentage of 1.5 students (62%) indicated similar fluency in English and Spanish in comparison to 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students (35%) (Table 4). This finding made sense since 1.5 students had been born and had lived in Latin American countries during the first portion of their lives. While diglossia, fluently speaking both languages separately, was challenging for more than half of my students, it was considered by a large number as the ideal linguistic state, as I demonstrate in the next section.

	English better than Spanish		Spanish & English pretty much equally well	
	Number of students	Percentage of students	Number of students	Percentage of students
1.5 males	3	43%	4	57%
1.5 females	2	33%	4	67%
Total 1.5 students	5	38%	8	62%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	8	80%	2	20%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	7	54%	6	46%
Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. students	15	65%	8	35%
Total males	11	65%	6	35%
Total females	9	47%	10	53%
Total students	20	56%	16	44%

Table 4: Language/s Spoken by Students

#### *Spoken Language Preference*

While English was the language the overall number of my students spoke best, their top preference was diglossia (39%). The second choice, English only, came close with 36%. The third choice was Spanglish with 14% (Appendix N). There was a marked difference between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1.5 generation immigrants. While English only was the top choice for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation (48%), only 15% of 1.5 immigrants chose that option. Slightly more than half of the 1.5 students preferred to speak both languages separately with 54%. Speaking English and Spanish separately was the second choice

for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants with 30%. I had anticipated this finding since 1.5 generation immigrants had more exposure to Spanish in their birth countries.

While several students, mostly female, described their use of Spanglish as natural, a larger number of students articulated their preference for diglossia. Nicolas, Elmer, Carlos and Dania explained why bilingualism was the ideal state. Nicolas, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation male, had been living dually between the gang and academic worlds. While he was a participant in the Advanced Via Individual Determination (AVID) program and was also taking AP courses, he was attempting to leave gang life, but with much hesitation. His two most characteristic traits were his bluntness and his pride in his bicultural Aztec/Mayan heritage. He was quite interested in learning history, the history of his ancestors. He demonstrated his clear preference for diglossia in one of his journal entries: “For me Spanglish is for the ignorant because that is what I learned when I was a child. I was also taught that being bilingual is better than simply speaking one language. Thanks to my parents I can speak in Spanish well even though I still need to improve it. Being able to speak two languages is good since I can understand both English and Spanish well, and I can speak, read, and write in both languages” (May 24, 2010) <sup>13</sup>.

Elmer was a 1.5 generation male of Salvadorian heritage who took honors classes and had the highest grade in my class. While he was not as blatant against Spanglish as Nicolas, he considered diglossia to be a higher form of expression: “If you speak Spanglish, you don’t demonstrate that you can speak in Spanish or in English too well. I think that there is nothing wrong with speaking Spanglish but I think it is important and I would recommend for people to try improving in both

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<sup>13</sup> I have translated all of my students’ journal entries.

languages. I think that speaking Spanglish is better than only speaking one language. But in my opinion speaking in Spanglish is not professional” (May 24, 2010).

Carlos was a second generation male from Guatemalan/Vietnamese heritage who lived with his Guatemalan stepmother and was quite fluent in Spanish. He had been identified as one of the most at-risk ninth graders. On the days he took his medication for ADHD, he did quite well academically. Carlos considered Spanglish to be more street-like and bilingualism as more school-like. He explained that “Someone who is bilingual knows how to speak both languages in a correct way. Those who are bilingual perhaps have more education or tend to work more in schools. The ones who speak Spanglish maybe only use it on the street. The bilinguals use it more at their work or at school in order to use good vocabulary” (May 24, 2010).

Dania was an outgoing and confident 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female of Salvadorian heritage. She was an eloquent bilingual. Her father was the minister of her Latino church and she was very involved with her church. In my opinion, she represented a good example of selective acculturation. She wrote, “Being bilingual for me does not mean being able to speak both languages fluently but instead living both languages. Knowing how to read, write, speak and breathe the languages fluidly is being bilingual” (May 25, 2010).

Females were more multifaceted than males in their use of the different linguistic possibilities. While males were distributed between their only two preferences for monolingualism (47%) and diglossia (53%), females preferred a much wider range of language choices and combinations: Spanish only (5%), both Spanish

and English separately (26%), Spanglish only (26%), Spanglish only and English only (5%) and both English and Spanglish separately and Spanglish only (11%). Only 26% of the total number of females chose to leave Spanish (in any combination with English) out of the equation. Thus in addition to being more bilingual than males, females saw many more possibilities in their language expression. Females mostly, just as Karen, Enid, Victoria, Yara and Margarita below, were quite candid in their justifications for their use of Spanglish.

Karen, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation junior female who deeply valued her Salvadorian heritage, perceived her current Spanglish speaking state as natural but also as a transitional stage into higher Spanish fluency. She explained in the following:

My first language was Spanish. I was held back for that reason. I twist the words. I speak Spanglish and can't help it. I like reading in Spanish, even if I can't pronounce it. My mother is hoping that I will get my reading and my writing straight. I need to help her translate. I am going to have to because I am going to write all the menus in Spanish when I become a chef. (May 11, 2010)

Despite her academic challenges, Karen was the student who volunteered the most to read aloud in her Spanish class. In fact, she acted as the reading leader of her class. She did not take Spanish the following year since, as she expressed, I was not going to be her teacher. However, she continued reading in Spanish and plans to continue improving her Spanish expression throughout her life. Karen also indicated that, "My parents are happy since I am learning how to speak Spanish well because if I spoke only in English, they would not be able to understand me. That is why for me it is good to speak in both languages" (May 11, 2010).

Enid was a vocal 1.5 generation junior female of Honduran heritage who generally switched back and forth between English and Spanish. Enid perceived Spanglish as a natural form of expression in her bicultural existence as she expressed in her journal entry:

When I greet my female friends I speak in Spanglish. I don't know why but I like it. Many students speak in Spanglish with their friends. I think that is another way of showing off to people that you speak two languages. In my case, I speak both and I am very proud of my cultures. I think that the best thing that has happened to me is having been born to two different cultures. I remember that one day when I came back from kindergarten and I was speaking in English my mother got angry at me and told me: "Never speak to me in English because I don't understand you and, besides, you know Spanish". (March 2, 2010)

Victoria was a quiet 1.5 generation female from Bolivian heritage who expressed the depth of her reflections quite well in her journal. She clearly perceived Spanglish as one step towards the journey of becoming fully bilingual. According to Victoria, becoming bilingual was a matter of practice, of taking risks, and of acknowledging and learning from mistakes. She wrote in her journal that, I don't believe that there is anything wrong with Spanglish. It simply makes you remember that you have to practice more. It makes you recognize what you are lacking. I see it more like a benefit and believe that, if you acknowledge your mistakes, you could become bilingual. Those who are bilingual must have had a lot of practice. They also had to start by speaking Spanglish. What matters the most is finding ways to learn more and more. There is no level in languages that indicates

that you know everything. There is always something to learn and improve. (March 2, 2010)

Yara, a 1.5 female from Honduran heritage, was Enid's younger sister. She was quieter and more of an English monolingual than Enid. She wrote in her journal, If I want to say something, and it becomes easier to speak in both Spanish and English I would do that to say it faster. There is nothing wrong with speaking Spanglish. There are also Americans who speak in Spanish and they try to speak both at the same time. (March 2, 2010)

While Margarita was defining her sexuality she also demonstrated a high capacity for learning and a strong initiative for wanting to get ahead academically. She was a 1.5 generation sophomore of Nicaraguan heritage who spoke much more English than Spanish at the beginning of the school year. She perceived speaking Spanglish as valuable as becoming bilingual since both translated into having an open mind to learning. She wrote in her journal, I believe that when you are bilingual in Spanish and English and speak Spanglish, it all depends on how comfortable you feel in both languages and how you can compare them in a way that will sound good. Bilingualism and Spanglish are both good, they are something good that means that your mind is open to learn a new language. (March 2, 2010)

Rico, the most recent arrival of my thirteen 1.5 generation students, was an exception to his gender in his regard for Spanglish. His heritage was both Bolivian and Chilean. He wrote in his journal that



People say that Spanglish is more like street-language and that being bilingual is normal and educated. Personally, I have nothing against any of the two. Spanglish takes the best of Spanish and English and combines it in words. Spanglish includes words in Spanish which can't be described in English, words in English that can't be described in Spanish, or words which are combined or created. Bilingualism is referred to as the more educated of the two. The words in both languages don't mix. I think it is more difficult to communicate bilingually. (March 2, 2010)

In conclusion, while the majority of students had indicated that they were more fluent in English than in Spanish, they perceived diglossia as the ideal linguistic state. The order of generation seemed to play an important role in their speaking preference. While the majority of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students preferred to speak in English only, the majority of 1.5 generation students preferred to speak in both languages. These findings on spoken language mostly contradict the findings of reading and writing preference as I demonstrate next.

#### *Reading and Writing Language Preference*

When asked about reading preference, most students (64%) said they preferred to read in English. Their second choice was reading in both English and Spanish separately with 31%. In contrast to speaking preference, more males (41%) than females (32%) preferred to read in both English and Spanish separately. Most females (74%) preferred English only. Thus females were less versatile in reading than in speaking. Moreover, males seemed to prefer to be more bilingual in reading than in speaking. And as far as order of generation, whereas 1.5 students – mostly males - were about equally distributed in their choices of reading in English only and

in English and Spanish separately, most 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students (70%) preferred to read in English only (Appendix O). Again I had anticipated this finding due to the more extensive contact of 1.5 generation immigrants with their heritage language.

While several students still may have preferred to read in English, it was clear that several such as Enid and Melanie were beginning to contemplate reading in Spanish on their own initiative. Enid, the Honduran 1.5 generation immigrant who spoke mostly in Spanglish, felt glad to have read her first book in Spanish as part of her independent reading: “I had never read in Spanish before. I read the one about the pastor who went to other countries” (May 25, 2010). Melanie, who had been identified as one of the most at-risk ninth graders, chose for her independent reading a Spanish classic, *Marianela*. She told me, “I improved a lot in reading, I read *Marianela*.” I told her that I was surprised she had chosen such a challenging book, a classic. Then I asked her why she had wanted to read that book, to which she replied: “I saw the movie. It was quite challenging but I finished it.”

Other students such as Karen demonstrated satisfaction in realizing the possibility of becoming readers of Spanish. Karen commented that “I see myself more as a reader. Your class has made me read. I am really good at reading in Spanish” (May 11, 2010).

Margarita, mostly an English monolingual at the beginning of the school year, perceived reading in Spanish as a work in progress: “I guess I can read pretty good. And there are words that draw me back and I take time trying to pronounce them” (May 11, 2010). Margarita’s accelerated progress that academic year qualified her to skip one class level into Spanish AP language the following year.

As with reading preference, more than half of the students (58%) preferred to write in English only. And, like their reading preference, less than half (31%) preferred to write in both English and Spanish separately. Again as I had anticipated, there was a noteworthy difference between 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students. Whereas 46% of 1.5 generation students preferred to write in both English and Spanish separately, a much lower percentage of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students (22%) preferred to write in both languages separately. Similar to speaking preference, females differed from males in their more widespread preferred reading language choices which included Spanish only for 5% and different combinations between Spanish and English for 16% (Appendix O).

Several students were appreciative of having become better writers in Spanish. Carlos sounded as if he had miraculously, suddenly learned how to write in Spanish: “I just learned how to write in Spanish. I did not know how to do it” (May 21, 2010).

Enid, Elmer and Dania expressed a desire to write better in Spanish which was linked to their increased comfort in learning how to write:

Enid: “I want to keep learning how to write in Spanish, accents (accent marks) help me a lot in my grammar”.

Elmer: “I am more confident about writing. I used to hate it. I was afraid of messing it up with all the accents (accent marks) and all that. I would like to write more. I want to master both languages”.

Dania: “I want to improve my writing and speaking. I was afraid of writing because of the accent (marks) thing. Last year we did not go over it. It was just a fun class. I did not learn a lot”. (May 25, 2010)

Other students such as Ana and Carlos expressed an equal interest in reading and writing in Spanish. While Ana still felt shy about speaking in Spanish, her comfort level in both writing and reading in Spanish had increased significantly: “I can write almost perfect; the only thing I don’t know really well is the little marks [accent marks]. But my level of comfort in writing and reading is much better. Like I can now write a whole message to Jonathan [Dominican boyfriend] in Spanish” (May 11, 2010). Carlos’ increased interest in both writing and reading in Spanish was linked to the value he attributed to the Latino culture, “I want to learn to write and read more in Spanish next year. Latin culture is strong, I want to read more, write more, those accents” (May 21, 2010). In chapter six I provide an in-depth description of how my students’ interest in reading and writing in Spanish changed. Despite the variations in the levels of my students’ linguistic fluency and spoken, written and reading preferences, they all seemed to have their versatility in common.

#### *Language Versatility of the Borderlands Student*

Nearly 70% of my students’ parents spoke only in Spanish. The percentage of parents who spoke only Spanish at home was higher for 1.5 generation (85%) than for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students (61%) (Table 5). I had anticipated that finding because of the longer exposure that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation parents had had to the English language. Despite the higher ease in and preference for speaking in English for a large number of my students, it was noteworthy that no student spoke in English only with his/her parents.

In total, 69% of students spoke in English and Spanish with their parents and 31% spoke only in Spanish with their parents. Moreover, despite the perceived lower Spanish fluency for males, they somehow managed to speak only in Spanish to their parents (47%), substantially more than females (16%). While 84% of females

	Spanish Only		English Only		English & Spanish		Spanglish Only	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total 1.5 students	11	85%	0	0%	1	13%	1	13%
Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. students	14	61%	3	13%	6	26%	0	0%
Total number of students	25	69%	3	8%	7	19%	1	3%

Table 5: Language/s Spoken by Parents

spoke in both English and Spanish separately to their parents, only 53% of males did so (Table 6).

	Spanish Only		English & Spanish	
	#	%	#	%
1.5 males	2	29%	5	71%
1.5 females	1	17%	5	83%
Total 1.5 students	3	23%	10	77%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	6	60%	4	40%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	2	15%	11	85%
Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. students	8	35%	15	65%
Total males	8	47%	9	53%
Total females	3	16%	16	84%
Total number of students	11	31%	25	69%

Table 6: Language/s Spoken with Parents

In contrast to the language/s the students spoke to their parents, 69% of all students spoke only in English to their siblings. The second choice (23%) was both English and Spanish. Again while females had indicated that they were more fluent bilinguals, when it came to their siblings, slightly more of them (74%) spoke only in English than their male counterparts did (63%). More males (31%) than females (16%) spoke in both English and Spanish separately to their siblings. One 2<sup>nd</sup>

generation female spoke only in Spanish since, as she expressed, her sibling was still living in El Salvador (Appendix P).

While many students had indicated that they spoke only in English with their siblings, the way most of them communicated with their grandparents and to other members of their extended family was different. The total percentage of students who spoke in Spanish only to those family members was 81%. The total percentage of males who spoke only in Spanish to their grandparents and other members of their extended family was 71%. The total percentage of females was 90%. So while more females spoke only in English to their siblings, more females spoke only in Spanish with their grandparents and other members of their family. In regards to order of generation, a slightly higher percentage of 1.5 generation students (85%) than 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students (78%) spoke only in Spanish with their grandparents. This indicates that Spanish use was still quite prevalent in 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students despite their more extensive contact with the English language than 1.5 generation students (Table 7).

	Spanish Only		English & Spanish	
	#	%	#	%
1.5 males	6	86%	1	14%
1.5 females	5	83%	1	17%
Total 1.5 students	11	85%	2	15%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	6	60%	4	40%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	12	92%	1	8%
Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. students	18	78%	5	22%
Total males	12	71%	5	29%
Total females	17	89%	2	11%
Total number of students	29	81%	7	19%

*Table 7: Language/s Spoken with Grandparents and Other Members of the Family*

I considered the finding that the parents of more than half of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students could not speak English troublesome. As the literature has suggested, Latinos who can't speak English with their parents may be at a high risk for dissonant acculturation with them, which means that, while parents remain Spanish monolingual, their children become English monolingual (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). This may translate into role reversal and limited communication between parent and child. It seemed contradictory that the largest group who indicated to be English monolingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males, was also the largest group that spoke in Spanish only to their parents. I found that piece of data contradictory but it is possible that the level of communication between parent and child may have been quite limited. It is also important to note here that, even though 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males did not speak English and Spanish equally well, when it came to their parents, they resorted to Spanish expression even if it was not as fluent as their English expression. On the other hand, while a higher percentage of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation females had indicated that they could speak English and Spanish equally well, only 15% of them spoke only in Spanish to their parents. However, when it came to speaking to their grandparents, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation females went back to speaking only Spanish with them. And while some 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males spoke in both English and Spanish to their grandparents, more than half spoke in Spanish only to them. As I had expected, both 1.5 generation males and females spoke mostly in Spanish with their grandparents. But when it came to their siblings, the great majority of the students (both 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation) spoke to them in English only unless their siblings did not know how to speak English (e.g., because

of living in their country of origin). The findings suggest that students demonstrated versatility in their language use. They basically resorted to the needed language – even to the less comfortable of the two - depending on whom they were speaking to.

### Cultural Identity

In this section I introduce my findings regarding my students' cultural identity. I include the characteristics of and their perspectives on borderlands experiences. I also refer to indications of their identity exploration and incipient critical perspectives through self-labels, journal entries, and discussions. Moreover, I make reference to the gain in cultural and linguistic appreciation my students demonstrated by the end of the school year.

### *Borderlands Cultural Experience*

The data I gathered revealed that my students perceived their home and school cultures to be quite different from each other. The labels they attributed to themselves also illustrated their lack of or limited identity as unhyphenated Americans. There was a great diversity and combination of labels which had nothing to do with the uniformity suggested by the label *Hispanic*. The students clearly lived a borderlands existence between their heritage culture and the American culture.

### *Gap between Home and School Cultures*

On the topic of how the overall number of my students perceived their home culture in contrast to the school culture, slightly more than half (56%) indicated that their home cultures were *somewhat different* from the school culture, and 39%



indicated that their home cultures were *very different* from the school culture. More 2<sup>nd</sup> generation (48%) than 1.5 generation students (23%) indicated that their home and school cultures were very different (Table 8).

	No difference		Somewhat different		Very different	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
1.5	0	0%	10	77%	3	23%
2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	2	9%	10	43%	11	48%
Total	2	6%	20	56%	14	39%

*Table 8: Difference between Home Culture and School Culture*

Many of my students' remarks during focus group conversations, class discussions and journal entries demonstrated their first or second hand borderlands experiences as demonstrated in the aforementioned questionnaire. Following are several excerpts of my students' journal entries on how they perceived their borderlands experiences.

*Students' Thoughts on Borderlands Experiences*

Students' perspectives on the borderlands topic fell into three broad categories: conflicts generated from living between two worlds; the split family phenomenon; and perspectives on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigration experiences. Dinaida and Dania expressed some of the conflicts experienced by borderlands students living between two worlds. According to Dania, the eloquent bilingual daughter of a minister, there is always something missing for the borderlands child: My parents tell me that from the age of one more or less I used to travel to El Salvador. I never went with my parents. I traveled with my grandparents, my uncles

and aunts. My mother tells me that [...] I always used to come back speaking with the accents of the children from there. I used to come back as an entirely new person...each time that I go back to El Salvador I cry while I go towards the airport and take the plane to go there. I feel that I will miss my loved ones in the United States...but when I come back the same thing happens to me, I come sobbing because I feel that I leave who I really am there. Even though I was not born in El Salvador, I feel I am from El Salvador. It is in my blood, it runs through my veins. I feel, like India Maria (comedian) says, "I am neither from here, nor from there". Inside of me there is always a voice that wants to come out. I understand the importance of being bilingual and bicultural in this country but in reality almost always only English is the language that is used. The only places where I feel that I can allow that second person to come out are in Spanish class and in my home. I wish I could change that in one way or another. (February 8, 2010)

Dinaida, who was in grief over her father's recent deportation to Peru, seemed to understand the conflict resulting from acting American while belonging to a Latino family. She wrote the following about the conflict in *Cuando era puertorriqueña*: "The conflict of Negi's mother in *Cuando era puertorriqueña* is that she [her daughter] is acting like an 'americana'. But it is not her fault that she is acting like that. It is the culture. The mother [...] does not want her to act as an 'americana', because she does not like how they act and dress" (February 8, 2010).

Dania made reference to the difference between being, in her words, an immigrant and being *americanizada* (Americanized):

Many times the child of the immigrant goes through experiences that are different from the “gente americanizada” (Americanized people). For example, the culture is different. In my experience my parents have to meet my female and male friends to know the kinds of people I get together with. The people who are “americanizada” simply go out and that is it. I don’t think that “los padres hispanos” (Hispanic parents) don’t trust their children; they simply protect their children more. (February 8, 2010)

Several students had a lot to say regarding the split family phenomenon, which was illustrated in the movie “Under the Same Moon”. Even if they had not directly had that experience like Dinora, many of them knew at least one person who had lived through it. For example, even though Dania had been born in the United States, she knew and sympathized with people who had experienced separation from their family members. In Dania’s words, “I could see and understand how difficult the life of an illegal immigrant is...my friends tell me how they miss their countries, their parents, their family, their friends. You can see in this story (“Under the Same Moon”) what it means to suffer as a result of being an immigrant” (April 19, 2010). It was interesting how she related being an immigrant with being illegal. Perhaps in her experience she had become acquainted with many immigrants who happened to be illegal.

For 1.5 generation Dinaida, Enid, Francisca and Elmer, the split family syndrome was intimately personal. When I first met Dinaida, she was a sad teenager, as her father had just been deported to Peru. Dinaida wrote in her journal:

I have become introverted. I was expressive before but I have changed. My father was deported; can no longer enter here. Now I cry a lot and I am sad and pretend to be

happy when I don't want anyone to know what happened. Now you know something about me and I hope you will understand why I don't speak much in your classroom.

(October 5, 2009)

Enid, one of the two 1.5 generation sisters of Honduran descent, could clearly identify with the characters in the movie "Under the Same Moon":

My impressions of "Under the Same Moon" are strange since my mother, father and siblings are immigrants<sup>14</sup> and I remember as if it were yesterday when I came to the United States that it was very painful for me. I cried like I had never cried before. When I watched the movie for the first time I became sad. It felt as if I had gone through the pain they went through. That is why I don't like to watch movies like that, since I think that I have gone through the same as the boy. (April 19, 2010)

Francisca, the 1.5 generation female of Peruvian/Venezuelan heritage who admired her immigrant father, wrote:

When I saw this movie for the first time I started to cry because I went through something similar. When my father came to the United States it was very sad for me and hard not to see him every day. But through the years he could save money to bring me to the United States. And for him that was really hard since he had to work night and day to make money to be able to bring us. That is why I appreciate all he does for me and my siblings. I don't plan to get in trouble because he does not deserve that I fail him that way. (April 19, 2010)

For Elmer, the 1.5 generation male from Salvadorian heritage who scored the highest grade, his childhood experience was similar to the one of the child in "Under

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<sup>14</sup> Enid and her sister Yara had been born in the United States but had moved to Honduras and back to the United States before the age of twelve. Therefore I identified them as 1.5 generation immigrants.

the Same Moon.” In his candid journal entry he wrote the following after watching the movie:

For two years I lived in El Salvador with my aunt. During those years I spent fun time with my cousins. [...] The movie “Under the Same Moon” made me think about my own past. I remember how much I missed my mother. And I used to think like the child in the movie. I thought that she did not love me, but when I grew up I realized that she did. Even though I lived with my aunt and used to see my oldest sister, it was not the same as having my mother with me. The idea of leaving my whole life in El Salvador caused me a lot of fear. I did not know how things were going to be here. When I used to live in El Salvador I did not have to attend school but I was told that when I came to the United States I would have to go since that was the law in the United States. I felt terribly since I did not want to leave my cousins and could not bring my toys in my suitcase. When the day arrived I felt really badly. When I arrived to the airport my stomach started to hurt. I was so afraid that I lost my appetite [...]. Then the time came to get into the airplane. I started to cry. All of my relatives hugged me and told me goodbye. I got into the plane with my uncle and cousins. In the airplane I slept several hours. Finally the airplane landed. There were my mother, brother and sister waiting for me. (April 19, 2010)

Juan, a second generation male of Salvadorian origin who slept a lot during class, not only had family in El Salvador but also helped his mother support them: I work in McDonalds with my mother. We both work together to pay the rent. Only she and I live in our apartment. Also in the summer I helped her with another job of hers. When I have money after paying the rent, my phone, cable/internet, I send

money to my sisters and grandmother in Salvador. I also help other family members. When I have money left I deposit it in the bank for school” (October 5, 2009).

Jennifer, the religious female of Salvadorian heritage, was also separated from her siblings: “I am the only one of my siblings who is in school. They are in El Salvador” (October 5, 2009).

Several students also shared their thoughts on the last theme: being 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants. Their impressions had to do with their own experiences as 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants as well as with the experiences of their relatives and other community members. Victoria’s description alluded to the experience of the 1.5 generation immigrant. This quiet but expressive writer of Bolivian descent, wrote: I don’t consider myself 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation. I was born in another country but since I was three I grew up here. I was adapting to the culture here. But at the same time my parents made me remember where I come from and what it is like there. The experience impacts the first generation at the beginning but little by little they adapt and there is no longer a difference between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation. It depends on how your parents bring you up. (February 16, 2010)

Some students such as Melanie, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female of Salvadorian and Bolivian heritage who liked the food her mother made when her relatives came to visit, considered the experience of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation to be easier than the one of the 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrant. She wrote, “For many immigrants it is difficult to learn English and, for lack of interest to learn or for lack of an education, they make themselves known as ‘chents’. For the immigrants of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, it is totally

different. They grow up learning English and adopt much of the American culture” (February 16, 2010).

Regarding the problems faced by 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants, Ana, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female who was mourning the death of her Bolivian grandfather, wrote, Children give bad names to immigrants like “chents” [...]. I liked the movie [“Under the Same Moon”]. The message was important, to never lose faith. It demonstrated that life is really hard and even harder for immigrants. Many things can happen; police can send you to your country of origin, someone can use you, you can’t find work, and, when you find a job, it is not what you want and they don’t pay you well. (April 19, 2010)

Other students saw lack of appreciation in 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants as a problem. Ana wrote the following: “First generation immigrants appreciate that they can have a good education. Sometimes second generation people do not care and do not appreciate it like the ones of 1<sup>st</sup> generation” (February 16, 2010). Carlos, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation male of Guatemalan and Vietnamese heritage, expressed that 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants have a “stronger will” than 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants who have more opportunities but don’t always take advantage of them. He wrote that “If someone from 1<sup>st</sup> generation had the opportunity to attend college, s/he would take it while someone from 2<sup>nd</sup> generation would not put much interest in it” (February 16, 2010).

Enrique, the most recent arriver 1.5 generation student, perceived the growing gap between the experiences of immigrant children and their parents as conflicting:

“The parents and children get to develop different beliefs and the children change the manners taught by their parents” (February 16, 2010).

For several students whose parents came from different countries, their borderlands experience became trilateral as they had to negotiate between their bicultural/ binational / bidialectal (even biracial) Latino heritage and with being American.

### *Complex and Tricultural Identities*

Many of my students also expressed ambivalence or a complicated perspective as they explained their cultural identity. Some students were blunt in their statements that they were not American. To my comment, “Maybe you identify yourselves with being ‘norteamericanos,’” Yara, one of the sisters of Honduran heritage, abruptly replied with a serious, imposing expression on her face, “I am not American” (January, 25, 2010).

Carlos, the child of Vietnamese and Guatemalan parents, described his existence in a dual way: “I was born here but I am not Americanized, I guess.” He understood being Americanized in both a racial and material perspective. In his view, being Americanized meant having the material affluence of white, well-to-do Americans: “How white people live like, like they live in those big houses. They have everything they want like picture perfect lives” (May 20, 2010). Carlos’ explanation caused me to start thinking about the possible marginalized identity of some immigrant children and how or if they would identify with marginalized literary topics.



Francisca, the 1.5 generation female of Peruvian/Venezuelan heritage who adored her Peruvian father, was one of my most forthright students when it came to her culture not being American. She stated that, “I am not American. I prefer to speak Spanish and my home is not American at all.”

On the contrary, Lola, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation student of Salvadorian heritage, explained that her home seemed pretty Americanized until her grandmother came to visit: “My family is not like the ones who are in El Salvador. They have gotten accustomed to American life. The one who is still purely Salvadorian is my grandma who visits once a year. She brings back the culture to my home” (February 8, 2010).

Several of my students with dual Latino heritage demonstrated an even more complex sense of identity. For example, Isabel, the student from Ecuadorian/Chilean background who intended to go to Harvard, wrote about the dialectal aspect of her heritage: “I am multicultural. My father was born in Chile and my mother was born in Ecuador. I love the sayings of Chile. The accents stick easily with me” (October 15, 2009).

Margarita, the student who skipped to a higher Spanish level, also wrote about her mixed cultural heritage, not only in terms of nationality but also of contrasting cultures: “My mother and I are from Nicaragua but my father is from Guatemala and my siblings are from the United States, that is why we have many traditions and cultures. My father’s culture is more indigenous and the culture of my mother and mine is more from the city” (October 15).

Some students identified with one Latino side more than with the other. For example, Nadine, the dancer of Bolivian music, wrote in her journal: “My culture is

Bolivian and Guatemalan. I would say that I am more Bolivian since I am closer to my mother's side. One of the things that make me more Bolivian is that I love Bolivian food. I also dance in a folkloric Bolivian dance group and I like it very much" (October 15, 2009).

*Summary of Findings on Borderlands Cultural Experiences*

The data I gathered suggest that the great majority of my students lived borderlands cultural experiences. Their borderlands experiences had to do with living between two worlds within this country and/or between two countries. Several students also demonstrated trinationa/tricultural/tridialectal affiliations because of their dual parental heritage. That finding was important since, as Oboler (1995) stated, there has been a tendency to homogenize people with a diverse Latin American heritage.

An emotional borderlands experience for many of my students had to do with family separation. In fact, the split family phenomenon was quite characteristic of their experiences. My students also had a great deal of familiarity with the experiences of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants. Most thought that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants had some advantages such as being born a citizen and being more adapted to the American culture. However, several of them mentioned the downside of taking for granted some of the benefits. Despite order of generation, most students did not identify as American.

My findings also suggest that only a very small number of my students perceived any similarities between their home and school cultures. Moreover, the fact that more 2<sup>nd</sup> than 1.5 generation students regarded their home and school

cultures to be *very different* may indicate 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students' deeper understanding of the American culture, which may impact their perception about the contrasting characteristics between their home and school cultures. The data may also demonstrate that, despite the more prolonged time 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants may dwell in the United States, their home environments still far from resemble the American culture.

### *Identity Exploration*

Based on what research suggests about the benefits of facilitating Latino students' construction of their own self-labels (Zarate, Bhimji & Reese, 2005), I devoted class time to explaining what the literature says about that topic. I explained how labels imposed from the outside could impact the sense of identity of minority students and how they were at the stage of beginning to explore and construct their own sense of identity. The following sections present my findings on my students' cultural and linguistic identity exploration.

### *Identity Exploration According to Grade Level*

In regards to identity exploration according to grade level, my findings suggest that the majority of my older students, eleventh and twelfth graders, had already started exploring their cultural identities. For instance, the only two seniors stated that they had gone through a great deal of exploration of who they were when they were younger. Ana, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female of Bolivian and Dominican heritage who struggled with her shyness in speaking Spanish, and Santos, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation male of Salvadorian descent who was starting to feel more comfortable in speaking

Spanish, openly expressed that they were fairly satisfied with their self-knowledge.

Tony, a 1.5 generation junior of Bolivian heritage, had also done a great deal of identity exploration. He had discovered his homosexuality very early in life. Tony's behavior changed significantly from acting like he did not belong or intend to belong in my class to naturally becoming the reading leader. Tony was versed in literature in both Spanish and English and was also quite eloquent in both languages. He had chosen not to take Honors English despite his teachers' recommendations. One day Tony wrote a powerful entry about the limitations imposed on people through labels: "People are much more than a label" (February 23, 2010). He even asked me for his journal the next day to continue writing about that topic. In his typical articulate manner, Tony expressed during the focus group interview that, "Everyone goes through identity crises. They [students] need support but don't need to be held by the hand because you have to find your own answers and no one can give you the solutions that you need. We are malleable at this age; we are very influenced by the opinions of others. Later in our lives we can only think we have a personality." (May 17, 2010)

Tony's friend, Carlito, was a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation junior of Bolivian heritage who missed a great deal of school. He and Tony became good friends that school year. They were both part of one of the focus groups. Carlito explained that "I like being Hispanic but people already assume that I don't speak English. There is racism in the United States." He added that,

I have gone through a lot of identity crises. I have gone a lot through it [them]. I used to feel ashamed because I heard things about being Hispanic. Tenth grade was when I thought about it for the most time. You start thinking about who you are and one of the things you are is Hispanic and I have gone a lot through that. Ninth grade is a lot about fitting in. In tenth grade you think more about who you are. Now in eleventh I know I am Hispanic and can't do anything about it. My parents are the nicest people I know. And I know many Hispanic people that aren't like what people think of them. (May 17, 2010)

While Carlito was speaking, Tony was listening to him intently. Then he uttered, "I find it odd that you would let the way others label you impact you. We are not defined only by one word. As human beings we are caught up with labels, who they are and why they are that way. I don't let myself be defined by only one word. We are human beings with very different personalities and characteristics" (May 17, 2010).

The data I could gather on the exploration of identity by tenth graders were quite limited since I only had five tenth grader students (Phinney, 1989; 1993). Only two tenth-graders were openly exploring their identities, one cultural and the other one sexual. Nicolas seemed to have been going through a turbulent exploration stage and trying to break out of the shell created by the way he had been identified thanks in part to his choice of gang involvement. The following year, Nicolas had clearly chosen the academic path. One day I saw him volunteering to help his AVID (Achievement Via Individual Determination) teacher do fund raising for their program. I also often saw him in that teacher's classroom after school receiving

tutoring help for his physics class. At the beginning of the following year we talked about his summer's trip to Guatemala to finally see the Mayan ruins he so passionately had wanted to see. It seems to me that he came out of his identity exploration with a stronger and more positive sense of identity. Several people like his AVID teacher, his father, administrators, and I were there to reach a hand through his turbulence.

The other student who openly explored her identity was Margarita. The student of Nicaraguan/Guatemalan heritage who skipped one Spanish level, Margarita seemed more mature than a tenth grader. She went through a strong exploration phase regarding her sexuality. She trusted me enough to let me know about it. The exploration of her sexuality during tenth grade took predominance over her cultural and linguistic exploration. She explained during a focus group conversation: This year I have explored my identity. As a freshman I was out of it; I did not care about my grades; I did not care about anything. I did not care about my future. I went numb, there was so much pain. I did not care about life or anything around me. This year I care about my future, where I am going to be. I hope I will excel. (May 10, 2010)

While ninth-grader Dinora openly stated her appreciation of writing as a vehicle for "exploring my identity" (May 4, 2010), it was not clear whether my ninth graders were exploring their social identity as they wrote, or whether they simply appreciated the opportunity to express themselves in writing. Nevertheless, a large number of these students looked quite focused as they wrote their entries about some of the topics that had to do with identity exploration. In addition, some of their

journal entries and essays on their independent reading choices contained emotional reactions and personal or second hand accounts related to those topics. As I demonstrated above regarding the topics of split families, conflicts, immigrant experiences and complex and triple identities, several ninth grader students -- such as such as Dania, Dinaida, Francisca, Elmer, Enrique, Victoria, Melanie, Carlos, Lola, Isabel and Nadine -- were candid about the relevance of these topics to their lives. Moreover, as I demonstrate later in this chapter, the reactions of several ninth-graders to the topic of the impact of labels and society's labeling on the identity of minority teenagers were strong and personal. Several of those students as well as the older ones showed evidence of beginning to play around with the labels that refer to Latinos (Zarate, Bhimji, & Reese, 2005) as I demonstrate later in this chapter.

#### *Connection between Labels, Identification and Identity*

After I acquainted my students with the topic of the impact of society's labels and identification on minority students' sense of identity, I asked them to write a journal entry about the topic. While some students were more philosophical or objective, others shared their thoughts in a more personal or emotional manner. In their written and oral expression I discerned some indication of social identity exploration as well as of an incipient critical perspective that questioned the impact of society's identification on their own sense of identity.

Some students such as Dania questioned society's identification. This outspoken daughter of the minister wrote in her journal, "I don't think that it is good that society identifies who you are. That is why I say 'I am who I am so what?'" One

does not have to believe humanity if they tell you that you are something and you know it is not like that” (March 16, 2010).

Other students such as Nadine, the Bolivian dancer, did not associate with any label and criticized the label *chent*<sup>15</sup>. She wrote in her journal, There are labels like the preps, emos, gothic, ghetto, *chents*, the Asians. I personally don’t feel that I belong to any of those groups because I have friends of all kinds, some are preppy, others are Asian and others are ghetto so I don’t fall in any of those categories. One of the labels that all “latinos” are called is *chents*. Some use it in a bad way and others say it playing but I say that is a negative label for all of the “latinos/hispanos”. (March 16, 2010)

Enid, the vocal female of Honduran heritage, expressed her dislike of labels in an emotional manner and also demonstrated the construction of her own identity: Labels? I don’t like that word since I am not clothes created by a factory. I am very proud of my Latino culture. My parents always made me be my best because I am not only “latina”, but also “Americana”. When people from another country ask you where you are from and you tell them that you are “latina” they immediately think you are from Mexico. I will never abandon my “cultura latina” (Latino culture) because it is precious. It is something I am very proud of since it has many beautiful countries where the “sabor latino” (Latino flavor) grows more and more. When someone places a label I don’t like it because I am not just “latina”. As I said at the beginning, I am not a piece of clothes on which you place a label. I am “latina” “hispana” however you would like to call me because I am proud of coming from two

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<sup>15</sup> Demeaning label that refers to 1<sup>st</sup> generation Latinos



beautiful countries. I had the opportunity of being born in the United States and of having beautiful parents from Honduras. (March 16, 2010)

As I stated before, even though Enid and her sister Yara were born in the United States, they went back to Honduras to live there for several years prior to returning to the United States before the age of 12. Therefore, I have identified both sisters as 1.5 generation immigrants.

Some students expressed confusion about the different national, racial or ethnic labels they had been identified with. Isabel was the outspoken 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female whom I nominated as best student at the end of the academic year. She was a ninth grader whose parents came from Ecuador and Chile. Her goal was to go to Harvard. Several times during the school year she complained about different occasions when she had experienced discrimination in the United States. She wrote, I don't like labels. I had a bad experience in this school. One day, during Jagtime [homeroom], my teacher called me outside of the classroom. She asked me to fill the space about my race on an application. I only identify as "hispana" and the form was requiring me to answer about my race. None of the races had to do with me. I am not black, Japanese, from an island or from Europe. The teacher explained that it had to do with how the government identifies us. (March 16, 2010)

Elmer, the student of Salvadorian heritage who had the highest grade in my class, wrote in a similar fashion to Isabel:

For all of the years that I have lived in the United States I have been classified as a "hispano" when I complete forms. In my house I have always heard the name "latino". I used to think that they meant the same thing, but no. I have also always

identified as a Salvadorian. Everywhere there are “latinos” everyone asks me, “what country are you from?” I have never had issues with my nationality. Some say Salvadorian but I say Salvadoran since I looked it up on the internet. What I have issues with is the topic of race. In the forms now they ask you what your race is. If you choose white then they ask you to go to number two. In the second part it asks you if you are “hispano or latino”. I have always thought that “hispano or latino” was your race and that your nationality is your ethnicity. But now they have changed that. I don’t consider myself white. Neither do I think that we the “hispanos/latinos” are from one race or, like we say in English, a branch of the white race. That for me is the only thing that confuses me about my identity. (March 16, 2010)

Perhaps as a consequence of my efforts to acquaint my classes with the subject, several students such as Carlos and Lolita clearly indicated their understanding of the difference between identification and identity, that one’s identity should not depend on the labels applied by others. Carlos, the student of Vietnamese/Guatemalan heritage, wrote,

I think that someone does not have a life or has low self-esteem when he labels another person with the purpose of feeling better about himself/herself. Labels are something that others put on you. Identity is something special and only you can change what you are. Any person can give you a positive or negative label. Some people can also do an act to have a label or others can be your friends because of the way you have been labeled. (March 16, 2010)

Lolita, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female of Salvadorian heritage, wrote the following:

Some people believe their labels and start thinking that they are true and start thinking bad things about themselves. Like the word “hispano”. Some people say that “hispanos” are bad without a future and that they are not from here. The labels can be good or bad. Identity is what one thinks of oneself. It is not what others think of you. Your identity can be important for you. It is what describes you. I think that identity is better than labels since labels make you feel something negative about yourself. Someone can label you without really knowing who you are and identity is better since it is the positive things you think about yourself. (March 16, 2010)

Other people such as Nicolas and Margarita, both of whom were going through an identity exploration phase, indicated a disconnection between society’s identification and their own sense of identity. Nicolas explained, “I identify as a ‘hispano’ or ‘latino’ since both for me mean the same. People identify me as ‘bruto’ (brute), ‘maleante’ (criminal), gangster and all of those labels. But I don’t care. I am who I am and don’t care about what anyone says about me. I also identify as a worker since when I like to accomplish something I do a good job” (March 16, 2010).

Margarita wrote in her journal,  
In each society they give you a label about how they want you to be. I have heard that I am Nicaraguan, “hispanoamericana”, that I am good for nothing, that I am loud, noisy, crazy, beautiful, creative, and much more. But I can’t identify with being “Americana” and Nicaraguan or with being “hispana” either. I identify as a girl who tries to understand people, who loves to laugh, who does not like limits, who likes to fight for the rights that belong to me and to others, who likes to be original and

different from others, who likes to speak out whatever is in my mind, and I am homosexual and proud of it! (Journal Entry, March 17, 2010)

The conversation between Karen and Margarita below illustrates both students' exploration of the topic of social identity for Latinos:

Karen: "There are a lot of 'latinos' but [they] don't want to be called 'latinos'. When they are asked 'where are you from?' they say, my parents are this...but you're part of it too! I mean you look like them, you have their skin color, you have the culture and all that but you don't want to be called that way. A lot of people say I am American but I say I am half Salvadorian and they say 'not even that'".

Margarita: "Because you were born here, that's what you are labeled as. But you can talk about background. You can say I was born here but I have background from El Salvador".

Karen: "But you still have your culture".

Margarita: "If you are born in El Salvador you can't say that you are American".

With the goal of facilitating my students' further exploration and construction of their own sense of identity (Zarate, Bhimji & Reese, 2005), I asked them to create an identity project as I explain in the next section.

### *Identity Exploration through Projects*

After I tasked my students with creating an identity project, I handed to each of them a sheet of paper with a simple drawing of a blank shirt. I asked them to complete the drawing by illustrating at least eight ways they identified as and to provide a written description in Spanish for each illustration. I asked them to provide at least one linguistic and one cultural representation.

Thirty-seven students completed the project: eighteen males (nine 1.5 generation and nine 2<sup>nd</sup> generation) and 19 females (six 1.5 generation and thirteen 2<sup>nd</sup> generation). Despite the fact that I asked my students to illustrate their linguistic and cultural identities, only ten students illustrated their linguistic identities which included Spanish, alone or in some kind of combination with English. In regards to the American label, just one student identified as American only. Instead the majority of students, 59%, identified nationally with Latin American countries, 68% of these with one country and 32% with two countries. Several students drew flags, mostly the flags of two Latin American countries if they were of mixed heritage. Seventy-three percent of the students identified in terms of music. Forty three percent identified athletically. Thirty-two percent identified in terms of artistic or literary expression. Nineteen percent defined themselves in terms of their families. Very few students identified themselves as readers or good students. When we brainstormed the different labels that they could attribute to themselves before they started their projects, several students referred to derivatives of *lazy* but I did not allow them to use those terms on the project. I did not allow them in my attempt to guide them to construct their own versions of identity, separated from society's possible identification. In looking back I realize that it was my mistake to assume that derivatives of *lazy* were just the result of societal labeling and not self-identified weaknesses or flaws. In retrospect, I would have allowed them the freedom to use any of those derivatives but I would have had a private conversation with each one of the students who used them to understand the motives and to provide them with guidance

if they needed it. Smaller categories were ones associated with the topics of race, religion, violence, philosophy and spirit, nature and animals, and homosexuality.

The two homosexual students, Margarita and Tony, were the only two students who consciously chose not to identify in linguistic or cultural/national terms. While Tony did not include any reference to those two topics, Margarita drew two crossed out flags, an American and a Nicaraguan flag, on both sides of the drawing. When I questioned both students they stated that they did not identify as such. As Tony had stated during the focus group, interview, “At this point in my life I am more interested in other things” (May 17, 2010). The project of Karen, the student who identified strongly as a Salvadorian, combined her national pride with her bisexual identity. While a big Salvadorian flag was at the center of her project, a big rainbow surrounded it. Later she informed me during the focus group conversation that she identified as bisexual. The multiple identities (Gay, 2000) of this eleventh grader who had failed one year, as a reader, a future chef, a Salvadorian, a Spanglish speaker, a bisexual, and more coexisted seemingly effortlessly within her. One more 2<sup>nd</sup> generation male did not refer to any of those but I did not have the chance to ask him why (Table 9).

There was one student who had the hardest time completing the identity project. That was Nicolas, the former gang member. I wrote in my journal: Nicolas has started several times. He is the kind of student who always finishes what he starts but he is having a hard time expressing, or finding his identity. He just broke out of gangs a little time ago. Even the readings he picks are changing somewhat. (March 23, 2010)

In my typical nagging fashion, I asked Nicolas many times to hand in his project without any success. Finally, I asked him fully knowing the answer, “Why can’t you do this project?” He answered in his typical straightforward manner, “Because I have heard so many bad things about me that now I don’t really know what to say about myself.” I told him at least three good things I perceived in him and made some recommendations about how to turn his violent tendencies into something positive. The next day he finally handed in his project which included his own ideas, not mine, of himself.

Nicolas and I had talked extensively about his gang involvement about three months before I assigned this project. The day I found out Nicolas was involved with gangs, I went to talk to him. At that time I was still upset about the imprisonment of one of my students. Among many things, I told Nicolas, “Young people who do bad things are not bad people yet. You are still on time to grow into a good adult.” Soon after, Nicolas abandoned “la vida loca” (gang life). When I saw him at a school event, he told me “I am trying to improve, I don’t want to go to jail.” I replied, “You will not go to jail.” Later on in the year, Nicolas surprised us all during music project presentations as he presented his song about a son apologizing to his father. The song went, “Soy un idiota, te amo” (I am an idiot, I love you). When I asked him why he chose that song he answered, “Because of my father I did not go to jail for many years. I was a gang member.” His somber face reminded me of when we talked about

	1.5 male	2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. male	1.5 female	2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. female	Total
Spanish	1	1		1	3
Bilingual			2	2	4
Spanglish				1	1
Spanglish & bilingual				2	2
National: Unhyphenated American	1				1
National: Latin American	6	3	3	10	22
1 Latin country	5	2	1	7	15
2 Latin countries	1	1	2	3	7
National: American & Latin American (one country)		1	1	2	4
National: American & Latin American (two countries)		2		1	3
Panethnic		1			1
National & panethnic	1	1	1		3
No National or Linguistic	1	1	1		3
Family	1	4		2	7
Homosexual		1		1	2
Literary/artistic expression	4	3	1	4	12
Race		1			1
Religious	1		1		2
Music	4	8	3	12	27
Athletic	5	5	2	4	16
Violence		2			2
Philosophical, spiritual	1			1	2
Nature and Animals	1	2		2	5

*Table 9: Identity Projects*



his gang involvement, especially when we both cried as he mentioned his mother's abandonment. That night I wrote in my journal, "Some of these students have really deep issues; their depth has nothing to do with the superficial image that many people have about teenagers" (March 23, 2010).

While I had assigned the identity project primarily as a vehicle for my students to explore and start creating their own sense of social identity, the project provided me with some preliminary evidence about my students' multiple identities. In the next section on self-labels I explain how I further inquired about my students' cultural identity.

### *Self-Labels*

In my attempt to learn more about my students' cultural identity, I included Question #4 in the *Questionnaire for Students about Linguistic Identity and Cultural Identity* (Appendix I). Question #4 had to do with the cultural labels students attributed to themselves. The question asked students to identify as either *monocultural*; *bicultural* in which the distribution of both cultures was the same; *bicultural* in which one of the cultures was stronger than the other; or *other* in which they would be able to create the definition for their own identity.

Of the 36 students who answered the questionnaire, four students (two males and two females) left the question blank. One of the males deliberately left it blank since, as he indicated, he did not like to adhere to cultural labels. I did not have the chance of asking clarification from the other male. The two females did not understand the question, as suggested by the question mark they drew.

Only 6% of the overall number of students (one male and one female) declared themselves *monocultural*. Of the two, the male student, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and of Salvadorian heritage, used the panethnic term *Hispanic* to describe himself. The female, who was 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and of dual national Latin American heritage, was the only student who used the national, unhyphenated term *American* to refer to her identity.

Of the 32 students who answered that question, 66% (10 males and 11 females) identified as *equally distributed bicultural*. And 19% (4 males and 2 females) indicated that their identity was unequally distributed. In other words, one part of their bicultural identity played a stronger role than the other. Of those six students only two identified as more American than the other part of their bicultural heritage (Table 10).

Of the 36 students, 31 provided labels: the vast majority of both males and females. As I indicated above, four students had left the question blank. A fifth student did not provide any self-label such as Hispanic, Bolivian or Salvadorian-American. I divided the labels they attributed to themselves into the following categories: linguistic identity, national identity, combination between national and panethnic identity, Panethnic identity, combination between linguistic and national identity, alternative, and being explicit about not choosing a label (Table 11). Under “Other,” students could provide alternative combinations of labels. The alternative definitions were provided by two 1.5 generation females. One stated that, “[I] can’t define culture - it is just sticking to customs from place born and where I live now.”

	Male	1.5	2 <sup>nd</sup> gen.	Female	1.5	2 <sup>nd</sup> gen.	Total
Monocultural	1		1	1		1	2
Bicultural (equal distribution)	10	3	7	11	3	8	21
Bicultural (unequal distribution)	4	3	1	2		2	6
Other				2	2		2
Bicultural (equal distribution & other)				1		1	1
No answer	2	1	1	2	1	1	4

*Table 10: Distribution of Cultural Identity Categories*

The other student stated that, “It is a combination of both but [both] are equally blended” (Appendix J).

The label category most chosen by students (35%) was the combination between national and panethnic. The second most chosen label category (29%) was national. The third most chosen label category (16%) was linguistic. Besides being the top choice for the total number of students, the combination between national and panethnic was also the top choice for males, overall 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students, Salvadorians (most of whom were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation), and students with one heritage country. The national category was the top choice for 1.5 generation students and for those students whose parents came from dual Latin American backgrounds.

The choice of the combination between national and panethnic may have demonstrated, on one hand, my students’ confusion regarding the difference between national and ethnic categories. On the other hand, that combination could have been the result of their incipient understanding of the benefits of constructing their own

	Linguistic	National	National & Panethnic	Panethnic	Linguistic & National	Alternative	No Label
Males	4	4	5	1			1
Females	1	6	6	0	1	2	
1.5 total	2	4	3	0	1	2	1
1.5 males	1	3	2	0			1
1.5 females	1	1	1	0	1	2	
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. total	3	6	8	1	0	0	0
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	3	1	3	1	0	0	0
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	0	5	5	0	0	0	0
Salvadorian students	0	1	8	1	0	0	0
1 heritage country	2	4	9	1	0	1	1
2 heritage countries	3	6	2	0	1	1	
TOTAL	5/31	10/31	11/31	1/31	1/31	2/31	1/31

*Table 11: Self-Labels*

sense of social identity. That understanding may have emerged as a consequence of my efforts to get my students acquainted with research that had to do with that topic as I will demonstrate in chapter five. Moreover, that combination may suggest the borderlands 2<sup>nd</sup> generation panethnic/national identity comprising the simultaneous experiences of being Latino (panethnic) in the United States and of Latin American and/or American descent (national).

Students whose parents came from two different countries did not choose as their top choices the panethnic or the combination between panethnic and national.

Instead, national was their top choice and linguistic was their second choice. Their top choice might have been national due to the additional complexity caused by their triple heritage.

In the combined category of national and panethnic, all students used the national term *American* or other Latino American national terms in conjunction with a variety of panethnic single or combined terms such as *Latino*, *Hispanic*, and *Spanish*<sup>16</sup>. No student used the term *norteamericano/a*, which is commonly used in Latin America to refer to the label *American*. In regards to the linguistic label, mostly males, 80%, chose it.

#### *Summary of Findings of Identity Exploration*

My findings were in agreement with what the expert teachers and the literature (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) had stated regarding Latino students not identifying as American. The data suggested that my students had a borderlands social identity, dual at the very least. That finding raised my concern of when students don't identify as fully American. What happens if they don't feel that the other part of the dual identity is as valuable as being American?

My limited findings on the identity exploration of my older students coincided with what the expert teachers expressed as well as with what the literature had suggested (Phinney, 1989, 1993) regarding the time Latino/minority teenagers begin exploring their social identities. According to Phinney, the phenomenon of social identity exploration typically takes place during middle adolescence, mostly tenth grade. Accordingly, I noticed that my older students -- eleventh and twelfth graders --

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<sup>16</sup> Spanish could also be considered a linguistic term but I have included it as a panethnic term since the students did not use it next to another linguistic term such as *English*.

seemed much more in tune with who they were than the majority of my students, who were mostly ninth graders. While my eleventh and twelfth-grade students seemed to have already gone through a period of identity exploration, two of my few tenth graders seemed to have been going through an identity exploration stage. In regards to my ninth graders, while they seemed to be quite interested in the topic of social identity and it was possible that they were going -- or starting to go -- through an identity exploration stage, there was not enough evidence to make that claim.

On the topic of cultural labels, the extensive variety of combinations of cultural labels that my students attributed to themselves may suggest that they were exploring and/or constructing their own sense of identity. Moreover, the diversity of self-labels suggested the total lack of uniformity which defied their being identified by American society as part of one uniform *Hispanic* group (Oboler, 1995). In addition, the diverse answers to the questionnaire as well as the identity projects demonstrated the multiple identities of my students (Gay, 2000).

#### *Cultural and Linguistic Appreciation*

More than half of my students (61%) experienced *some* or *a lot* of gain in cultural appreciation by the end of the school year as their answers to question #5 in section #2 of the *Questionnaire for Students about Linguistic Identity and Cultural Identity* demonstrated (Appendix I). Thirty nine percent experienced no gain which may mean that those students already had a high level of appreciation from the beginning or that their low initial level never rose. A considerably higher percentage of females (42%) than males (12%) indicated that their level of comfort had increased

a lot. The chart below demonstrates the students' increased appreciation of their cultural heritage (Figure 9)

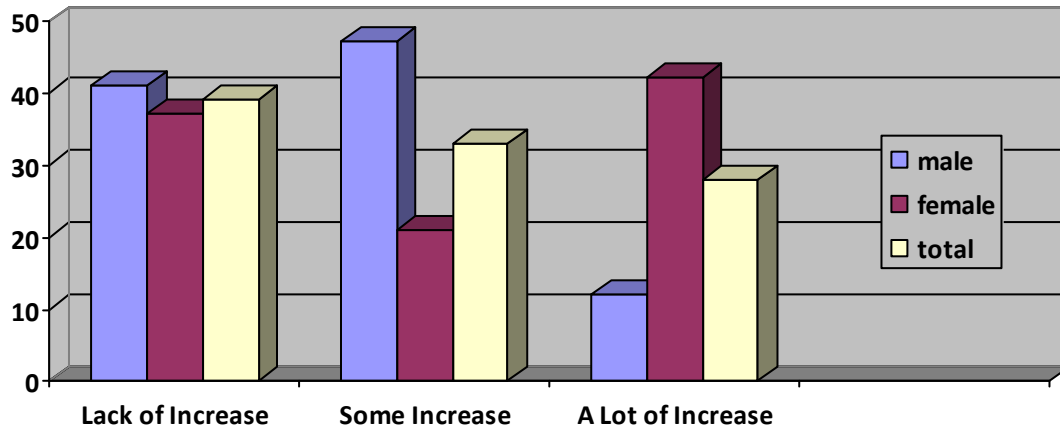


Figure 9: Levels of Appreciation of Heritage

During some of the focus group conversations, several students explained how our class had impacted their appreciation of their cultural and linguistic heritage.

When I asked, “Do you feel good about your Latino side?” Isabel, of Ecuadorian and Chilean heritage, expressed, “Yes, I feel more proud of the culture, the food, the way we speak” (May 3, 2010). In a similar fashion, Dinora, of Peruvian origin, expressed, “It is about the Latin culture in general. Each country has their own sayings, they have their own food, like in El Salvador everyone eats pupusas. Talking with Central Americans like Dania and Enid you find out that they are different” (May 3, 2010).

Chris’ heightened appreciation for his Cuban heritage did not overwhelm his appreciation of the Latino culture in general he was just becoming acquainted with. He explained, “It is really big, so many countries and every country has so many cultures. The Hispanic culture is so many new things. I learned a lot more. There is no one pattern. I am a bit more proud of my Hispanic heritage. I learned about all

these different cultures, Jose Marti and now I am more proud of Cuba; I was proud of Cuba but now I am more proud of Cuba; and we learned so much about different countries” (May 17, 2010). Carlito also expressed, “I like being Hispanic. Our class makes me feel better about being Hispanic. It makes me feel more proud of all the different countries in our class” (May 17, 2010). Nadine chose the more appropriate term *Latin* which refers to the panethnic existence: “Yes, I guess. I feel more comfortable about being Latin in the United States” (May 3, 2010).

Chris’ increased appreciation towards his heritage also motivated him to want to become more fluent in the language. Similarly several students expressed a heightened desire to become more fluent in Spanish. For example, to my question “Does my class make you want to speak more?” Dania answered, “Yes, I used to think it was just a language, but now I can tell how rich our language is. La lengua española es como un adorno<sup>17</sup>” (May 25, 2010). Likewise, Chris expressed his desire to continue learning how to speak Spanish better. And Enid explained that, “I only spoke to my mother in English; now it is surprising that I am speaking to her in Spanish” (May 24, 2010). Karen explained the difference in the attitudes of her classmates: “Last year in our class nobody wanted to speak in Spanish, we all spoke in English even if the teacher wanted us to speak in Spanish. We just did not care. Well we would speak in Spanglish” (May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010).

#### *Finding Cultural Value in Connections to the Past*

Several students also demonstrated an appreciation to what connected them to their past histories and their ancestors. No student demonstrated a yearning as fervent as Nicolas, the former gang member in advanced classes, for a past he did not know

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<sup>17</sup> The Spanish language is like an ornament.



much about. During one of the focus groups' discussions, Nicolas expressed how much he liked ancient history, particularly his Aztec and Mayan histories: "I want to learn about Mayans and Aztecs. I feel connected because it is my culture; I am Mexican, Mayans love art. American history is boring, not enough background or ancient history. I like to read about what people are capable of doing; genocide and all of that. Some people break down and cry about it, but it happens. Not me. People make decisions that affect the whole world" (May 24, 2010). At the time of that conversation, Nicolas was taking Advanced Placement World History, which he considered his favorite class. After much search for a book that he enjoyed and after jointly deciding that he did not like reading fiction -- Nicolas insisted he disliked reading throughout the school year -- I found him one about Latin American history which included Aztec and Mayan history. In an essay that was the longest of any of my students and by far his best in the year, Nicolas wrote a detailed account of the history of his ancestors based on that book.

Karen, the student who found her national heritage to be rich, was also ardent about learning more about the history of her heritage. It looked as if the more she learned about Salvadorian history, the more satisfaction she gained from it. During the focus group conversation she said:

I wish I knew more about my ancestors. I just want to know what happened. I liked the book about Salvadorian children. It was about back in the time when the Salvadorian war started and my family was there. I actually saw the video about it. They went against each other. If my family had gotten killed I wouldn't be here right now. When I read that book I realized that a lot of children were suffering over there.

And it is kind of cool that an American woman adopted a kid over there...you know that is kind of cool. That is like awesome. You're like making something new. You are actually bringing another culture back to us. (May 11, 2010)

This deep connection between the two cultures/histories that Karen negotiated daily seemed to have left a strong impression on her.

The teachers I interviewed communicated a strong emphasis on helping students build connections to their roots in order to gain resilience. One teacher stated that,

Latino students always need to remember their roots: here they will mix the identification with their roots, their parents, their grandparents, other members of their family, food, and more. If they are not taught who they are, they will be floating in the air because they will never connect with their culture. To help them find who they are, their teachers need to help them build connections between Spanish and Spanglish and English, and help them see the connections between the Latin American countries, religions, and history. An "apellido hispano" (Hispanic last name) is not enough. It is essential to remind them of their origin. (May 10, 2010)

Several students had strong connections to people in their childhood experiences, some of which had taken place outside of the United States. They kept vivid memories of their family oral traditions as well as of the games they played as children. Some of the students seemed to transcend to the Latin country of their birth or to another state as they were transported to their pasts. Enid depicted a vivid memory she had of her childhood:

“Run, run, run!” Those words always come to my mind. Having the warm dust under my feet while playing soccer on the street next to my house. Every afternoon after school we went out to play baseball. We never missed a game. It did not matter if it rained or if it was too hot outside. When we used to break into teams I did not care what team I was in. Having a good time was all that mattered. When I went to Honduras this summer I looked at all of my childhood friends and remembered those times with them. No separation, short or long, will ever stop us from starting to play that game all over again. (May 26, 2010)

Enid became melancholy when she remembered her childhood in Honduras. Going back and being in touch with her old friends provided her with a meaningful sense of connection: “I miss those moments. My friends were very special. Our friendship grew each day. When I go to Honduras we make a bonfire in the patio of my house and we tell each other what has happened in our lives from the moment we separated” (May 26, 2010).

Enid’s sister, Yara, also had vivid memories about a game she played as a child in Honduras:

One of the games during my childhood in Honduras was “cebollita” (small onion). I played that game with all of my neighbors and the children of my godmother. During the game one kid had to find the mother hen, who was the strongest person, and the other children were like the baby chicks who would stand very close to the mother chicken. Then the eagle would come and try to pull the baby chicks from the mother hen. It was one of my favorite games when I was a little girl. (May 26, 2010)

While Enid and Yara had vivid memories of their childhoods in their nations of origin, Isabel, the student who intended to go to Harvard, expressed how she had none until she first visited Ecuador and met some of her relatives:

The first time I went to Ecuador, it was like a dream. I felt good in my heart, and very happy at the same time. When I left the airplane it felt pretty hot and humid. I looked at the sun, so bright, that it hurt my eyes to see the sky. The moment I met my cousins and uncles I felt so “*llena de gente*” (filled with people). I did not know that I had cousins and uncles/aunts. (March 23, 11)

While I had never heard the term *llena de gente* before, it made great sense to me since it vividly expressed the strong emotions Isabel felt when she was first surrounded by the relatives she had not met before.

Ana, the female who was mourning her deceased grandfather wrote, When I was a girl my favorite thing to do was spend the time with my grandfather. We went to the movies and he read me stories of his country. We went to play tennis in the high school. He was old but he still played with me. Those times mean the world to me since now my grandfather died, but I have those memories that I will never forget. (May 26, 2010)

The stories Ana remembered from her childhood came from both the oral and literary traditions. She wrote, “I don’t remember names of books I read when I was a little girl. I remember that my grandfather used to read me books about ghosts. And my mother always told me ghost stories when I was a girl. And my grandfather used to tell me stories about Bolivian drawings” (May 26, 2010). The last time I saw Ana, she told me she wanted to become an English teacher.

Enid, the outspoken 1.5 generation female of Honduran origin, tied her cultural background to the oral tradition transmitted by her grandfather: “There is also a lot of culture in my house. When my grandfather is with his grandchildren, he sits in his chair and starts telling legends or stories from when he was a child. I like to listen to all of the stories that my grandfather tells” (October 15, 2009).

Chris, the 1.5 generation male of Cuban origin, also perceived his grandmother as the transmitter of culture “I have had a little bit of experience with my culture. My grandmother always teaches me new foods that she cooks for the tradition of eating meals with the family. She also shows me photos and tells me stories from when she was a little girl” (October 15, 2009).

Only David, who arrived to the United States when he was seven, did not seem to have memories of his childhood in his country of origin: “I can’t remember my childhood [in Argentina]. Since I came from Argentina I barely brought memories. Time passes and you have to create room in your brain for new memories. I can barely remember my uncles and cousins” (October 15, 2009).

#### *Summary of Findings on Cultural and Linguistic Appreciation*

According to the linguistic and cultural identity questionnaire, the cultural appreciation of more than half of the students increased. It increased *a lot* for more females than males and it increased *some* for more males than females. While I was not surprised by these data, what took me by surprise was finding that the connection to their roots was a source of cultural appreciation and strength in itself for many of my students. While for some students that sense of connection had always been present, for others, there was a yearning to learn about their roots. Their connections

to their past were linked to people (mostly family), cultural and linguistic experiences, childhood memories, and stories. My findings supported what one of the teachers I interviewed expressed. In her words, “In heritage speakers classes we need to help them connect to their roots, to provide them with a sense of connection, if not they would be up in the air. That will help them feel more grounded” (October 10, 2009).

As I did my best to get my students acquainted with what I have always perceived to be the richness of my heritage’s language and culture, I noticed how, while some did not really grow to appreciate it, others acted as if they were genuinely enlightened. For example, 1.5 generation Chris’ interest in his national and panethnic heritage turned into enthusiasm as he learned more about it. As for a notable number of students, Chris’ initial limited Spanish usage became more fluent as he demonstrated much more interest in improving his Spanish skills. Others like 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Karen, who had much love for her Salvadorian heritage thanks to her mother’s constant reminders, was extremely delighted to learn much more about what she had always instinctively loved. And Nicolas, who was in transition between a negative and a positive sense of identity, was eager to learn about a remote past that would make him feel more connected. I was glad to hear recently that, after much keeping on at it, he finally convinced his father to take the family to Central America. Last summer Nicolas finally visited the Mayan ruins in Guatemala, the country of half of his heritage.

## Conclusion

Regarding my students' linguistic identity, slightly more than half of my students indicated that they spoke English better than Spanish, including a higher percentage of males and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students. More females and 1.5 generation revealed more bilingual tendencies than their counterparts. While all students demonstrated versatility in their language use, changing languages depending on whom they spoke with, females demonstrated more versatility in the different combinations they used.

Most students preferred to read and write in English. In contrast to speaking preference, slightly more males than females preferred to read in both English and Spanish separately. Females were less versatile in reading than in speaking since most preferred English only. Moreover, males exhibited more bilingual tendencies in reading than in speaking. More 2<sup>nd</sup> than 1.5 generation students preferred to read in English only. The percentage of 1.5 generation students who preferred to write in both English and Spanish separately doubled the percentage of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students who preferred to do that. Similarly to speaking preference, females differed from males in their more varied preferred reading language choices which included Spanish only and different combinations of Spanish and English.

Regarding cultural experiences, they lived a borderlands existence between heritage culture and American culture. A small percentage of my students indicated no difference between home culture and school culture. A greater number of 2<sup>nd</sup> than 1.5 generation students considered their homes to be very different from the school

culture. Having parents from different national backgrounds was an additional factor in the already complex identity of my students.

As the labels project indicated, my students had multiple identities. While older students had begun to explore their social identities, younger students demonstrated that they were either starting or had not yet started exploring their social identities. Two of my tenth graders were showing evidence of entering a strong exploration process.

Most students did not identify monoculturally or as unhyphenated Americans but, instead, used a variety of hyphenated combinations, mostly national and/or national/panethnic. Salvadorians mostly identified in national/panethnic terms, and students of dual national Latin American heritage identified mostly in national terms. More than half of my students demonstrated *some* or *a lot* of increase in cultural appreciation. While the majority of males demonstrated *some* increase in cultural appreciation, the majority of females demonstrated *a lot* of increase. More 1.5 males indicated no increase than the other groups, perhaps because some of them had already felt appreciation. Several students demonstrated a desire to learn about their histories.



## CHAPTER 5 – BECOMING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHER IN THE PROCESS OF ENGAGING LATINO STUDENTS IN LITERACY

In this chapter I provide a detailed description of how I, as an action researcher who used the anthropological framework, drew on my students' linguistic and cultural experiences and identities in order to become more culturally responsive in my approach to engaging them in Spanish literacy. I answer the following two questions:

- 1) How do I attempt to draw on my students' linguistic and cultural experiences, voice, and agency as a guide to teach them literacy?
- 2) How do I guide my students' exploration of their cultural and linguistic identity through culturally relevant literary topics they identify with?

To engage in my action research I relied on two processes. The first process, which I present in the first section of this chapter, involved drawing on my students' perspectives as well as on my own perspectives and those of the five teachers I interviewed. In the second main section of this chapter I present the second kind of process which involved the strategies I implemented in order to become a culturally responsive teacher. These strategies included the ways in which I drew on the characteristics of the Latino community, student agency, and a reading model. They

also had to do with how I guided my students through their identity exploration via literary topics. In chapter six I present the outcome of my action research.

### Drawing on Perspectives

In this section I explain how what I learned about my students' linguistic, cultural and reading experiences impacted my teaching as I was trying to become a culturally responsive teacher. I illustrate how I followed my students' voices and agency in order to make my pedagogy more conducive to reaching them to the best of my ability. I describe how I drew on what I already knew and learned about the characteristics of the Latino community to make my classroom atmosphere and my role as a teacher more culturally responsive. Moreover, I explain how the opinions of the teachers I interviewed regarding the need to help students build connections and explore their identity impacted my teaching. In the first segment I address the topic of my perspectives.

### *Drawing on My Own Perspectives*

As the teacher of Latino students, I drew on my own tacit understandings about the Latino culture in its national as well as in its panethnic sense. I had an extensive amount of knowledge about Latin American/Spanish culture, language, dialects, and literature thanks to growing up in a bicultural household and to my academic training. I had also been born to cultural and social capital which helped me grow up with a positive sense of identity. Being labeled or identified as a racial minority by society did not damage my sense of identity. In my national heritage, during the first part of my life, I was part of mainstream society. On the other hand, as a Latina living in the United States during the second half of my life, I have learned what it means to live

as a minority person, never fully belonging to mainstream society, marginalized. After over 30 years of living in the United States, I continue living a borderlands existence. As Anzaldúa (1999) explains, “It’s not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Not comfortable but home” (p. 19).

My binational heritage – Puerto Rican and Venezuelan – has also added complexity to my cultural and linguistic lenses. Thanks to my dual background, my students with similar experiences and I developed an additional common bond: we not only saw the world through the experience of living as Latinos in the United States, but also as the children of parents whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds could be quite different.

I possessed tacit understanding about the community-oriented aspects of the Latino/Latin American/Spanish culture. I grew up in a highly interactive culture which often regarded the individualism characteristic of the American culture as negative. Community felt quite familiar to me and it was what I worked so much to create in my classroom. I also experienced, first-hand, the oral tradition, especially through my beloved Venezuelan grandmother, my best friend. Additionally, as part of my students’ ethnic group, I saw the need to act as much more than a traditional teacher. I needed to act as a mediating agent, almost as a *godmother* in the Latino sense in order to maximize my students’ possibilities. In a way I tried hard to treat them as if they were my own flesh and blood. As with my own children, I toiled for them to move forward, not only academically, but also in developing a positive sense of identity. I wanted my students to see value in their heritage, in their parents’ cultures. As a possessor of cultural and social capital, I valued many aspects of the

Latino culture and believed in the richness of the Spanish language/dialects and Latin American/Spanish/Latino literature and music. And I tried to transmit those values to them. I intended for them to start questioning the way society had devalued them by labeling and identifying them as other people's children. I meant for my students to value/revalue the richness of what was an intrinsic part of their identities as immigrants or children of immigrants who could eventually become bilingually engaged with literacy to their own benefit. As I demonstrate next, I also tried to apply what I learned from the expert teachers.

#### *Drawing on Teachers' Perspectives*

While I and the teachers that I interviewed had our tacit understandings of the Latino culture in common, their expertise made all of the difference in my teaching. Some of their ideas based on their extended experience helped me understand how best to draw from my students' cultural and linguistic experiences and potential. Those teachers' perspectives helped me consider all of the possible connections I could guide my students to develop such as connections to the past, as well as their national connections to their heritage and panethnic connections to the lives of other Latinos in the United States. The expert teachers were convinced that helping students build or rebuild these connections were key to their academic achievement as well as to their personal wellbeing. They also understood the importance of bringing in their home cultures -- oral tradition included -- to the classroom in order to bridge the Latino students' borderlands experience.

Those teachers' input on the issue of Latino/a student identity was also valuable. They all agreed that identity must be 100% integrated in the Spanish for

Heritage Speakers curriculum. The program of studies was considered superficial by them. Some of them had devoted time and energy to transform the curriculum into a more culturally responsive one at the county level without much success. Despite their efforts, the program of studies was still in draft form, the exact copy of the curriculum for regular Spanish learners. Nevertheless, while they tried their best to follow the required curriculum, they went out of their way to fill the gaps they perceived in order to address the real needs of their students. Those teachers understood that, by doing this, they would make all the difference. They instinctively acted as culturally responsive teachers even if they were not familiar with the term. Those teachers regarded the role of the teacher of heritage speakers as crucial in the lives of those children. The expectations for themselves as teachers went beyond the description of a regular teacher. Their role was much more personal and involved. They had a sense of personal significance and understood the need to guide their students to understand, question, and transform the inequalities of society which treated and identified them as *other people's children* (Delpit, 1988). The expert teachers were all convinced that developing the bilingualism of their students would help them academically and personally. Those teachers also led me to understand the importance of listening to my students as I demonstrate next.

#### *Drawing on Student Perspectives*

I spent a significant part of my day listening to students' voices via individual conversations, class, homeroom and focus group discussions, and via close inquiry into their journal entries, essays, questionnaires, and projects. I remembered throughout the year what one of the teachers I interviewed said about developing

Latino students' voices: "Just make them talk a lot" (October 10, 2009). That comment coincided with Diaz-Greensberg's (2003) research about developing her focus group participants' voices through repeated interviews. With Diaz-Greensberg's findings and the expert teachers' recommendations in mind, I started class most days with either a question about their impressions on strategies I used before, on what we read the day before, on a topic I had already presented or was getting ready to present, and more. I also started each week with questions around the theme of the week, which normally had to do with an identity-related topic. One day I wrote in my journal: "Listening to kids is what I spend most of my day doing. They guide me through my topics" (February 14, 2010).

An unanticipated phenomenon for me was the large number of students who were willing to join my focus groups. More than half of the students, 20/36, who had consented to participate in my research also agreed to participate in focus groups. Before I made an open invitation to join my focus groups, I read out loud some excerpts from Nieto's (1999) book featuring the opinions of diverse youth. As I was reading I noticed that the majority of my students were very attentive. I then made an open invitation to all of the students who had consented to participate in my research to join my focus groups which, as I indicated in chapter three, became five in total. Part of my explanation while I was inviting them was that I wanted to listen to their voices and share what I would learn from them with a larger audience of educators. I added that I wanted to create a curriculum that they could identify with and motivated them to read, speak and write in Spanish more. Yara asked, "Are you writing a book?" I answered "Yes, it is my thesis. I have written three chapters and, if you want

to, you will be part of the remaining chapters. Do you want to take a part in it?"

Yara's eyes widely opened without responding to my question.

Through the focus group discussions I also discerned my students' eagerness to express their opinions. While some students were clearly much less eloquent than others, the least eloquent eventually opened up and expressed ideas which changed the direction of my research. In fact, a couple of times some of the least eloquent students told me that no one had asked for their opinions before and that teachers should do that more often. At the end of the allotted time for discussions, several students offered to come back to future discussions without my asking. In my journal I wrote the following about my listening to my students' voices: "Today I asked them several questions about my teaching. Natalie told me that she likes it how I listen so much to them, like I really listen to what they have to say" (May 3, 2010).

Initially, the least communicative of the focus groups was the one that consisted of my five mentees. While they had become quite comfortable in speaking with me about a variety of topics, their expression suddenly became limited when I asked them to share their own reflections about issues of identity and literacy. They were seemingly quite unused to being asked their opinions about such issues. Perhaps it was that they had never been asked or that they had never really clearly reflected about those issues. But their initial short phrases eventually became longer sentences. The expression of one of those students, Carlos, in reference to the "picture perfect lives" that only Americans can live, eventually shifted the direction of my research. The other four groups were more articulate from the beginning.

Some of my students were clearly starting to demonstrate their capacity for thinking critically as Margarita's entry below demonstrated. While my emphasis was on developing their voices, I could see that, if given the proper emphasis, some of our conversations had the potential of becoming quite critical in terms of my students' perspectives on American society's inequality and their role in changing it. Ideally, students' capacity for critical thinking would be developed in the next level, Spanish for Heritage Speakers 3.

Sometimes when you are 2nd generation and you enroll your child in elementary school, they ask you what language you speak at home. If you answer that you speak in Spanish they automatically send your child to ESOL. That happened to my brother and taking him out of ESOL was not easy! When my mother was registering me in elementary school they asked her where she came from and, since we are from Nicaragua, they sent me to ESOL even though I had been here more time than in Nicaragua. (May 10, 2010)

By listening to my students' voices I learned a lot about their linguistic, cultural and reading experiences.

#### *Drawing on Students' Linguistic Experiences*

At the beginning of the school year, English was the prevalent language used by my students despite my requirement to speak only in Spanish. As compared to the regular Spanish classes I had taught for eighteen years, making my Latino students speak only in Spanish was much harder than I anticipated. Karen's words made me wonder why my students were not speaking in Spanish: "Last year in our Spanish class nobody wanted to speak in Spanish. We all spoke in English even if the teacher



wanted us to speak in Spanish. We just did not care. The most we tried was speaking Spanglish.” Was it simply because English use was more natural for them? Was it because they resisted Spanish as the language that had less cultural capital? Or was it because of some combination of both factors? I wondered.

As weeks went by and as I pressured my students to speak, read and write more in Spanish, I was surprised to find out that the majority of my students were, in fact, much more fluent in Spanish than they had seemed all along. Moreover, as I discovered the versatility of my students (chapter four) I noticed that bilingualism was latent in all of my students, in some more than in others. When I came to that realization, I decided that I needed to explore my students’ zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), the level where I could reach them to bring them up to the next level. Also, as I was inquiring for the positive aspects of my students’ cultural experiences, I realized that I had been oblivious to the most obvious one. Their form of linguistic expression, whether Spanglish or Spanish/English bilingualism, was in itself a valuable resource. I also understood that the more my students read, wrote, and spoke in Spanish, the stronger the voices which reflected their agency would become. According to one of the teachers I interviewed, “bilingual Latino students do much better in school than monolingual ones” (October, 16, 2009) which confirmed what the literature I had reviewed suggested (Leopold, 1970; Peal & Lambert, 1962; Rumbaut, 1990). I also decided that respecting my students’ level and choice of language was an important way of welcoming their agency.

By taking advantage of my students' linguistic versatility without losing sight of their English preference, I intended to trigger in my students a different sense of what speaking Spanish meant to them. Since I wanted to fully develop my students' potential and possibilities, my goal was to guide them to value their heritage language and to understand the advantages of becoming fully bilingual. The words of another teacher I interviewed kept coming to my mind: "Students don't love one language or the other; but we need to show them the beauty in Spanish" (October 16, 2009). I wanted them to identify more bilingually, even if their identity was initially more as Spanglish speakers. So from the beginning of the year I continued insisting that students express themselves more in Spanish. Nevertheless, I acknowledged their use of English and Spanglish as natural and allowed them to pick books for their independent reading in any language of their preference. But I took advantage of every opportunity to make them read in Spanish whether out loud or by listening to someone else read. Moreover, the songs they picked for their music projects could contain some English. And, at times, I read the class fiction or non-fiction pieces which contained some English or Spanglish. But I required my students to only use Spanish during the discussions or in the journal entries which followed those readings. When it came to Tertulia book discussions, I allowed only Spanish. I decided that speaking about books they had chosen to read and may have identified with, while probably challenging, would be a structured way of developing their Spanish fluency.

I also noticed that many students were better Spanglish than bilingual speakers. However, as the journal entries and questionnaires confirmed, most students

considered bilingualism to be a higher form of expression than Spanglish. Karen's comment illustrated what some students thought about speaking Spanglish: "My father says that I speak ghetto Spanish". That finding made me decide to become more open towards the use of Spanglish. With that in mind, I officially acknowledged Spanglish in front of my students by reading some of the research by Stavans (2003) defending the use of Spanglish as natural for borderlands people. But mostly, I was going to acknowledge its existence as a transitional vehicle towards becoming more bilingual. Thus I subsequently read out loud several of the Spanglish words presented in that book and then asked my students to translate them into Spanish. The acknowledgment of Spanglish was challenging for me since after 30 years in the United States, I have remained completely bilingual as my English fluency has improved and my Spanish has not deteriorated due to continuing to speak, read and write in Spanish often.

Unlike reading and speaking, when it came to writing, I required Spanish only. Writing in Spanish about what they had read in either language was a step forward in the development of their Spanish literacy. And as several students told me, many were happily surprised at how much Spanish they were capable of writing and how much more fluent in writing they became as time passed. Because of the non-spontaneous nature of writing, they could spend time thinking about words and phrases in Spanish to express what they could so easily express if they spoke and wrote in English. I read and corrected all of their essays which they were required to rewrite. If they did not rewrite, I would badger them until they did. I also read all of their journal entries and either summarized them in front of the class the next day or

selected some entries to read aloud with the authors' permission and without mentioning their names. I thought that listening to/about student entries would be an additional vehicle to increase their literacy and to strengthen their voice.

Talking in Spanish during Tertulia book discussions was more challenging due to the spontaneity of the process. Nolo, for example, who could speak so passionately about his newly found books in English, became much less eloquent when I asked him to speak in Spanish. Students' use of the dual language which perhaps reflected their borderlands experience proved difficult to channel spontaneously into only one language, the language that only reflected one-half of their experience.

While I strove so that my students would accept their level of language where it was, I endeavored so that they would see the value of becoming more fluent in Spanish. I wanted to help them see value in their current linguistic reality in addition to the possibilities that their language repertoire provided as a more sophisticated and beneficial form of expression. Just as I did with other identity-related topics, I read research to my students about the benefits of becoming fully bilingual; of being able to think, speak, write, and feel in two languages; of being able to see the relativity of the world through two very different lenses. I intended for their linguistic identity to become transformed into possibilities instead of stagnant in limitations. In the next section I describe how I drew on my students' borderlands experiences.

#### *Drawing on Students' Borderlands Experiences*

As illustrated in chapter four as well as in Appendix F, data gathered through various research instruments led me to conclude that my students lived borderlands

existences. As my focus groups informed me, several students also perceived their lives to be different socioeconomically from those of middle class white Americans. Moreover, as the identity projects illustrated, my students had multi-dimensional identities (Table 9). A noteworthy number of students, both male and female, identified musically; several males identified athletically; and a couple of students identified in terms of sexual preference. I also found several students who openly expressed that they did not identify in cultural or linguistic terms. Moreover, I became aware that a notable number of my students expressed “heritage” identities. Attracted by the history topic, these students expressed a longing for a past that had nothing to do with growing up in mainstream America or in close contact with people who identified as unhyphenated Americans. A topic that I only referred to once through one reading, “La reforma migratoria para el 2010” (Appendix C) was legality. While I was aware that legality was a relevant issue in the lives of many of my students, I chose not to dwell on it since I did not intend to find out that information about my students. Throughout my career I have always chosen that path in an effort to treat all of my students as equally deserving of all of the considerations for legal citizens.

Through their writing samples I also perceived that, while some students clearly valued some of the most typical aspects of their heritage cultures, the majority of the students, mostly 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, had limited knowledge of their national and panethnic heritage. The first time I asked my students during a class discussion to comment on the qualities of the Latino culture, *boxing* was the only answer I received from one 2<sup>nd</sup> generation male student. When I asked the student to clarify, he

explained that our culture is violent. That afternoon after much reflection I realized that the sense of social identity of many of my students had probably been negatively impacted by American society's identification of them as marginal beings. I also remembered the literature I had reviewed about the at-risk identity of the Latino teenager and about the negative impact suffered by 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants who had lost contact with their roots. Moreover, I thought about the words uttered by one of the teachers I interviewed: "Many 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Latinos have no sense of pride in their cultural heritage. First generation students come with pride in their heritage but eventually 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students lose it" (October 16, 2009). Another teacher had said bluntly that "pride was bitten out of them" (October 16, 2009). Those comments above reflect the importance of helping immigrant students, especially 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, discover value in their heritage. My students needed to become better informed about the many characteristics of their national and panethnic heritage in order to question society's identification and start creating their own sense of social identity.

That day I experienced a wakeup call. As their teacher, my duty was to help them discover the positive aspects of the Latino culture so they would come up with a more positive sense of identity. If my students failed to see the positive aspects of their cultural identity, it was my own failure as their teacher. So I decided to take on a course of actions which rarely stopped. However, as convinced and committed as I was, I often struggled with how to acquaint my students with the most positive aspects of their heritage. While I never stopped believing in my students' potential, I was well aware of the socioeconomic circumstances that often negatively impacted

their academic achievement. My journal entry below illustrates some of my reflections:

I came home wondering about how to acknowledge the positive aspects of my students' heritage. I started thinking about the many impediments in some of their lives like serving in jail, lack of self discipline, poverty, split families, absent parents, and more. Starting a task takes many a very long time and finishing it takes them way longer than I think it should. Despite the fact that I took them to the library on Wednesday, many of them did not have a book today. Several of them also owe fines to the library which they cannot pay. However, other students have surprised me with their choices and apparent sudden interest in reading (September 24, 2009).

While that journal entry illustrated my initial struggle with my perceptions of the obstacles ahead, my conversation with the expert teachers helped me come to the realization that my students were full of possibilities. One teacher explained that, The difference between the cultures is enriching...their religious knowledge, the respect to their parents although questionable, deep cleanliness, food, reverence to the elderly. Lately they are coming more literate. They are intelligent but many of them have not had the chance of developing their intelligence to the fullest. They have the common sense and know the consequences to their actions; they are very strong. They know how to struggle, fight. The illegal immigrants are the ones who work the hardest and who want to get ahead (October 16, 2009).

That teacher added a list of positive aspects, half of which I had not previously thought of: "the music and dances, the food, the sense of family, the ethic of working hard, supporting their family and taking care of their siblings, and their

own experiences. Some of them have a lot of knowledge about poverty. They have lots of experiences” (October 16, 2009).

I suddenly saw all kinds of possibilities, including the possibilities that each of my students, my Peruvian assistant, and I brought to the classroom. The first action I took the next day was bringing my students five articles in Spanish about different Latino and Latin American cultural aspects to read and share with the class. I wanted my students to see positive aspects, not only about their national heritage, but also what tied them panethnically to other members of the class as the articles made reference to different national origins. I spent a great part of the year attempting to do that through the literary topics I acquainted my students with. Exploring the positive aspects of my students’ heritage became a classroom community endeavor since whatever students learned they shared with their class.

I often asked my students to have conversations with their parents if they had connections with the topic we were discussing at the moment. For example, when we studied Peru I asked Miguel and Dinora to talk to their Peruvian parents about the Peru topic and to bring any information and typical artifacts. I also assigned my students to interview a family member (Appendix I). Some of the questions I provided referred to the positive aspects of their cultures. As a final project I asked my students to create a book for children based on what they found out in the interview. Most interviewees had expressed some positive aspects of their cultures, for example, what they missed in their countries of origin. Only Margarita’s interviewee expressed dissatisfaction with a home culture – lamenting the way homosexuals were treated in Honduras.



The easiest way of guiding my students was by being open to what they naturally recognized as their heritage values. Whenever I saw that possibility in a student, I asked him/her to share with the class. Several students started discovering some of the positive cultural characteristics in the independent readings. They often chose books that informed them about something meaningful related to their heritage. For example, David, the student who felt closer to his Argentinean than to his Bolivian heritage, chose to read the Argentinean classic about gaucho culture, *Martin Fierro*. His father was an educated man who encouraged David to read Argentinean literature. He had recommended that David read that book which he (the father) had read five times. By being able to choose his own reading, David had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with one of the finest pieces of Latin American literature. The book had the Spanish and translated English versions. David mostly read the English section but I recommended he read the Spanish version as well. If he got closely acquainted to the Spanish version he would have the chance of learning about the richness of the Argentinean dialect as well. This episode was also meaningful bearing in mind how, according to research, one of the causes of downward assimilation, for boys mostly, is the lack of communication between first generation parents and their 2<sup>nd</sup> generation children. In that case, David's father used this opportunity to inform his son about an Argentinean valued literary work at the same time that they were probably developing a closer bond.

For Dinora, whose father had recently been deported to his native Peru, being acquainted with Peruvian topics was quite meaningful: "I did research about my own country and now I know more about it" (May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010). She also expressed

appreciation that my assistant was Peruvian: “Now that Mr. Robles is in our class, I am learning how beautiful our culture is. I knew my culture of origin was beautiful but now I know it more and more” (May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010). This school year Mr. Robles has become their teacher and the Peruvian students often tell me how delighted they feel that their teacher shares their heritage. As I noticed that other students seemed as interested in doing research about their heritage I continued assigning research projects throughout the year. Bringing the portable lab to our classroom became quite ordinary. Students would research mainly in groups that shared a similar or different heritage and then they would report or write about it. When I changed classrooms starting the second semester (I ended up going to two different classrooms), I reserved the lab next door about every couple of weeks. Research was one more way of getting my students acquainted with a great variety of topics that would draw on their agency to guide their search for their own understanding of their heritage. My journal entry below describes that experience.

Today was a much better day. Students researched for news about their countries of origin. Yesterday I found out the specific country they are from. They all seemed pretty engaged on what they were researching. One student asked me if she could create a poster; another asked me if she could create a power point. The most fascinating news was about a volleyball game on the border between Mexico and the United States. The student who gave that presentation is of Mexican/American heritage. I keep trying for my students to discover/understand their own heritage on their own terms. (October 10, 2010)

I also found out the origin/s of my students and drew on that knowledge to plan my lessons. For example, when I found out that the Salvadoran culture was the most widely represented in my class, I devoted several classes to reading about El Salvador. As we were exploring Salvadoran maps, I asked each one of my Salvadoran students to show the region of their family's origin to the class. I also allowed Liza, a student of Salvadoran heritage, to call her father who had recently been in El Salvador to ask him the name of the city he had visited. When she asked if she could show the class several items that her father had brought from El Salvador, I allotted class time the next day for her presentation. She proudly delivered a short presentation in Spanish. At another time I emailed my former student, who was then living in El Salvador, to send me Salvadoran legends which I shared with the class.

As I indicated in chapter four, by the end of the year several students expressed a heightened sense of appreciation for the positive aspects of their cultural heritage. In fact, learning about the positive aspects of the Latino culture, was their third top reason for their increase in reading interest. A lot had to do with their increased knowledge about their heritage. As I also indicated in chapter four, several students felt more connected to their parents, communities and roots by knowing more about their heritage. While several students learned about their national heritage, various students also expressed positive comments about the panethnic experience of being Latino in general. I attempted to show them that there is a lot of diversity in the Latino culture. They could find positive aspects in the diversity of their common heritage. In a way I wanted to take them away from the generalizing

*Hispanic* stereotype (Oboler, 1995) and to instill in them knowledge that would provide them with an additional connection with the Latino community at large.

One of the projects I asked my students to do was the poetry/music project. My thinking was that, as their identity projects had indicated, many of my students identified musically. Thus I meant for them to make a connection between their musical, linguistic, and cultural identities. As several of the teachers I interviewed told me, Latino music with its common and yet quite diverse characteristics, should be considered and used as a vehicle to teach literacy to Latino students. I saw a lot of possibility in drawing connections between poetry and music which I did mostly on Fridays. I often brought a drum for a student to beat on while another student or I read a poem. When I taught AP Spanish Literature I had discovered that music was a form of literacy that students strongly identified with. In fact, the first time I taught poetry, I used *reguetón* (Latino rap) to teach my students about rhyme. I openly expressed to my students the great joy I still derive from listening and dancing to Latino music after 30 years of living in the United States. I thought that Latino music could bring forward my students' agency and voice by presenting their favorite piece to their peers. Just as with their independent reading choices, allowing them their own music selection was a way of acknowledging their agency.

With those thoughts in mind I decided to ask my students to do a music project. But first, I asked my assistant for recommendations on musical projects and he recommended for students to write their own songs. However, when I asked my students' opinion, the overwhelming majority preferred to find a Latino song. So I

decided to follow my students' voice and agency. I asked them to choose their favorite Spanish or Spanglish song or poem, present it to the class, and explain why.

Deciding to serve as my students' role model before they presented their songs, I presented two songs and one poem to them in an attempt to bridge poetry and music. I shared my favorite Puerto Rican song, Nuyorican song and Venezuelan poem. I personalized what I presented as much as possible, first of all since my dual heritage comes from both Puerto Rico and Venezuela. When I read the Venezuelan poem, "Los hijos infinitos (Infinite Sons and Daughters)," I expressed my belief that having children may make people more sensitive to other children. I also talked about the extremes of anguish and joy experienced by parents. Moreover, I explained how meaningful the two songs "Verde luz" and "Boricua en la luna" were to me since they reminded me of half of my heritage, the half of my beloved deceased father.

When I was introducing the very short "Verde luz" I asked my students if they had ever heard a song that was so short but meant so much. Isabel answered, "Yes, a song from church," at which moment I connected singing with Dania, the student whose father was a minister and who loved to sing. So I invited her to sing with Isabel. Soon Enid, Isabel, and Dania were singing their church song with great spontaneity in one of those magical teaching moments. Another magical moment was when Nicolas presented the song "Soy un idiota" (I am an idiot) with a sad and sincere expression on his face. He explained that he dedicated those lines to his father, thanks to whom he had abandoned gang life. We all listened to him quite seriously. No one laughed, no one moved with the music. It was a solemn moment and it felt to me at that moment as though we were all like a family. As my focus

group discussions informed me, the music unit was among the most appreciated by many students and one that opened their horizons to learn about other forms of Latino music. That finding made me realize that music could be indeed an effective vehicle to teach Spanish literacy to Latino students.

As some of the teachers I interviewed shared, the topic of Latino food could also be regarded as an important vehicle to connect learning to students' home environments and as a means to learn about the existing connections between Latin American food products. I also saw the health benefits of many Latino products as a positive aspect of the Latino heritage. As I informally asked my students what they knew about Latino foods, most demonstrated limited knowledge based solely on what they ate at home. I also noticed that they knew little about the health benefits of many Latin American products.

I began the food unit by bringing to class an article that identified the healthiest Latino food products and a food pyramid in Spanish. I personalized the unit by bringing *Excelencia en la cocina*, a cookbook written by my Venezuelan grandmother. They were in awe when they saw her photo on the back cover and some commented on my resemblance to her. I used the glossary compiled by my grandmother with the variety of terms used by different Latin American countries and Spain to refer to the same food product. I then asked my students to start working on their food projects. They simply had to choose one product, to inquire about its health benefits, and to present their findings in class. In the next section I describe how I drew on my students' reading experiences to impact their engagement in literacy.

### *Drawing on Students' Literary Experiences*

Early in the fall semester, when I conducted an informal poll, I noticed that several of my students did not like reading. Those findings, which I detail in chapter six, were confirmed when my students completed the questionnaire near the end of the year (Appendix J). From the beginning I knew I had a great number of resistant and semi-resistant readers. Those students considered reading to be basically a boring activity, mostly confined to English classes where their opinion as to what to read was never asked, where the reading topics had little to do with the lives they lived.

Since my goal was making my students identify more as readers, I decided to first consult the expert teachers about their students' self-perceptions as readers and what they did to positively impact their reader identities. One of the teachers answered:

Very few of our students identify as readers; they don't have the habit; their tradition is much more oral like the stories told by their grandparents. Our oral tradition is very rich. They love to see soap operas, for example. They love reading together and discussing what they read in group. (October 16, 2009)

Then I asked them, "Do you think your students may be resistant to reading in English for English is the colonizer language and in Spanish because it is the colonized language?" One teacher responded,

They prefer to read in the language they feel more comfortable with. Some kids have never read in Spanish; they have read much more in English. In our classes something happens that they suddenly wake up. The second language is Spanish. The language of world education is English. The parents are not very available to help

them become fluent in Spanish. They must learn Spanish to improve their identity. In this country the Latinos should not stay with just one language. It will not be beneficial to them. (October 16, 2009)

With those comments in mind, I began to closely observe my students' behavior in regards to reading. I directly asked students questions about their preferred reading topics and reading format. I also began to detect the topics they identified with via our class and homeroom discussions, their writing samples, and their book choices. As I illustrate later in this chapter I also started to implement aspects of the oral tradition in our literary interactions.

My students' voices guided me to take several courses of action. For example, early in the year I discovered that the majority of them found most textbook readings boring. I found out by asking my classes what they thought of the textbook readings. Miguel answered "Those readings are for old people, not for high school kids." No one contradicted him and several students nodded. Ana, in my other class, recommended reading "more drama books, not about donkeys [one of the stories in the textbook], more real stories, more drama, like girls fighting for a man" (May 11, 2010). I could also tell that most textbook readings were not interesting for many of my students by observing my most avid reader, Chloe, fall asleep during many of them. In addition, she often left whole test sections about those reading selections blank and wrote "I did not pay attention" next to the questions.

The day Miguel uttered the comment that the readings were for old people, I asked his class about the most interesting books that they had ever read. Most students agreed that the *Bluford High School* series, about the lives of African



American teenagers, was their favorite. I eventually noticed that the closest books about Latino teenager topics to that series were Gary Soto's. Later I discovered that some of my most resistant readers enjoyed books on marginalized topics such as Reymundo Sanchez's stories about books about the experiences of former gang members. Furthermore, when I found out that several students were interested in non-fiction, especially history, I started thinking about ways to do research about interesting current and/or historical aspects of their heritage and history. For example, knowing how valuable the World Cup event was for the majority of my students, and how a good number of my students identified with the topics of soccer and history, I asked them to work on a project on the history of the World Cup during the time of that event.

I started bringing a great variety of readings to class which I described in detail in chapter three (Appendix D) and will further explore in the second part of this chapter. My students' initial appearance of boredom during textbook readings often turned into acute attention as several of the supplementary readings ranged through different borderlands topics. As I will explain later, the greater length of many of the borderlands-related journal entries, the often personalized and/or emotional written reactions, and the students' intense increased focus also demonstrated interest in those topics.

Several students also recommended a connection between books and movies. "When we finish the book, [we should] watch the movie," Ana suggested. Miguel recommended "more books like the ones that are like movies that you can visualize, more drama. We should read something more interesting." Miguel and Ana were

indeed pleased to watch in my “Stand and Deliver,” “Casi una mujer,” and “Bajo la misma luna” which I described in chapter three. As students also told me, I made the mistake of showing “Casi una mujer” before we had finished reading *Cuando era puertorriqueña*. Knowing the content and conclusion of the story through the movie reduced their interest in following the reading.

My students’ reactions to these movies demonstrated that many of them could relate to or identify with the movies’ borderlands topics. For example, most journal entries written after watching “Bajo la misma luna” were longer than the usual -- closer to one page and-a-half or two instead of the required one page -- and several expressed a great deal of emotion and examples of real people they knew, including themselves, who had gone through similar experiences as the boy protagonist. Later in this chapter I explain in more detail how I used those movies to guide my students in their identity exploration and engagement in literacy.

Another student recommendation was a circular reading format which I tried many times and seemed to work as most of my students demonstrated more interest by participating more and by sharing more personal opinions. I will further explore that topic below under “Drawing on community.” Moreover, Miguel recommended reading the same book together to discuss during “La Tertulia” (book club). While that suggestion made sense to me, it came too late in the year to be able to start experimenting with a new Tertulia format.

Another habit that I developed from the beginning of the year was orally summarizing in front of the class the major themes the students had written about in their journal the day before. I often also read several of their entries with their

permission and without identifying who the authors were. Sometimes I read the entries of the students who, while quiet, expressed themselves quite well in writing. I did all of that with the goal of maximizing my students' agency, acknowledging and developing their voices, and further engaging them with literacy. One of the most productive experiences was when I read Tony's entry about labels, which led me to start a new focus that had a lot to do with my students' identity exploration.

Moreover, as I listened to my students throughout the year, I quickly realized how much they liked choosing their own books and disliked not having that freedom in their English classes. The following conversation among my homeroom students, all of whom had limited academic engagement, was quite significant. I thought that my action research would be the most meaningful if I could engage students with little academic engagement in literacy.

Carlos: "Teachers make us read boring books".

Jessie: "They should ask us, they never ask us. Or at least give us an option to what we like to read".

I also soon discovered my students' interest in topics that did not have much to do with belonging to the American middle class. As they were talking about not being able to choose their readings, they all agreed with Jessie's comment that, "It is complicated to be Hispanic and a teenager. Families are not perfect, a lot of drama. You cannot connect to the books you are asked to read in English class." Francisca also mentioned the difficulty of being judged as a Latina for "how you look." They also agreed that they were not "Americanized" which Carlos defined as "What white

people are like, like those big houses. They have everything they want like picture perfect lives” (May 20, 2010).

With this conversation and others that I detailed in chapter four in mind I decided to start bringing readings that had to do with the marginalization topic. In chapter three I provided the list of readings and in the second part of this chapter I will provide further information about the kinds of readings that I brought. The strategies I implemented to become a culturally responsive teacher are presented in the next section.

#### Strategies Implemented for Becoming a More Culturally Responsive Teacher

An important part of the process to become a culturally responsive teacher had to do with strategies. In order to optimally engage my students in literacy I needed to implement several strategies. One kind of strategy involved drawing on the characteristics of the Latino community. Another strategy entailed drawing on student agency and holding high expectations. One more kind of strategy had to do with drawing on a reading model. The last kind of strategy had to do with guiding my students to explore their linguistic and cultural identities.

#### *Drawing on the Characteristics of the Latino Community*

My goal throughout my action research was to teach to my students’ zones of linguistic and cultural proximal development. As I explained before in regards to my students’ linguistic zones of proximal development, I also tried to meet my students at their cultural zones of proximal development. Since I was aware of the disconnect between my students’ home and school lives, I attempted to bridge both by adopting several Latino cultural characteristics in my classroom and pedagogy. For that I relied

on my tacit knowledge of the Latino community, on my literature review, and on what I learned from conversations with the expert teachers. While I was aware that in several households literacy may have been less prevalent than oral tradition, I did not dwell on low literacy as a negative issue but, instead, drew on oral tradition as a characteristic that was full of possibilities. Again, as with legality, I did not attempt to inquire about the level of literacy of my students' parents in an effort to remain unbiased towards all of my students. I drew on the Latino oral tradition, the strong level of interaction between people, the pronounced focus on family or *familism* (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, 1995) and group (community) instead of on the individual. I did my best to create a setting that would seem natural to them, one that resembled a family or a community-oriented culture with a strong oral tradition.

Are books used as something we essentially talk about which connects us more to each other or is reading an activity that further isolates us? That was one of my first questions when I started my research. Since I was well aware that the oral tradition in some of my students' households was quite prevalent, I attempted to apply some of the interactive qualities of that tradition to most of our reading activities. In other words, I tried to make reading as naturally interactive as the oral tradition several of my students were probably familiarized with. I intended for them to perceive literacy in our classroom not as something distant but intimate and immediate, not separate from who we were but as natural as a conversation with a family member.

In contrast to English classes, my students never engaged in *Sustained Silent Reading*. All of the reading was done in group/s and I changed the seats often so the

students would interact with different people from different countries. As we read there was a lot of discussion connecting text to life experiences, theirs or mine. For example, as we were reading in *Cuando era puertorriqueña* about an incident in which the protagonist's teacher embarrassed her in front of the class, Isabel suddenly said, "Now I realize that my teacher was bad, that there was nothing wrong with me." Then Enid explained that, "When I was in Honduras my teacher asked me to write 'bueno' in Spanish and, because I had just come from the US, I could not write it. She hit me with a ruler and told me that I should go back to the US" (January 23, 2010).

I organized mostly communal literary experiences in which there was a lot of connection and interaction. Even written work was shared within the classroom community. At any time I would bring a new literary topic for discussion. Discussions started almost every class. With seating arrangement, what started as mainly straight lines became circles. I noticed that the majority of students opened up more when they sat in a circle. For some reason circles made conversations seem more intimate. I intended to have my students think that the book experience was one to talk about, to share. The Tertulia book clubs were the most formalized forms of literary interaction.

The reading that took place in my office during homeroom was also of the interactive type. My motto was, "Students who come to my office have to read." Typically there was someone reading aloud a piece which was often interrupted by my questions or by my students' comments about something in their lives the reading reminded them of. In my homeroom as well as in my Spanish classes, there was a great deal of intermingling of literary and real life talk which meant that book

characters and family/community members often seemed to exist in the same dimension. For instance, one day during homeroom when I was reading the synopsis of Cloe's newly acquired book which had to do with suicide, she said, "Did you know that the friend of Chica's [cousin] brother who was in jail committed suicide? And that Chica's brother was just placed in jail yesterday and that he will probably be deported?" (March 2, 2010)

While I intended for my students to see the unique characteristics in their heritage, I also meant to highlight the panethnic and to build community between students of different cultural backgrounds. I emphasized the possibilities of connection between my students' various countries of origin and dialects; their cultures and the American culture; their histories; their national and Latino literatures. I called attention to their commonality of experiences in regards to labels, moving often, immigration, obligations, childhood memories, gender roles, music, death, friendship, split families, and more. I also tried to highlight the connection with the older generations by asking them to interview a member of their family. Their increased fluency seemed to have also allowed them to better connect with their families and communities as several of them told me during focus group conversations which took place near the end of the school year. Moreover, I attempted to make them feel connected with each other by often changing their seats during class and Tertulia time. And I drew a bridge between inherited oral traditions and the strong literary tradition I acquired through my studies. As I detail under the *Death Topic* section below, I also wanted to bring on the universal through topics

such as death, spirituality, and the supernatural in connection with the magic realism so typical of our literature. We all told stories which bound us together.

Enid's words made me maximize my efforts of making my class format resemble a family gathering: "Our class has so much connectivity. I like how we change seats often and get to sit next to different people. It is like a community. We are all weird. I felt that Rafael [who had been incarcerated] was like my brother" (May 24, 2010). As I mentioned earlier, I often rearranged the seats to form circles. Moreover, I did not provide the same kind of structure I normally used to provide to my regular classes. For example, in the effort of creating a very interactive classroom culture, I did not ask students to raise their hands to speak but, instead, just asked them to speak one person at a time and to respectfully listen to each other. In my journal I described my fifth period:

Many times I step back and let their personalities run my class. Their personalities are unique; disrupt the normal pace of my class, but in a positive way. There is really not much linear, non-disrupted anything in this class but each child is so visible. (January 20, 2010)

Even our library visits became interactive as I explain next.

#### *Drawing on Community at the Library*

When we visited the library I paid attention to the kinds of interactions that took place between my students, particularly when two or more were looking at the same book or when one was showing a book that s/he had read to another. This kind of interactive behavior around books interested me since my focus throughout the year had always been that reading books should not necessarily be a "silent-sustained-



reading” activity as it is done in my school’s English classes. Instead I intended reading to be a more gregarious kind of activity which resembled the oral tradition; the interactive quality which I consider to be characteristic of the Latino culture. Despite the shortfalls of the Tertulia format I implemented, which I describe in chapter six, I still believe that it has great potential for engaging Latino students mostly for its communal quality.

The last time I took my students to the library to check out their independent readings I suddenly realized that my emphasis on reading in community may have had an impact on my students’ perception of reading as a more interactive activity. The uneasy experience many of them and I had led me to think about the direction our book experience had taken. For that visit our librarian had planned a rotational experience in which my students would be visiting a different table (there were six tables) every two minutes. Each time they visited a table they could pick a book and leave one on the table if they liked it less than the new one. I thought that was a brilliant idea except when I heard that they could not speak to each other during the whole experience. The librarian told them they could not talk which was hard to reinforce since they seemed to like or were used to talking about books during class. I regretted her decision since describing the books some of them had already read may have made a difference to each other in their choices and their motivation to read them. I noticed the strong urge of some students to talk about the books they had read or to ask the students who had read certain books to describe them. It was funny to see how they were trying to describe books by whispering or by using something similar to sign language. I felt that by not allowing them to talk about books we were

missing meaningful opportunities to raise their interest in reading. If I had been the librarian, I would have added a segment in which students would be able to talk to each other in order to answer questions such as, “Can you share with others your favorite books so far?” or “Which book would you recommend to someone?”

The next day I asked my fifth period, “Would it have made a big difference if you had been allowed to talk about some of the books?” Several students nodded. Dinora answered, “Yes, I wanted to talk about the books.” Dania smiled and nodded as I explained how I had observed that she (Dania) was trying to describe the book she read to Melanie and Victoria by using a form of expression similar to sign language.

I also paid attention to the kinds of books they enjoyed and if they only wanted to check out one book or more. Moreover I tried to discern if students needed my help in choosing books or in checking books out if they could not afford to pay their library fines. I also looked for differences between each time we visited the library. I noticed that the last visit saw great improvement since most students were talking with each other – even reading to each other – and with me about the books that interested them and were more proactive than ever in finding the right books for themselves. Several students checked out more than one. Perhaps they knew that I was relentless in my insistence for them to read and that they would have to write an essay about their selected books. Or perhaps they knew that I would help them check out books if they had a fine that they could not pay. But what meant the most to me was that, as my student Yara indicated, students had perhaps found the topic that was right for them after much exposure to various topics.

Several students came to me to show me the books they had chosen, make deals with me about my checking out several books for them, ask me questions about the books in their hands, and more. Library visits energized me. I felt that my hard work was paying off. I saw, with hope, less resistant readers all around me. Picking their own books was an individual choice but also one that provided my students with a sense of community.

Our last visit felt like an achievement. At the beginning of the school year a large number of my students had openly stated that they did not like to read. Now I saw incipient as well as more developed readers all around me. Did I cause this? Was it always there without my noticing it? Did they just need an adult to go out of his/her way to facilitate the potential desire that had always been there to begin with? I also thought that in the real world few teachers would be willing to sacrifice their paychecks by owing money to the library to make their students read.

In my proactive approach, I saw myself as a literary agent who facilitated my students' increasing motivation to read. During those library moments that my students went back and forth talking to each other about the books they had already read or were interested in reading, I felt more alive than ever. "This is one of those magical moments in teaching that doesn't happen too often," I thought. In the next section I describe another community-oriented part of my class.

#### *Drawing on Community during Book Discussions*

As I explained before, I established Tertulias to provide another community-building activity in which students could interact about books. While initially I had thought this would be easy to do, I encountered several challenges. But in my

stubborn disposition, I never gave up. Several of my journal entries were bitter sweet. Some events in the day made me lose hope but then others encouraged me to continue hoping. The journal entry below expresses how disheartened I was at times.

This activity never goes as well as I intend it. Sometimes I feel I am like don Quijote, dreaming the impossible. My idealized version is that they start discussing their books right away, that they all bring their books. Nolo, who acts as if he had ADHD, almost never follows my dream, brings it all the way down to the mediocre reality and makes me realize that maybe I am expecting too much of my students. In the meantime I will continue dreaming. Some students did not have books yet.

(November 20, 2009)

As my next journal entry demonstrates, I was constantly reflecting about how to make the Tertulia better.

My experience today with my second class made me realize that I need to make some changes when we have our Tertulia. For example, I need to sit with the different groups to listen and even share with them what I am reading. I need to look more relaxed and take more part in their conversation. Next time I will ask a few students to read part of their books to the whole class when we are done with the Tertulia. I will also ask a couple of students in each group to share some of their thoughts with the rest of the class after they are done sharing their books.

(December 3, 2009)

After much trying and finding out that many of my students would have preferred to talk about the same book during Tertulia times, the final Tertulia

experience was by far the most fulfilling to me. It felt like I had won a battle. My journal entry expresses how victorious I felt.

Today I felt that I reached a benchmark. Today was the first time ever that all of my students were almost completely involved in the activity. Believe it or not, in Nolo's group I made him start! He explained how the previous book of the sequel he was reading had ended so they would understand the connection between the two books. I was in awe. Nolo, the student who would not finish or do anything in my class, who had last finished a book in fourth grade, was talking about the connection between two books he had read. Nolo explained, "The last book ended with a kid dead in his arms and explaining how he had decided to quit the gang". Enid was so excited talking about Gary Soto's book ("I am in love with this book!" she told me last week) that she was monopolizing the discussion. In another group, Miguel, of Peruvian heritage, who is very bright but is barely passing the class for not doing the work, was telling the story about a Peruvian young man whose mother gets killed and all he does to have revenge. I remarked, 'So the book takes you through all the adventures he went through'. He nodded with really bright eyes. (May 20, 2010)

I was impressed. For the first time I could sit back and look at my work, what I had strived for the whole year. At that moment I realized that high expectations are extremely important and that teachers must keep on dreaming even if the whole world thinks they are acting quixotically. I simply wanted my Latino students to talk about books more naturally. That was my dream, and I had achieved it. One day near the end of the school year, I asked my students what they thought about the Tertulia. Some students agreed that at the beginning people joined the Tertulia just to eat the

cookie but by the time of that last Tertulia they were talking much more. Nolo recommended one big circle instead of the smaller circles. It was too late to try out his idea. However, I continued to arrange the class in circles during readings as I had been doing throughout most of the year. I also asked them, “Why did you all end up reading?” Dania answered, “Because you really wanted us to read.” And Yara added, “Because we all got to start enjoying our own topics; some people discovered the topics that they really liked because of all the different kinds of books they were exposed to. At the beginning they would just choose any book just for reading.” Then I remarked, “I knew that at the beginning you thought I was a lunatic” and some of them laughed. Then Enid explained, “I started liking to read books of my own choosing after reading those boring textbook stories.” Next I describe how, in my attempt to make my classroom be more community oriented, I also examined my role as one of their community members.

*Drawing on my Role as a Community Member and as a Cultural Mediator*

As far as my role as a teacher, I tried to act more as an involved member of my students’ community than as a distant person in authority. Sometimes I wrote in my journal when I asked them to write, and shared and listened to some personal stories following the oral tradition. I allowed a lot of spontaneity as long as it did not significantly impact my goal for the day. I developed a strong relationship with many of my students. I always felt respected even though it got chaotic at times. I often shared the general themes or read them excerpts of what I was reading at the moment. I also shared personal items such as my son’s poem about my accent, my essay about language and intimacy, and my grandmother’s cookbook. I read an entry I wrote

about how my father died and explained how my mother felt when she came to visit. In a way our family members, dead or alive, had a place in our classroom. Even Rafael, who had been placed in jail in November, remained present in our classroom as I often spoke about him, my visit, my court subpoena, the books that I was bringing to him and more. Several students related to that since they had family members or friends in jail. I shared my favorite poems and tried to explain as humanly as possible why they meant so much to me. I also shared with them my identity as a reader and as a writer who was currently writing a book in which their agency and voices would be represented. As in a family when someone achieves something important, we clapped in support of Nolo when he finished reading his books -- which he let us know with victorious demonstrations.

Also in keeping with the zone of proximal development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), I tried to act more like a family member who would meet my students on whatever level they were at. I learned early in the year that if I wanted my students to become readers I would have to go out of my way for them. I often thought, "What would I do if these were my children?" That question reminded me of the culturally responsive teachers Ladson-Billings (1995) described. Those teachers truly believed that their students had the power to do well academically. They kept their standards high while they met their students at their students' zones of proximal development.

I tried my best to attend to the kinds of books that my students were reading. Also, if they were not reading or had not found a book of their interest, I would assist them in finding a book and would badger them to read by persistently reminding them to read and by telling them that I would help them choose books if they had not yet

found any of their liking. Such I did with Nicolas. After much of my assistance and asking again and again, Nicolas finally found a non-fiction history book of his liking. I also checked out books from the library for several students. Moreover, I took my students, both my Spanish classes and homeroom, to the library. I even bought books for Nolo after I found out that he liked Reymundo Sanchez's books. And I kept that author's books in my office available for other students (two males and two females) who had previously been resistant readers and had also become fascinated by that author's books.

My office, which was meant to be the dean's office, turned out to be much more than that. In a way it became an extension of my classroom. I had a lot of books in it and regularly referred students to them. I read to and with my homeroom students almost every day. And as we read books, especially about marginalization topics, we discussed the readings mostly by talking about similar stories in real life. Other students, typically the ones who were often in trouble, frequently joined my homeroom students. At one point I started to add seats to my office and to configure new arrangements for the furniture. As I was reflecting about what it is that helps non-readers become readers I wrote: "I am starting to wonder if this story is most of all about my incessant actions to instill the love of reading in my students" (May 3, 2010). Thinking about the students who visited my office and the topics that interested them, I laughed in wonder. "What is it that motivates some unmotivated male readers to read?" I asked myself. Those students were supposedly unmotivated readers but went out of class, even English class, to read at my office about characters who dwelled in marginalized spheres (Leslie, 2000; Moje, 2000). Perhaps several



students identified with marginalized reading topics that were not covered in their English classes.

As time went by I started reflecting about the literature I had reviewed on the important relational role that adults may play in the lives of immigrant children (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). The day that I started to wonder more deeply about my role was when we were reading *Cajas de cartón*. A part of the reading described how a teacher took the protagonist child under his wing. After reading, I asked my students to think about their best teacher and I was surprised to hear my name coming from Miguel's mouth. Then I heard Nadine say, "Ms. Cabrero, you are the most inspirational teacher." I was surprised because, in my constant experimenting to find the best way to reach my students, I never felt I was an effective teacher. I smiled, hugged Nadine, and quickly took the conversation to another place.

While that topic was not one I thought about when I created the focus groups' questions, my reflections led me to bring that topic to one of the focus group discussions. Again I was surprised at the responses of my students. Their opinions made me realize that the role of a teacher in motivating her students to learn has a great deal to do with how important those teachers make them feel. In other words it has to do with the degree of agency teachers recognize in their students and how much teachers listen to their voices. The lines below were also a great cause of surprise:

Dinora: "I think more of you as a ..."

Isabel: "Counselor"

Dinora: “I don’t know if counselor is the right word, cause we could tell you anything and you would care”.

Teacher: “Does it have to do with belonging to the same culture and language?”

Dinora: “Yes because you are Hispanic too”.

Teacher: “So you are saying that as a teacher I am more like you?”

Dinora: “Yes, you understand our situation. You never give up on any of us, not even on Rafael [who was in jail]”.

Teacher: “So what recommendation would you give to teachers of Spanish for Heritage Speakers?”

Dinora: “Be someone like you who knows your students; someone who cares; you know about them, their favorite things; what they are like; get to know them and know them better. You remember everything about each one of us. That is how you can make students want to read more.” (May 3, 2010)

As I started wondering more about how my role impacted my students’ interest in reading. I added the next question to the reading questionnaire: “My teacher had \_\_\_\_ impact on my interest in reading” (Appendix K). Students could answer *no*, *a little*, *some*, or *a lot*. The greater percentage of my students’ answers were within the *some* and *a lot* categories, with a combined 57% for 1.5 males; 83% for 1.5 females; 75% for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males; and 69% for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation females (Table 12). Of the entire 34 respondents who answered that question, more than a third said I had impacted their reading a lot. Regarding reasons, one student’s response had to do with my perception of his agency. He wrote, “Mrs. Cabrero has

helped me a lot because she pushed me over the limit that I did not know that I had in me.” One 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female wrote “If it weren’t for Ms. Cabrero teaching us about our Hispanic culture, none of us would appreciate it as much as we do (even though maybe we did).” Another 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female wrote “She would try to get us to read by setting up Tertulias to share our books, and would also choose various stories to read. Lastly, she would jeopardize her library privileges to check out books for us when we couldn’t.” Another 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female expressed “Because she would try to get us to read and have Tertulias so that we can share with others. And when we shared I got interested in the books people read also.”

*Drawing on Student Agency and the Power of High Expectations*

I often wondered, particularly at the beginning of the school year, if I was expecting too much of my students. From the onset I was asking them to read books independently and to write five-paragraph essays in Spanish. Initially I noticed how several students did not have books to read for different reasons such as the obvious one

	No		A little		Some		A lot	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1.5 males	2	29%	1	14%	1	14%	3	43%
1.5 females			1	17%	3	50%	2	33%
2 <sup>nd</sup> males	1	13%	1	13%	4	50%	2	25%
2 <sup>nd</sup> females			4	31%	4	31%	5	38%
Total	3	9%	7	21%	12	35%	12	35%

*Table 12: Teacher Impact on My Interest in Reading*

of owing money to the library. But the less immediately apparent was not having someone who would be there taking them through the initial needed steps. By doing

that I learned that teachers could still have high expectations while being responsive to their students' zones of proximal development (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) as each student goes through his/her unique transition from being less of a reader to more of a reader.

Besides taking some of my students by the hand, I compelled them in additional ways to rise to my expectations. As described in the previous section, I consistently strove to be an agent in my students' transformation from resistant readers to less resistant readers. Nevertheless, on several days I went home discouraged feeling that my experience of teaching for almost 20 years served me poorly when it came to heritage speakers. My doubts about not micromanaging their reading and essay choices or of assigning tasks that were too hard were quite unsettling at times.

But by the end of the third quarter my disquieting feelings turned to surprised satisfaction. The great majority of my students were seemingly reading independently which was reflected in their essays which I had required them to write once a quarter since the beginning of the school year. While I had always required them to write five-paragraph essays, as the year progressed, the paragraphs tended to be longer and in several cases more personal. In addition, as I had always required my students to rewrite their essays, they now mostly rewrote them without my regular reminders. And their essays indicated more identification with the reading topics they had chosen. It seemed that many students had found a topic of their interest as one of my students had explained to me when I was querying about why they had become more engaged during Tertulia book discussions. The Tertulias became much less

chaotic and, clearly, almost every student was talking about a book s/he was reading. Moreover, when they wrote their journal entries, they were quieter and more focused. Their journal entries were longer and reflected deeper reflection about borderlands issues. I was starting to feel that my incessant actions were finally paying off.

### *Drawing on a Reading Model*

Another way I drew on my students' agency was through the use of reading models. When I noticed Tony and Karen's charismatic influence on the other students coupled with their interest in reading out loud in front of the class, I started using them as reading models. While I was aware that the number of reading models was quite limited, the fact was that the great majority of students did not feel comfortable reading aloud in front of their peers. In my fifth period, Tony began as a quite invisible presence. In fact he skipped the first couple of days. But Tony eventually demonstrated his leadership soon after I discovered and acknowledged that his eloquent writing had to do with his extensive reading experience.

The first time Tony read aloud in Spanish he read so fast that students looked quite shocked. It seemed to me that they felt intimidated by someone who was able to read that fast in Spanish. When I discovered that my role in reading aloud was not always as well-received as when students read, I started requesting his and other students' help. Despite Tony's first intimidating display as a reader, I soon discovered Tony's talent as a reading model when he read out loud, at a normal pace, the textbook story about the Peruvian canons. I gave Tony full reign of the story. I told him, "You can stop anytime for commenting about words and themes, asking questions and more." As he read, I was beginning to feel this sense of awe at the

majestic description of nature when suddenly he stopped what he was reading to express “wow!” Then I added, “This is a wow moment. Don’t you feel you are there?” When he read the word *temperamental* I explained its meaning, which he summarized as “bipolar.” I answered, “Well, yes, or more like how girls feel before they get their period.”

Tony’s interaction with the reading, his stopping to comment on what interested him, his pointing at words that he had not heard before or that sounded special, his natural changes in reading pace as of one who is really thinking as he reads and is trying to decipher what he is reading were quite special and genuine. His agency was shining right through. Tony modeled the kind of reader I wanted my students to become. It was then that I realized that I would treat Tony as a reading model, that students were naturally starting to perceive and respect him as such. Later on, Tony naturally took on his reading role as we read and discussed a chapter of *The Transcendent Child* (Rubin, 1996).

Since I had already realized that many of my students preferred the circle format, I decided to form a circle which became larger as students were finalizing their individual assignments. I asked different people who did not sound too articulate to read. I was starting to worry that the students would lose interest in the reading. Then I noticed that Tony was paying attention as he was finalizing his project. So when he was done, I asked him to come and read. In his typical pleasantly eccentric manner, he sat right in the middle of the group and proceeded to read. His tone was emphatic and very clear. He read for over an hour which was making me think that he was probably getting tired. But he continued to claim that he was not tired. Tony, as

usual, did a brilliant job at reading which demonstrated to all that reading is one of his favorite activities. He stopped to gaze at students who whispered, at which point they became apologetic. That experience again confirmed my original thought that Tony was indeed a great reading role model.

In my other class, Karen's initiative to "sacrifice," in her own words, since no one else liked to read aloud, her appreciation for her heritage culture, and her intention to become fully bilingual drove her to read several times a week. Her classmates listened when she read. To this day she visits me in my office often and hugs me each time.

The following section illustrates how I guided my students in the exploration of their identities through literary topics. It demonstrates how I used research as a vehicle for identity exploration and how I went about guiding my students to explore their linguistic identities. I describe the different strategies I used to facilitate my students' exploration of their borderlands identities as well as the exploration of marginalization experiences. Furthermore, I explain how my students looked into the topics of labels and death. Last, I discuss how I used writing to help my students explore their multiple identities.

*Guiding Students in Identity Exploration through Literary Topics*

Teacher: "What does the Puerto Rican girl in Nieto's book mean when she says she wants to be somebody?"

Marcos: "To be recognized, to be yourself."

Enid: "Identity!"

In this section I illustrate my various attempts to guide my students through the exploration of their borderlands and linguistic identities. My goal was to facilitate my students' engagement in literacy through topics they identified with. I present various literary topics I led them to read, discuss, and write about, and explain how I utilized discussions and writing as vehicles for identity exploration. Furthermore, I describe how I sought to get my students acquainted with research that would help them find their own definitions of their national and panethnic identities. Last, I discuss how I familiarized my students with the topic of labels and their impact on minority teenagers' sense of identity.

The most direct way I helped my students explore their identities was through research. In the following section I illustrate how I used the literature I reviewed to familiarize them with research on the identity of minority adolescents. I also explain how I guided students to conduct their own research on their national and panethnic heritage.

#### *Research as a Vehicle of Identity Exploration*

When I realized that many of my students were lacking in heritage knowledge, I decided that a great portion of their learning would come through their own channels and initiative. I tasked my students with doing research about every two weeks on several identity-related topics such as positive characteristics about their heritage, news about their national heritage, an influential Latino/a, their favorite piece of music, an interesting cultural characteristic, health benefits of Latino food products, the history of the world cup or any other sport related event, and so forth. Sometimes groups consisted of students from the same heritage. While there were



minimum requirements as to the format of the research projects, I allowed my students freedom to follow their own directions in their inquiry. I also often asked them to share their findings with their classmates. I thought that it was an important for them to learn from each other in order to discover the differences and commonalities between their heritage characteristics.

I also shared with my students what I was learning in my literature review regarding topics related to issues of identity. As I indicated in chapter three during class I read excerpts aloud from Nieto's *Affirming Diversity* (2008), Stavan's *Spanglish* (2003), Portes and Rimbaud's *Legacies* (2001), Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco and Todorova's *Learning a New Land* (2008), Oboler's *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives* (1995), Mendoza-Denton's *Homegirls* (2008), and Rubin's *The Transcendent Child* (1996) (Appendix C). During most of the readings students remained silent but did not demonstrate any indications of boredom. In the section on marginalization topics I provide further details about some of the discussions. The topic I address next is linguistic exploration.

### *Linguistic Exploration*

In the course of the school year I guided my students' exploration through several language-related readings (Appendix D). When I was getting ready to introduce the topic of linguistic exploration, I asked "What is the difference between being partially and completely bilingual?" Marcos answered "That you may speak Spanish but you don't really read it." I then started talking about the difference between diglossia and Spanglish. I shared my opinion that Spanglish is perfectly natural although, according to research, being bilingual is much more beneficial for

the 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant. I read an excerpt in *Legacies* (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Then I proceeded to read some Spanglish words. I ended the lesson by reading my son's poem about my accent. For a few more days I continued reading several Spanglish words from Stavans' book.

One day I asked my students a blunt question. When we were reading a passage from *Cajas de cartón* about how one Latino boy did not want to speak to the child protagonist in Spanish in front of their teacher, I asked, "Would you have become ashamed?" to which Chris emphatically answered, "I would have never felt ashamed." By that question I wanted my students to start exploring how they regarded the Spanish language. I also eventually asked my students to write about the difference between Spanglish and bilingualism.

While they were writing I was impressed with their degree of concentration and the increased length and depth of their entries about the language topic as compared to other topics they had written about earlier in the school year. Just as with the topic of labels that I explore later, they seemed to have a lot to write about the topic of language. As I normally did before they wrote journal entries, I gave them free reign within the assignment topic as far as the focus of their writing. They could be personal or philosophical. They could invent a story, write a poem and more. Nadine, who repeatedly told me that she did not like to write, was totally quiet while writing, which was quite unusual for her. Very soon she showed me her completed task quite proudly.

### *Borderlands Identity Exploration*

I acquainted my students with numerous readings that had to do with the borderlands experience of living as Latinos in the United States (Appendix D). In the sections below I illustrate how I guided my students through their identity exploration. The first topic I led them to explore had to do with labels.

#### *Labels Topic.*

“The class has brought more of my Hispanic side; I feel more Latina in general,” said Enid. When Enid uttered the label *Hispanic* and *Latina* in the same sentence as we were reaching the end of the school year, I was pleased. By not limiting herself to just one label, the one Latinos had been officially identified with, she was demonstrating that she was perhaps starting to create her own sense of identity, what I had strived for. I remembered what the literature suggested about the correlation between minority students’ self-labeling in more complex ways , constructing their own more positive sense of identity, and better academic engagement (Zarate, Bhimji, & Reese, 2005). Reading Oboler’s *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives* (1995) also made me more aware of the negative impact of labels on minority students. Thus, I decided to directly present to my students some of the research by Oboler and by Zarate, Bhimji and Reese regarding labels and the construction of a positive sense of identity. I also explained the difference and relation between identification and identity according to Gans (2007).

After getting my students acquainted with that information, I initiated discussions about the topic by asking them, “Who are you? Do you know who you are? Or do you wait for people to tell you who you are?” Subsequently I referred to

the topic every chance I had throughout the year, especially when we read *Cuando era puertorriqueña*. I also asked them to write a journal entry about the topic *Labels, Identification and Identity*. To encourage their own sense of identity exploration, I told my students that they could frame their entry in any way they wanted as long as they gave me the best entry they had written so far. As was customary, I read some of the entries that I thought would guide my students in their construction of more positive and stronger sense of identity. As a concluding activity, I asked my students to do an identity project. As I indicated earlier, I handed to them a sheet of paper with a simple drawing of a shirt. I asked them to draw several ways they identified and to provide a written description for each drawing in Spanish. I required them to provide at least one linguistic and one cultural representation. In chapter four I provided more detailed information about that project.

When I began to discuss the topic of labels, I noticed that many students, especially the ninth graders, had not thought much about the topic before. I could tell by their difficulty in responding when I asked them questions about the topic. This verified what the literature on social identity in minority adolescents suggests (Phinney, 1989; 1993). According to Phinney, adolescents start to explore their social identity in middle adolescence or around tenth grade. Nevertheless, as the class and focus group discussions went on, these students became somewhat more expansive when they spoke about the topic, which may demonstrate that being open to minority students' agency and encouraging their voices might help them start questioning the way society identifies and labels them (Diaz-Greensberg, 2003). Several of the more academically engaged younger students showed evidence of beginning to play around

with the labels that refer to Latinos (Zarate, Bhimji, & Reese, 2005). For example, two of the top students self-labeled as *Latino/Hispanic & American* (male) and *Spanish, Bolivian & English, Guatemalan & American* (female). Another academically engaged female ninth grader simply expressed that “can’t define culture-it is just sticking to customs from place born and where I live now.” No ninth grader used the sole term *Hispanic* -- only one tenth grader did.

Some of the older students, especially Tony, had much more to say about the topic of labels than the younger students. Even though he chose not to identify in linguistic or cultural terms, his essay on the topic of gender roles, in which he wrote about labels clearly demonstrated that he had thought a great about the topic. As I demonstrated in chapter four, the message of his essay conveyed that we are much more than a label which was what initially launched us towards the labels topic.

I was as candid as possible with my students in my explanation of labels. I explained that sometimes labels limit us, that they come from the outside and unfairly affect the way we look at ourselves while my students listened absorbedly. Then I explained that we can have multiple ways of identifying and used myself as an example.

One of the discussions I led had to do with the labels attributed to immigrants. After Yara criticized the behavior of newly arrived immigrant students, I conducted the following conversation to help my students understand how some of them, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants, could treat the 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants (their own parents included) unfairly. I also wanted my students to understand the internalization of society’s identification in the identity of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants:

Teacher: “Are there any special labels for new immigrants?”

Yara: “People call them *mojados* (*wetbag*) and *chents*”.

Teacher: “What does ‘chent’ mean?”

Dania: “It comes from Vicente, a name used a lot in Mexico”.

Teacher Assistant: “They used to refer the ESOL hallway as the *chent* hallway”.

Nolo: “And upstairs they call it the Mexican hallway”.

Teacher Assistant: “The term *chent* is used by people who have been born or raised in the USA to refer to people who just arrived from other countries”.

Teacher: “So by *chent* you mean the people who have not assimilated yet to the American way. So it seems that you have adopted American values. But often the issue for many 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants is that they buy into the negative image about Latinos. That is something that happens to kids who grow up here, the kids who are not *chents*.” (March, 16, 2010)

After I uttered that last comment, my students stared at me wordless which made me think that perhaps they were either thinking about their situations as immigrants or children of immigrants or did not understand what I said. Or perhaps they simply did not understand the message that I was trying to transmit. In the next section I present another discussion on identity that I attempted to lead without much success. The limited answers or silence of most students demonstrated that they either had not thought much about the topic before or they did not feel comfortable speaking about it. However, asking rhetoric questions was something I often did to introduce topics I wanted my students to start thinking about. Some of the questions may have also felt

too personal for my students so I never forced them to provide answers. When I asked “Do labels limit people?” the only response I received was in the form of a question: “What do you mean by a label?” Marcos answered: “Like when someone calls another person retarded.” Then when I subsequently asked “Is the word Hispanic neutral, positive or negative?” only one person answered, “Neutral.” Only Karen referred to the prejudice phenomenon: “Or maybe people think you are a gang member. The other day [at a store] this Chinese woman started pretending she was not looking at Margarita and me, like we were going to steal something.”

I took that opportunity to explain the difference and connection between being identified from the outside and how you identify from the inside according to what I had read in Gans (2007). Then Francisca asked, “What does identity mean?” to which my homeroom student Jessie answered, “It means how you see yourself.” I looked at her and smiled since I was so pleased that she had finally expressed her opinion about an abstract concept such as identity. She had never done that before. Perhaps she was starting to explore her identity. Jessie responded to my smile with a proud smile.

Whenever I saw the opportunity, I referred to the labels topic and mentioned the different ways some people may be labeled depending on the different environments in which they exist. By that I intended to convey that unfair labels can take different forms depending on the environment. For instance, as we were reading a passage from *Cuando era puertorriqueña* in which Esmeralda’s family gets into their first taxi in New York City and the taxi driver does not treat them nicely, I asked students to explain this incident. After Tony answered “Because the taxi driver was a

racist,” I explained, “Well, she went from being labeled ‘jíbara<sup>18</sup>’ in Puerto Rico to ‘spik’ in New York City.” Again students stared at me without saying anything.

*Exploring the Borderlands Experience.*

Through readings that involved borderlands topics I meant to facilitate my students’ understanding of their borderlands identities (Appendix D). One of the reading topics had to do with the colonial experience as illustrated in *Borderlands/La frontera* (Anzaldúa, 1999) and *Cuando era puertorriqueña* (Santiago, 1993). Another topic was immigration which included the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigration phenomenon; illegal immigration; the split family; the typical nomadic nature of the lives of immigrants; traveling/living between different cultures; school experiences of Latino and other racial minority children; the obligations of immigrant children; and the relationship between identification and identity. These topics were present in “La reforma migratoria para el 2010” (article), *Learning a New Land* (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008), *Legacies* (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), *Affirming Diversity* (Nieto, 2000), “I Am Who I Am” (poem), *Cuando era puertorriqueña*, “*Boricua en la luna*” (song), and *Cajas de cartón*.

I took the opportunity to discuss the topic of colonialism when we read in *Cuando era puertorriqueña* about how Americans were commissioned to go to Puerto Rico to show Puerto Ricans how to brush their teeth and to recommend them to eat some kinds of fruit which were commonly found in the United States but were nowhere to be found in Puerto Rico. I then talked to my students about the culture of colonialism in Puerto Rico, how many Puerto Ricans admired anything American.

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<sup>18</sup> The term “jíbaro” refers to people who live in the Puerto Rican country side. While that term has been used as a form of compliment, it is often used in a derogatory way to refer to country people.



Subsequently, I explained the concepts of cultural and social capital. Students seemed really focused on the reading. I was surprised when I decided to stop reading since I had not realized how much in tune they were with what we were reading. Enid insisted: “Let’s keep reading. We never read enough of this book.” I then asked, “Why? You like this book?” Several of them nodded.

Another time I read in Nieto’s *Affirming Diversity* (2000) about the school experiences of Latinos and other minority students through their own voices. I focused on the voice of a Native American student. Students listened quietly until we reached the topic of teacher expectations. I stopped reading to ask, “Have some of your teachers had low expectations for you?” Several students nodded and Enid explained, “My pharmacy teacher treats the Hispanic students differently. I don’t feel like trying after that.” I answered, “Don’t ever stop trying because someone does not believe in you. Never allow that to happen.”

We spent several classes discussing immigration-related topics. As we read *Cuando era puertorriqueña* Elmer expressed how that book reminded him of when he moved from El Salvador to the United States to live with his mother after several years. Other students such as 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Isabel remarked during class that that book was her favorite in the school year because she found the topic of moving from Puerto Rico to the United States quite interesting. While she did not have first-hand experience of immigrating to the United States, she often told stories about her parents’ experiences as they moved to the United States from Ecuador and Chile.

I also guided my students to start exploring the differences between 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigration experiences. Moreover, I intended for them to realize

that more Americanized 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants may feel superior to 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants, their parents included. So I facilitated the following discussion:

Teacher: “Do you perceive any differences in the behaviors of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants?”

Yara: “1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants behave weird like the guys who stand in the hallway and look at you when you walk”.

Teacher: “So do you mean that there is a difference between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation?”

Enid: “Yes, there is a difference in their behavior”.

Teacher: “So, are you expressing shame about the behavior of 1<sup>st</sup> generation Latinos? Do you feel ashamed about your mother?”

Dania: “No” (the rest of the students stayed quiet).

Teacher: “My sons often laugh at me about the way I act and speak. My son even wrote a poem about my accent”.

Enid: “When my mother is mad at Yara and me, we make fun of her. We tell her: ‘What did you say?’”

Dania: “Sometimes my mother surprises me. She would say something in English which surprises me. Then I would ask her, do you know what that means?”

(February 16, 2010)

We all laughed at Dania’s words.

Another conversation I conducted as we were about to start reading *Cajas de cartón* had to do with the typical immigrant’s experience of moving often. I started the discussion by asking my students, “If you were told that you suddenly had to

move and could only take very few things with you, what would you take?" Some of the items mentioned were an ipod, xbox, Bible, and underwear. I used that opportunity to explain the term *desarraigado* (uprooted). Then we read the part where the child found out that he had to move again just when his teacher had told him he would teach him how to play the trumpet. Then I asked, "When do you think it is harder to move?" Some answered "middle school" and others answered "high school." Yara, who had moved back and forth from Honduras, answered, "In high school since it is harder to make new friends."

Following our discussion about moving often, I asked my students to write about a trip. As with all the other journal entries I allowed them to give it the twist they wanted. For example, it could be a real or imaginary trip. Nadine was trying hard to remember when she moved here from California. Nicolas wrote about his trip to Texas to meet his grandfather. Some students described experiences that were too intimate and emotional to be able to be shared with the class. In contrast to most of the other entries, I opted not to read or summarize what the students had written. Elmer explicitly told me not to share his entry with anyone in the class. He had made an emotionally detailed account of when he moved to the United States to live with his mother after having lived with his aunt for several years. I included excerpts of several entries in chapter four.

Of the books *Cuando era puertorriqueña* and *Cajas de cartón*, the latter was the one that students identified with the most, mainly because of the nomadic condition characteristic of the migrant worker. Many of my students had moved more than the average person. Enid, who chose to read that book for her independent

reading, told me emphatically, “I like it a lot. I cried a lot reading it because it reminds me all the times I had to move. Just when I thought I was close with my friends I was told that I had to leave.” Moreover, Nicolas seemed to have identified with the fruit picking topic of *Cajas de cartón*. Besides Nadine, he was my only student who had lived in the southwest (his grandfather lived in Texas). Half of his heritage was Mexican. Nicolas was not one to participate much in class discussions, but he gave his most emphatic and clear answer, like the one uttered by someone who knows exactly what he is talking about, to my question, “Why does the father count the boxes?” He answered, “Because he is counting the fruit he has picked to get paid.”

*Cajas de cartón* also included the topic of obligations of children of immigrants. In this true account, the protagonist child had to care for his younger brother alone in a car while his parents and older brother were working on the field. He was eager to start working with his parents so he would not be left behind taking care of his younger sibling. I felt that topic was also very close to many of my students who could not often participate in extracurricular activities since they had to leave school early to pick up and take care of their siblings. Many of my students also spent long hours without seeing their parents while they were away working day and night. After discussing that topic of obligations, I asked my students to write about the topic. Margarita’s entry below was the most memorable of all of my students’ journal entries. She explained how responsible she felt for her younger brother for which she felt absolutely no regret.

When I was a little girl I had to take care of my brother. My older brother was our father and mother in one person. But when he died I did not know how to make my life function. But since my older brother used to take care of us I had to start taking care of my little brother. I was a mess when my oldest brother died but I had to put myself together for my little brother. I had to comfort him during the first months and later when my parents were not at home. I used to be the one to cook for him and used to help him in his homework. Taking care of my brother meant everything for me. And it is still my obligation but I don't feel forced. I do it because I love my brother and want the best for him. Now he tells me I am like the mother we did not have. He is my priority. Now I cook only during the weekdays. On the weekends I rest" (April 26, 2010).

*Exploration of Borderlands Experiences through Movies.*

Another way I acquainted my students with the exploration of borderlands experiences was through movies. Once or twice a quarter, I showed a movie to my students. Early on I showed them "Stand and Deliver" about a math teacher whose high expectations, belief in his students's potential and hard work to bring them up to his expectations, led the students to succeed in AP Calculus at unprecedented levels. The students, many of whom had not seen that movie before, looked really engaged while watching it. It was also meaningful that the teacher, Jaime Escalante, was of Bolivian heritage since several of my students were of Bolivian heritage. One of my students was in fact related to him. Miguel, the student with really bright eyes, told me that, while he could really relate to the topics of "Stand and Deliver," he could not

relate to the topics of his English class. He explained that the movie related to his life although he did not specify how.

As stated earlier, the second movie I showed was “Casi una mujer”, based on *Cuando era puertorriqueña* and its sequel, *Almost a Woman* (1999). This movie had to do with the borderlands experiences of a Puerto Rican female teenager who had to move to the United States when she was in eighth grade. I asked my students to answer several written questions that had to do with having to live between cultures and with the topic of *desarraigo* (uprootedness). The students seemed very engaged as well while watching that movie. However, some students eventually recommended not showing a movie before we had finished reading the book since “Casi una mujer” retold almost the whole story of *Cuando era puertorriqueña* which may have been the reason some of my students lost interest in that book as the questionnaire reflected.

A movie which many of my students identified strongly with was “Bajo la misma luna.” That movie told the story of a mother who had to leave her child behind in Mexico to work in the United States. That is a well known experience that many immigrant children go through (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). In fact, a large number of my school’s students have gone through that difficult experience. That movie integrates several borderlands topics such as the split family, immigration, illegal status, discrimination, poverty, uprootedness, hard uncompensated work, and more. The main reason I knew many of my students had identified with the story was the journal entry they wrote after they watched the movie. For some reason many students became highly emotional when they wrote

their reactions. Many of them wrote of their own experience or the one of someone they knew. We had recently read an article on immigration reform and students had talked about how the families were being separated – “even small children were separated from their mothers,” as Nadine exclaimed. Nadine said emphatically while watching the movie, “I have to move because this is making me very sad,” which may have meant that she wanted a more private seat as she was feeling emotional.

I asked the students to write a whole page and-a-half with more elevated vocabulary, connection words, synonyms, and no repetition of words. I was not sure whether it was due to my heightened requirements or because they were more used and able to write longer entries, or simply because that movie elicited strong emotions in my students. But the great majority of the students looked more engaged than ever as they wrote. This time my only requirement was writing a reaction to the movie. Even Nadine who had always stated that she did not like to write said after she wrote two full pages, “Look, Ms. Cabrero, I am done.” I was really impressed. Miguel also wrote a considerable amount – almost one page - even though he barely ever finished anything that he started. David, who had failed the previous quarter, and Melina wrote one page-and-a half as well. “Impressive!” (April 19, 2010), I wrote in my journal.

#### *Exploring Marginalization Topics.*

As I started discovering that many of my students chose books for their independent reading that had to do with marginalized topics, I decided that I would devote some time to discussing, reading, and writing about those topics (Appendix

D). In chapter three I provide a list of those topics. I wrote the following in my journal,

I wonder if books with violence attract more certain kinds of students; also books with crisis, addictions, like Carlos's book choices. There is so much drama in the lives of some students that those may be the topics they relate to the most. Several students, such as Nicolas, seem to like the *Bluford High series* which have to do with the lives of mostly African American students. (January 20, 2010)

The first time I talked to my students about *diferencias socioeconómicas*, we were reading *Cuando era puertorriqueña*. Protagonist Esmeralda described her perception of private school students as they were heading to school. I asked, "How does she perceive them?" Isabel answered that "They are different socially." I added, "Yes, socioeconómicamente."

The experience of having my student Rafael incarcerated after a gang incident was one I intended to share with his classmates as much as was legally possible. I decided to inform them about what happened when I visited Rafael in jail and when I was subpoenaed to court. I read them some of the letters Rafael wrote to me and I asked them to write him notes which I included in my letters to him. I also showed my students the books that I took to Rafael and asked them to recommend books for him to read. Rafael had been a part of our classroom family and I was not planning to suddenly eliminate him from our immediate experience regardless of the gravity of what he had done. I had and still have hope for his redemption. He was only 15, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation child product of downward assimilation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) at the time of the incident.



In my mind, Rafael's experience connected with Nicholas' who was having a hard time leaving the gang life. I told Nicolas, "So you mean that I will also have to visit you in jail like I have to do with Rafael? Because I will not give up on you."

Knowing that Rafael's incident was part of my students' immediate experience, I read to them the poem "El llamado" (The Call) regarding a revelation experienced by someone who is in jail. Moreover, I soon decided to read them research on the topic of gangs and jail. In addition to learning about Rafael, some of my students had knowledge of gangs because of personal or second-hand experience. I had also noticed that several of them considered violence as an integral part of the Latino culture. So I read excerpts from *Homegirls* (Mendoza-Denton, 2008) as a way to make them stay away from gang life or from identifying as gang members. I read my students a piece on the voices of gang members who demonstrated, to a stronger degree, the same characteristics that were typical of the relation between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants. For example, I referred to the disrespectful treatment that 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants received from 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants. The gangs in *Homegirls* were divided according to who had come more recently to the United States. I read about the different physical ways the members of each gang identified, and more. My attempt was to make them understand the negative, even silly, reasons that people divided to join gangs and hurt each other.

I also read about how the gang members dressed and how they divided by the language they spoke; how the *norteñas* considered the *sureñas* as inferior and the insults they used against each other. I said,

It makes me think of what some people in this class have said about the newcomers and how they have even used similar terms such as *mojados* [wetbag] to refer to them. It also makes me think about how many 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Cubans in Miami treated the newcomer Cubans. I wonder if in the pursuit of status we tend to treat others, even members of our families, not so nicely. (February 16, 2010) And I left it there as they again stared at me wordless.

I also read to students an excerpt from a story told by a former gang member (Nieto, 2002). The story illustrated the experience of a student who tried to succeed in school and his eventual disengagement from gangs. Students seemed very interested as they were all paying close attention. Even Alberto, who eventually went to an alternative school for a behavior disorder, was paying attention. Nolo asked him to be quiet and pay attention when I was getting ready to start. And Nadine, who always had a hard time being quiet through anything we did, said emphatically when I finished reading, “That was good!” Then Daniel, a former gang member who often was quite disengaged from class, commented, “A gang member can leave the gang anytime to accomplish what he wants.” But added that, “A gang member is always part of his gang.” I asked, “Why, are they like a family, sort of like you are always part of your family?” He nodded. I asked him to explain further, but he replied, “Forget it.” I realized that this was all he was ever going to tell me and I left it at that. I used the opportunity to share my experience with a former student who ended up in jail despite his early identification by a university for his academic promise. I said, “Yes, he drove me crazy but he was really smart. He served prison, had some friends die, learned his lesson and eventually went to college.”

Another marginalization topic we discussed was poverty as it was presented in the story of “En el fondo del caño hay un negrito,” about a poor family living in Puerto Rico’s wetlands. I also referred to the topic of poverty when we read a passage from *Cuando era puertorriqueña* describing the protagonist’s zinc house with a floor made out of soil. When I asked them if they had seen houses like that, several students agreed emphatically like, for example, Karen who explained having seen many houses like that in El Salvador.

The following focus group discussion illustrated how several of my students liked reading topics that had to do with marginalization. This focus group, which consisted of my homeroom students, referred to what they found interesting in some of the independent book choices they had liked that school year.

Nelly: “Baby girl gets raped. That was interesting”.

Jessie: “In my books I was interested in families that were not perfect, a lot of drama. You can connect to it”.

Francisca: “I guess because we have been through it. I think that lots of Hispanics go through more of that than the White students. Also they [White Americans] don’t even know you but they judge you by how you look”.

Teacher: “Do you think that if books painted a perfect life you would be bored with them?”

Carlos: “Yes. Happiness, there is nothing to it”.

When Francisca and Carlos agreed that they liked *Cajas de carton*, Francisca said, “Yes, like my mom, she likes moving a lot; that makes me mad. I have to keep going to faraway places to see her.”

Carlos: “My dad moves a lot”.

Teacher: “So you like *Cajas de cartón* because you can relate to it?”

Carlos: “Yes”. (May 21, 2010)

Jessie did not find *Cajas de cartón* to be boring either. When I asked her to describe what was interesting about it, she answered, “His pain is interesting to me. I used to go through that” (May 21, 2010).

During another focus group discussion, Dinora made a comment about the less than ideal experiences of the characters in *Cajas de cartón*, which did not stop after they had crossed the border to California: “Yes, the boy in *Cajas de Cartón* said, ‘but this is not California’ because nothing had changed after they had crossed the border” (May 4, 2010).

One of my jobs during the school year was to coordinate the mentoring program for the most at-risk 45 ninth graders. Thus between the coordination of that program and teaching several ninth graders I naturally became involved in the lives of several ninth graders. As I explained before, while it was not part of my job description, I naturally noticed that several of those students, five in particular, preferred to be in my homeroom than in the homeroom they had been assigned to. One of the summer scholars was Carlos, an ADHD male who had moved many times in his life. He had just met his natural mother, lived with his stepmother and sporadically saw his alcoholic father. The meetings with his father were naturally full

of turmoil which he tended to talk about during homeroom. Francisca, a Venezuelan female, started speaking much more to me when she found out that I was Venezuelan. She lived with her father since the time her mother abandoned the household. She visited her mother on weekends. Jessie also lived with her father and had a lot of issues with her mother. Nelly could not get along with her male homeroom teacher and had ADD symptoms that had not been officially diagnosed. Since I noticed that she needed someone to keep her focused and I knew she had a hard time bonding with male teachers, I invited her to my homeroom. I got to know the fifth one, Cloe, through her older sister who had attendance issues related to the recent death of her father. My relationship with Cloe became close which naturally led her to come to my homeroom.

I monitored these students' grades the whole year, talked to their parents and teachers, put pressure on them to improve, and more. I often read with and to them as I told them that whoever was in my office had to read. I also often talked with Cloe about books as she was an avid reader. She was one of my few students who clearly identified as a reader and read several books at the same time. She would often greet me saying "Ms. Cabrero, I just finished my book!" I checked out several books for those students. The favorite book of Carlos, a boxer, had to do with a boxer who was sent back to his country several times as an illegal immigrant. Francisca's favorite book had to do with an alcoholic teenager. Two of Nelly's favorite books were *Freedom Writers Diary* (Freedom Writers, 1999) and *Baby Girl* (Adams, 2007)<sup>19</sup>. Jessie loved the *Bluford Series*.

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<sup>19</sup> *Baby Girl* has to do with a low income minority teenager who becomes pregnant as a consequence of being raped.

Besides preferring to be in my office during homeroom, what those students had in common was their need of a great deal of academic support and an adult to provide them some structure. None of them considered themselves good students. They all needed a lot of convincing from me to focus academically.

Several times we read together at the library which never seemed to embarrass them. Our first visit to the library was when Francisca and Jessie asked me to check out books from the library for them because they felt like reading. The next day the three of us took turns reading Francisca's book about the alcoholic young woman. Many conversations interrupted our reading. They had to do with connections that the students made between what they read and their lives or the lives of people they knew. It soon became lucid to me that there was a clear relationship between the topics they chose to read and their lives.

A conversation between Jessie, Carlos, and Francisca demonstrated this connection. As we read about the topic of male adolescents who become parents too young, Jessie remarked, "My father should read this book." Then she added, "I am not getting along with my dad." To which Carlos responded, "My father disappointed me. He has thirteen children. I live with my stepmother. I just met my mother about two months ago but she is not used to having children so she gets impatient." Then Francisca followed the conversation with, "I will never let my father date another woman" (March 16, 2010).

Cloe's life, like the lives of the characters in the books she read, was quite challenging. An avid reader, she tended to gravitate towards books about characters with difficult lives. She would often provide summaries such as, "...About this

teenager who is abandoned by her mom and how she starts to change” (January 11, 2010) or “...About a woman whose husband abused her and did not tell her that he had AIDS” (March 9, 2010). And as I mentioned earlier, Cloe often related the lives of the characters she was reading with the lives of real people: “My sister started self-mutilating after my father died” (February 8, 2010).

Carlos was also very adept at connecting whatever we were reading to real life, especially his home life. As Cloe was commenting on a book she was reading, Carlos interjected,

I saw my stepmother after she had been beat up by my father. When I saw her on the sofa, with a black eye, I felt bad because I would have done anything for that not to happen. Sometimes he (father) says he is going to beat me up and I say, “I hope so.” I will fight him as well. (April, 26, 2010)

One day Carlos explained, “I read the book *Precious*.” I read the whole thing because my mom had it at the house. “Why do you like *Precious*?” I asked. “Because of the way she explains what happens to her, how she gets raped by her father and abused by her mother”. “Why do you like those topics?” I asked. He answered, “That has not happened to me but I can identify with it” (January 25, 2010). At another time, Carlos said suddenly, “Last night my father came home for a while and we got into a fight. I was annoyed because he was drunk. My brother is in jail because he fought with my father. My father put him in jail” (February 22, 2010).

Cloe’s book choices were unique in that, even though most of their characters lived marginalized lives, they could often find a sense of liberation. One day she asked me enthusiastically: “Did you ever read ‘Huellas en la arena’ [Footprints on

the sand]? I nodded. She added with keenness, “I saw it yesterday and liked it so much that I bought and brought it to my house. But it is nicer in English” (April 14, 2010).

Cloe’s experience led me to some reflections. While I understood that many of my students identified with marginalized topics, the ultimate message I wanted to leave them with was that they could transcend circumstances that life put in front of them. With that in mind I decided to read with them a chapter in *The Transcendent Child* (Rubin, 1996). The book documented the transcendent adulthood of real life people who experienced traumatizing childhood experiences. I was committed to providing for my students who had not lived *picture perfect lives* the opportunity to identify with marginalized topics but in a hopeful way.

I picked a time when we had a very long class due to state assessments. Several of my students had work to make up so I started to read the chapter to whoever was available by forming a circle which eventually became bigger as students were finishing their make-up work. I selected a reading that combined borderlands and marginalization topics. The story had to do with a woman of Mexican American heritage who experienced extreme hardships as a child. The hardships did not end when she left her parental home since she married a brutal man who did not want her to go to college. Her determinate goal, though, was to go to college which she accomplished despite tremendous obstacles. She now has a doctorate and has found an understanding partner who allows her to continue growing. The reading included themes such as ethnic discrimination and racism, illegal immigration, growing up as a Latino/a in the United States, physical,



emotional and sexual abuse, chauvinism, poverty, and more. But the predominant message, which I intended to leave to my students, was one of transcending circumstances.

*Exploration of Cultural Gender Roles.*

Another topic that several students, females in particular, identified with was that of gender roles. In order to explore this topic I presented several readings, started discussions, and asked my students to write a journal entry. I read a segment in Garcia Lorca's play *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (*The House of Bernarda Alba*). That play, which my students will read in its entirety if they eventually take AP Spanish Literature, questions the traditional role of women in the Spanish society of the first half of the twentieth century. I explained that Garcia Lorca was a homosexual author who understood the injustices perpetrated against women in Spain.

We further discussed the double standards in Latino culture while we read excerpts in Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La frontera* (1999), *Cuando era puertorriqueña*, an ultraconservative Spanish manifesto about women's roles used in Franco's Spain, and "Medias rojas" (Red socks). "Medias rojas" is a naturalist Spanish AP reading about a father who disfigures his daughter's face so she will not leave him alone in Spain to go to America. Females had much stronger reactions than males. At the end of the unit I also asked my students to write about any topic related to gender. I also told them, thinking about Tony and Margarita, that they could write about sexual preference if it pleased them. Another topic which seemed to intrigue several of my students was the universal one about death as the following section illustrates.

*Exploration of the Death Topic.*

At some point several of my students seemed quite interested in the topic of death. For example, some students such as Ana and Cloe had close family members die recently. Students such as former gang members Daniel and Nicolas knew gang members who had been murdered. They had both chosen for their independent reading a book on Tupac, a young rapper who had been murdered. Other students such as Miguel, Isabel, Chris and Yara were quite interested in the supernatural and the connection between life and death. I also intended to connect the death topic with magic realism, which was so typical of our literature and which students were going to seriously study later in Spanish AP literature. I had also remembered when writer Gabriel García Márquez said in an interview that “all Latin Americans are magic realists,” and reminisced the way my grandmother introduced me to magic realism through her personal tales, mostly about her experiences connecting life and death.

The first time I referred to the topic of death, it was early in the school year when I shared with them something personal. I had asked them to write a journal entry about an important event in their lives. So I decided to write simultaneously about my father’s sudden death when I was more or less their age. As I normally read and/or summarized some journal entries the day after they had written in their journals, I went ahead and read my entry after summarizing all of their entries. They listened intently. The topic was intimate. I was showing my students my vulnerable side perhaps too early. But gaining a sense of closeness, intimacy, family, and community while we discussed literary topics was my goal.

On another day when we were going over a textbook reading written by Isabel Allende, I decided to present them Allende's book *Paula*. One of the most memorable parts of that book is Allende's description of her daughter's passing after being in a coma for one year. In her description of her daughter's passage, the author utilizes magic realism as she depicts the present relatives – dead and alive -- as if they were all in the same dimension. I also read the description of Isabel Allende's poignant reaction after her daughter had finally died. In my fifth period we formed a circle. With my seventh period I decided to take students to the softball field where they sat on the bleachers.

One of the most surprising reactions was the one of Ana, a student who had not enjoyed most literary topics throughout the year. Her adored Bolivian grandfather, of whom she often wrote in her journal, had recently died. That day in the soccer field Ana participated like no other in her class. At the end of the discussion she asked me if the book had been translated to English meaning that she was intending to read it. I replied with the question, "Why don't you read it in Spanish instead?" Cloe, while more reserved about the topic, answered my question, "Do we continue to have a relationship with the people who die?" with, "Yes, I love my papi." Ana followed: "With my grandpa. I think of him every day. I cried so much when he died," to which I said, "What you felt was *congoja* (anguish)" (May 16, 2010).

Those two students expressed a special connection with the topic of death, which felt familiar to me since I also experienced the separation from a beloved one

early in my life. Again as if we were a family, the day of the anniversary of my father's death I informed my students.

The discussion with my other class took a different turn. I had arranged my class in the form of a circle since I understood the intimacy it facilitated. As with the other circle reading, Tony got in the middle and started to read without my asking. Tony had already told me how much he enjoyed Isabel Allende. His action just seemed absolutely natural and the students accepted it as such. Between Tony's uttered lines we discussed the tenuous line between life and death. "Would you like to go with someone you really love?" I asked. Elmer answered, "No because I don't believe in the after-life." Then Yara went on telling a supernatural story about a butterfly and her dead grandmother and how she felt that her grandmother spoke with her from the other world. Then I remarked, "Isabel Allende talks to her daughter daily and has written a lot, especially in *La casa de los espíritus*, about her ethereal grandmother who was *clarividente*." So I explained the word *clarividente* (clairvoyant) and Chris said that he is like that, that he has dreams about some people and then he sees them. Then scientific Marcos, asked "Is that really true?" And I answered, "I don't know, what do you guys think?" Then Tony talked about how people may have the need to invent heaven and, "Where does the energy go? We may become a tree." Tony spoke in English despite my requests but all of the others spoke in Spanish. Isabel insisted that there is heaven and hell and Yara joined her to explain that they are two different places. "It is hard" I said "because you may have people you love going to different places." Then I started speaking about *realismo mágico* when we reached the part of the reading in which dead and alive people are in

the same room. “Wouldn’t you like to keep communicating with someone you love even after s/he has died?” Then Miguel shared how he saw the intact corpse of a family member who had died several years ago. Yara seemed very enthusiastic about this topic. “Why do you visit someone who has died? There is nothing there,” she said (May 15, 2010).

*Identity Exploration through Writing.*

A vehicle that I found to be quite conducive to identity exploration was the exercise of writing. While my main focus had initially been to develop my students’ interest in reading, I was soon surprised to find out the unfolding writing ability of several of my students. While initially the writing samples of many of my students were quite limited, I soon became staggered by their increasing length. From the beginning I required them to write in Spanish five paragraph essays about their independent readings, which I carefully corrected and asked them to rewrite. I was relentless in my expectation for them to rewrite and improve their essays. But despite my own influence, I clearly saw evidence of students who wanted to write well out of their own initiative. Karen was one of the first students who impressed me with the length of and hard work she put into her essays. The increased length of my students’ essays was unexpected, especially, since most of them only wanted to speak in English from the beginning. Perhaps their writing improved because of the fact that they could devote extra time to finding the right words. Whatever the cause, I was pleased. I was also startled at the fact that most of the books they chose to read were in English, which meant that they had to translate all of their thoughts into Spanish.

As I started thinking about how to use writing as a possible vehicle to guide my students to reflect on their identity as a consequence of related reading topics, I considered various ways of making them use writing as an identity exploration vehicle. I often felt that asking my students to write about what we had been discussing helped them personalize and reflect more deeply on topics that would eventually help them develop a more positive sense of identity. I also thought that giving them free reign as to the format and perspective they used to write was one more way of welcoming their agency and of treating them as honor students.

Of the 17 topics that my students wrote about in their journals throughout the year, the following thirteen, most of which were assigned on the second semester when I was guiding them to explore their identities more thoroughly, had to do in one way or another with the exploration of their identities (Appendix L):

- “Mi cultura” (My culture)
- “Cuando era niño/a” (When I was a child)
- “Yo” (Myself)
- “Diferencias y similitudes entre el personaje de mi libro y yo” (Differences and similarities between my book’s character and me)
- “Los conflictos de Esmeralda Santiago” (The conflicts of Esmeralda Santiago)
- “Las experiencias de los hijos de los inmigrantes” (The experiences of the children of immigrants)
- “La experiencia escolar de los inmigrantes de primera y segunda generación” (The school experience of the immigrants of 1st and 2nd generations)
- “Spanglish o bilingüismo” (Spanish or Bilingualism)

- “El rol femenino y masculino” (The feminine and masculine roles)
- “Etiquetas” (Labels)
- “Un viaje” (A trip)
- “Mis obligaciones” (My obligations)
- “Mi reacción a la película ‘Bajo la misma luna’” (My reaction to the movie “Under the Same Moon”)

### Conclusion

In this chapter I demonstrated how I engaged in ethnographic action research to become culturally responsive by drawing on my students’ linguistic, cultural and reading experiences. By listening to my students’ voices, I learned about their linguistic zones of proximal development. I found out that my students were versatile in their language use and that most regarded bilingualism as the ideal linguistic state despite their level of bilingualism. I built on their versatility and regard for bilingualism to turn them into fluent bilinguals.

I drew on what I already knew and eventually learned about my students’ cultural and linguistic identities to bridge their borderlands experiences and to get them acquainted with literary topics that reflected those experiences. Through borderlands literary topics, I guided my students to explore their borderlands experiences and identities through classroom and homeroom discussions and through writing exercises. My realization that many of my students were lacking in knowledge about their linguistic and cultural heritage drove me to introduce them to extensive information about their heritage through various means. I also allowed them

to be agents of their own learning as I allowed them to select their own reading topics and conduct their own topics of research.

Through my ethnographic action research I learned about my students' reading experiences and interests. I introduced them to a large number of readings as I grew to understand what attracted their attention. These readings dealt with the topics of language, roots, borderlands experiences, marginal experiences, voices of Latino teenagers, and cultural gender roles. Listening to my students' voices, I also started experimenting with different teaching formats to engage them in literacy.

My query unexpectedly guided me to understand the importance of my role as a teacher of Latino/a students. Furthermore, I discovered that acknowledging and building on my students' agency and voice were meaningful since, by doing that, I allowed them to become empowered agents of their own learning as well as explorers of their identities.



## CHAPTER 6:

### IMPACT ON LATINO/A STUDENT INTEREST IN LITERACY THROUGH THE EXPLORATION OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT LITERARY TOPICS

In this chapter I present my findings on the impact of my students' acquaintance with culturally relevant borderlands literary topics on their interest in literacy. These findings answer my research question, "Can I, through the exploration of culturally relevant borderlands literary topics impact my students' interest in literacy?" I discuss the shift in my students' interest in Spanish reading, writing and speaking and suggest the reasons for my students' increase or lack of increase in reading interest. I also present the conclusions I drew from the choices my students made for their independent quarterly reading assignments. Finally, I make reference to the connection between acquired comfort and interest in literacy.

#### Reading Interest

Regarding the topic of gain in reading interest, 35 students (16 males and 19 females) answered the *Questionnaire for Students about their Reading Interests* (Appendix K). The reading interest of 57% of all students increased. The reading interest of 40% did not increase. And of those 14 students whose reading interest did not increase, six had a lot of interest from the beginning, leaving only 8 of 35 who had the possibility of increasing their interest but did not. The reading interest of only one student decreased.

While the interest of 29% of 1.5 generation males increased, the interest of 71% of them stayed the same. Two of those five males had a lot of interest from the

beginning. The interest of 50% of 1.5 generation females increased while the interest of the other 50% stayed the same. Two of the latter three females had a lot of interest from the beginning. Concerning the interest of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males (one did not provide that information), while the interest of 67% increased, the interest of 22% stayed the same. And while the interest of 69% of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation females increased, the interest of 31% of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation females stayed the same. Of those four students, two had a lot of interest from the beginning.

As to the number of levels that student reading interest increased, for 55% of students their interest increased by one level. Most of the students in this category, 64%, went from *a little* to *some*. The percentage of the students whose reading interest increased two levels was 40%. The largest group in this category, constituting 75%, went from no interest to some interest. There was one last category in which one female student indicated that her level had gone up from some to some plus.

Regarding the shift in each reading level, *no* interest changed into *a little* for two students and to *some* for six students; *a little* turned to *some* for seven students and to *a lot* for two students; *some* turned into *a lot* for 2 students and to *some plus* for 1 student; *a lot* stayed the same for 6 students, who had enjoyed reading a *lot* from the beginning of the school year.

Forty percent of students indicated no shift in their reading interest. Of those students, the reading interest of only one student did not change from *no* initial reading interest. Nine percent of students indicated no reading shift from the initial *little* interest. Eleven percent of students did not shift from *some* reading interest.

Finally, as indicated above, 17% of students initially had *a lot* of interest in reading, which did not decrease. Only one student indicated a decrease in reading interest.

The majority of the focus group participants expressed that their interest in reading in Spanish had increased, for some more than for others. As I demonstrated in chapter four example, Enid, the Honduran 1.5 generation immigrant who spoke mostly in Spanglish, felt glad to have read her first book in Spanish as part of her independent reading: “I had never read in Spanish before. I read the one about the pastor who went to other countries.” Enid was expressive when she spoke about her enjoyment of reading: “I like romantic books, I like history books. I can’t stop reading. Religious books. I like readings by the same author. I hug my books around” (May 25, 2010). Melanie, who had been identified as one of the most at-risk ninth graders, chose for her independent reading a Spanish classic, *Marianela*. She told me, “I improved a lot in reading, I read *Marianela*” (May 25, 2010). Karen commented that “I see myself more as a reader. Your class has made me read. I am really good at reading in Spanish.” Then I asked her if she wanted to read and write Spanish better in the future. She answered, “Yes, I really do” (May 11, 2010). And as I demonstrated in chapter four, other students such as Margarita saw reading as a work in progress.

Another focus group participant, Juan, often slept a great deal during class. His exhaustion was caused by working late hours in order to assist his family in both El Salvador and in USA financially. Nevertheless, *The Line*, a book that has to do with immigration, kept him awake in class. Later he told me *The Line* was his favorite book that school year. When I asked him during his focus group discussion if that book had to do with his life, he said, “Not my life but [the life of] others, like the life

of immigrants. Just recently my two nephews came to the US and I could relate the story to them” (May 18, 2010).

Some students like my mentees perceived reading in Spanish in terms of the more incipient stage of reading out loud and deciphering how to pronounce those words. Three of my mentees, Francisca, Jessie and Nelly, were also among my most hesitant readers. Those students needed a great deal of academic support, one of the reasons I had decided to mentor them. The three of them admitted to *feeling better* about reading. One day during homeroom, Francisca and Jessie even asked me to take them to the library to find books, which I did without hesitation.

For another one of my mentees, Carlos, the student who introduced my research to the theme of marginalization, the biggest academic challenge was his ADHD, one of the labels he included in his identity project. Nevertheless, his limitation was not just cognitive but financial. He said, “My eyes bother me when I read.” When I told him, “Maybe you should go to the doctor,” he answered, “It costs money” (May 20, 2010). Despite his financial and cognitive challenges, Carlos demonstrated throughout the year that he could be a good student when he took his medication. His explanation about his interest in increasing his literacy in Spanish was linked to the value he attributed to the Latino culture, “I want to learn to write and read more in Spanish next year. Latin culture is strong, I want to read more, write more, those accents” (May 21, 2010).

Nolo, who had last finished a book in fourth grade and who was going through ADHD testing, said one day in class when I asked for recommendations on how to improve my teaching: “All I can say is that you got me to read” (May 27,

2010). Nolo was one of the four students who failed my class. While the other three students failed because of persistent absenteeism, Nolo was almost always in my class. However, he barely ever did what I asked him to do. Nevertheless, one of our visits to the library to select their books for independent reading changed his engagement in reading. At the beginning of third quarter, when the librarian presented a book written by a former gang member, Nolo hastily raised his hand and uttered: “Save that book for me!” When I found that Nolo owed money to the library, which meant that he would not be able to check out the book right away, I went ahead and checked it out for him as I did for many other students. After Nolo finished that book, I ordered him the second and third books in the series since he had expressed interest in reading the sequels. He highly recommended these books to Rafael when I visited him in jail, and to Darío, another friend. Darío was not doing well in his English class and had recently been placed in a literacy class for not passing the state’s eighth grade’s Standards of Learning English Assessment. Darío became one more student who visited my office often so I would read Nolo’s favorite book to him.

Another student who slept a lot during class was Cloe, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female of Salvadoran heritage. Cloe had to wake up early each day since her widowed mother had moved the family far from school to find affordable housing for her four daughters and herself. As Cloe often told me and tests reflected, she did not pay much attention to the textbook readings. Nonetheless, her interest in reading increased significantly that year. While Cloe had always enjoyed reading, she became such an avid reader that being a reader became part of her identity, as demonstrated in her identity project. She also became quite close to me as she became my mentee during

daily homeroom. On the questionnaire about reading interest, she indicated that I had had a lot of impact on her reading interest “because we both like to read; and she’s the best teacher ever”. Cloe often read several books at the same time, many of which I checked out for her during homeroom. Most days she would greet me with a smile, a book in her hand, and an oral account of whatever she was reading lately.

Cloe had the unrivaled capacity to associate the lives of book characters who did not live “picture perfect lives” (Carlos’ quote) with her own life or with the lives of people she knew. Before I met Cloe, I had dealt repeatedly in my dean role with her older sister who had emotional problems due to the sudden death of their father, who had fallen from the roof of their apartment complex where he worked as the custodian. Cloe had lived a life full of hardships and most of the characters she identified with had not lived “picture perfect lives.” In fact they lived quite marginalized lives. Cloe understood human nature with the wisdom of an old soul. While she understood the downtrodden lives of characters/people who lived with hardships, she also found redemption in themes and characters who reflected her spiritual perspectives on life. One time, when I asked her class if each story had a theme, she was the only person who answered with a stare of conviction in her eyes, “Yes, every story has a theme because every author has a message” (February 15, 2010). That time she was fully awake.

In contrast, Santos was one of the few focus group participants who did not feel inspired yet to read out of his own initiative: “I have never been much of a reader. It is true that I have read more this year but I am not inspired yet to pick up a book and read” (May 10, 2010). During another part of the focus group discussion he

had indicated that he liked writing more. I even read to his class one of his essays about his independent reading, *Animal Farm*<sup>20</sup>, as an example of good writing.

The answers to questions #1 and #2 in the *Questionnaire for Students about their Reading Interest* demonstrate the shift in student reading interest from the beginning to the end of the school year (Appendix J). I categorized students with *no* or *little* reading interest as resistant readers; students with *some* interest as semi-resistant readers; and students with *a lot* of interest as non-resistant readers (Figure 10). There was a marked difference in the findings. Whereas at the beginning of the year 20 of the students had been resistant readers, at the end of the year that number had decreased to seven. The semi-resistant group more than doubled from nine to 19 thanks to the noteworthy group of students who shifted from resistant to semi-resistant. The last group of non-resistant readers which had started as six changed to ten. Thus while at the beginning of the year only 15 students had not been resistant readers, by the end of the year, that number almost doubled to 28.

#### Reasons for Increase and Lack of Increase in Reading Interest

The students who stated in the *Questionnaire for Students about their Reading Interests* (Appendix K) that their reading interest had increased answered question #4 in the same questionnaire. That question presented different possible reasons for which the students' reading interest increased. Some of the students also answered question #3, which presented different reasons for lack of increase in reading interest even though it did not apply to them. The most frequent choice for the total number of students was

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<sup>20</sup> As I stated earlier, I allowed students to read their independent readings in any language of their choice but required them to write their essays about those readings in Spanish.

*I could choose my own independent (home) reading topics (E). The second most frequent choice was Some of the reading topics were much more interesting than others (B). The third most frequent choice was Topics related to positive aspects of the Hispanic culture and language are interesting to me (F) (See Appendix R).*

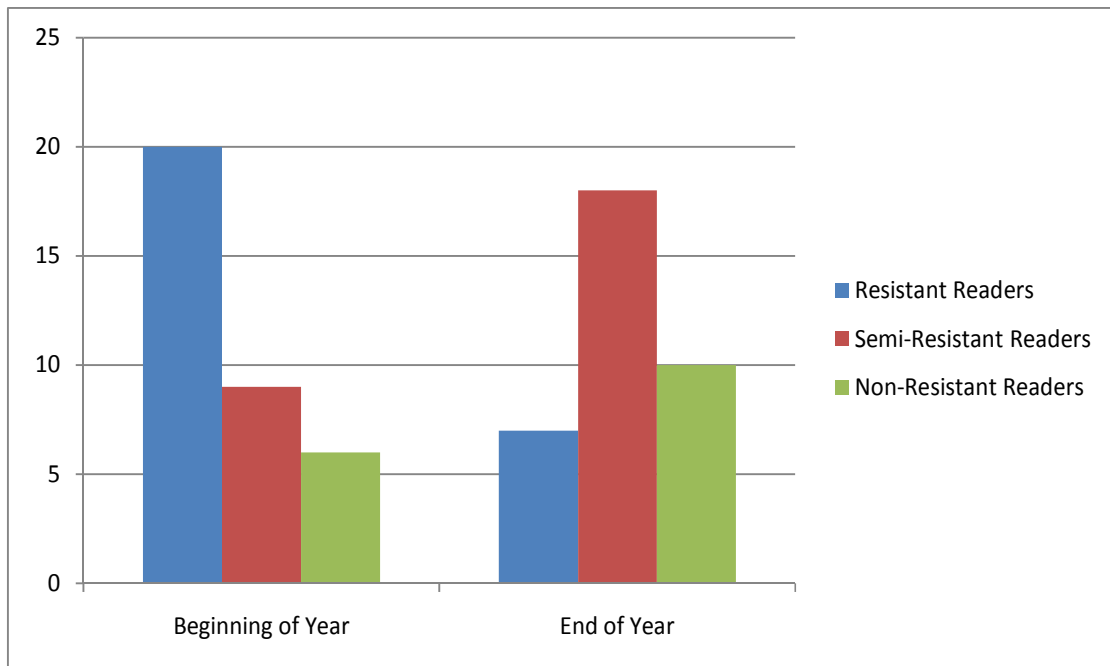


Figure 10: Reading Levels

As all of my focus group participants confirmed, the freedom of choosing their own readings was key to my students' increase in reading interest. The lack of restrictions and independence facilitated my students' experimentation with different topics which led them to find the topics which engaged them. The literary topics that my students selected through their independent readings added to the topics I acquainted them with. Thus the freedom of choosing their own readings might have impacted their second top choice of having found some topics more interesting than others. While it was possible that, before their immersion in literary topics, my more resistant readers had not found topics they identified with, they now found topics that



engaged them. Accordingly, Yara commented during class one day, “Because we all got to start enjoying our own topics; some people discovered the topics that they really liked because of all the different kinds of books they were exposed to. At the beginning they would just choose any book just for reading.” These top two selected reasons demonstrated the positive impact elicited by the combination between student agency in finding literary topics and an extensive exposure to literary topics. While exposure - *The more exposure I had to a variety of reading materials, the more I got interest in reading* (C) - was not among the most frequently selected three reasons for the overall number of students, it was one of the top three choices for the disaggregated male and female groups. It also figured as one of the most frequently selected three reasons for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants. For 1.5 generation it was the fourth top choice for 1.5 generation. This finding suggested that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students were, perhaps, more attracted by borderlands topics than 1.5 generation students.

The exposure element also had to do with the third most frequently selected reason chosen by my students, *Topics related to positive aspects of the Hispanic culture and language are interesting to me* (F). As I indicated earlier, I had discovered early in the school year that my students had limited information regarding the positive aspects of their heritage, that their identity may have been impacted by society’s identification of them. When I reached these conclusions, I started the process of immersing my students in literary topics to help them start exploring/creating a more positive sense of identity. I intended for my students to become acquainted with the most positive aspects of their linguistic and cultural

heritage so they would come out of their social identity process with a more positive sense of identity. And as indicated by their selection of this reason, my actions seemed to have worked for a noteworthy number of students.

As Margarita, whose interest had increased from *some* to *a lot*, wrote in the questionnaire: “I think it is better to read about positive things about Hispanics because all you see is negative things being said about our race.” Moreover, Karen wrote, Reading all these different stories had interested me because it (they) shows (showed) how the ‘latinos’ have made a difference and it (they) also shows (showed) the legends, myths, and culture and how the countries in Latin America live. And I like talking about that cause sometimes I feel like I am in El Salvador but without the uniform.

Karen’s increase also went from *some* to *a lot*.

The literary topics seemed to have opened for my students a window into the positive aspects of the Latino culture. However, there was a difference between males and females. While more females preferred the positive aspects, males preferred both the negative and positive aspects. While I did not have the chance to ask my male students why, I wonder if by *negative* they meant the more marginalized topics as I had noticed that they were more attracted to those than the females (Appendix K).

Another important aspect related to my students’ exposure to borderlands literary topics may have had to do with what Athanases’ (1998) finding on minority readers. She suggested that students who saw themselves represented in literature experienced a heightened sense of identity. Reading about characters whose lives

resembled their own may have helped form meaningful encounters/partnerships between my students and literature (Hinchman & Sheridan-Thomas, 2008). Thus my findings suggest a possible connection between reading engagement and a heightened sense of identity. Their extensive exposure to characters whose lives may have reflected theirs, may have helped bring about a more positive sense of social identity.

As for reasons my students' reading interest did not increase, 36 students completed the *Questionnaire for Students about their Reading Interests* (Appendix K). The students who stated that their reading interest had not increased (Appendix R) answered question #3 on the *Questionnaire for Students about their Reading Interests*. Some of the students also answered question #4, which had to do with reasons their reading interest increased, even though it did not apply to them.

The most frequently selected reasons students chose for their lack of increase in their reading interest were *The reading topics were not interesting* (A) and *Topics that we read about in Cuando era puertorriqueña and Cajas de cartón are not interesting to me* (D). The second choice was *The discussions we had during the Tertulia every two weeks did not really change my interest in reading* (F). The third choice was *I just don't like the practice of reading* (B). The data disaggregated according to gender and order of generation were considerably consistent on the three top choices.

Of the 14 students whose interest did not increase, six of them had already expressed a lot of interest from the beginning, leaving only eight students (22%) who had the possibility of increasing their interest. Moreover, as I illustrate later about the kinds of independent readings that my students selected, 1.5 generation males in

particular had a tendency towards more global and philosophical topics than the other students. One 1.5 generation male student whose interest was already *a lot* (and never changed) from the beginning wrote in the questionnaire, “Most of the topics were boring. The only ones I found interesting were the excerpts she [the teacher] read at the start of class regarding society and its incompetence.” One 1.5 generation female, whose interest increased from *a little* to *some*, wrote the following: “I did enjoy all the focus on reading and when we would choose our own books. But the readings we did in class and Tertulia I found boring. The topics of the stories we were required to read seemed the same. It did not really change. Or it was something I have heard before. It just did not catch my attention.” This lack of interest was not limited to 1.5 generation students. One 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female, whose interest increased from *a little* to *some*, explained that, “It does not really have anything to do with what we read or did in class. I am just not that interested. I like reading books that I can relate to.” As findings suggest that some of my students did not identify with borderlands topics, the curriculum for heritage speakers should ideally combine borderlands as well as more philosophical and global topics in order to satisfy these different kinds of interest.

A curious occurrence was that several of the students chose reasons for lack of increase even though their interest increased as I point out above. It is possible that my questionnaire did not provide all of the possible reasons their interest increased. Or, more likely, that there were times in class where their interest did not increase and they were thinking about reasons for that. Moreover, while it was clear that there

were definite aspects of the class that those students did not like, an unidentified *something* may have impacted their interest increase.

Concerning the Tertulia format, while few students whose interest increased mentioned the Tertulia as a reason, the Tertulia was selected as the second most frequently selected reason for lack of increase in reading interest. As far as the students who indicated an increase in interest, it is possible that the limited time the Tertulias met – once every two weeks for a total of half-an-hour each time – did not seem relevant enough to notice it; that other reasons were more relevant. Or plainly, just as the students whose interest did not increase indicated, they simply did not like Tertulia literary gatherings. Perhaps not appreciating the Tertulia had to do with not enjoying the more constrained form of social literary interaction. Another possible reason could have been that, as Miguel explained, students did not appreciate listening to others talk about books which they had not read themselves. As the year progressed, students were discovering the topics that interested them, which may have not been considered interesting to their Tertulia partners. Another possibility could be grouping students according to related topics of their interest. Each group could choose to read a book/or similar books on the same topic. Groups could be regrouped each quarter according to the shift in interest thanks to the exposure to different topics. While there was definitely room for improvement for the Tertulias, our last visit to the library demonstrated the communal quality of our class' literary experiences. Another possible reason for the low regard for Tertulias could have been that I required my students to join them from the beginning without requesting their

input in any way until much later. I also took it for granted that they would enjoy the Tertulias which had always been one of my preferred activities, a mistake on my part.

My most incongruous piece of data had to do with the books *Cuando era puertorriqueña* and *Cajas de cartón*. From my perspective based on classroom discussions, students had seemed quite interested in both books as we read them on the first day of each week. But when asked in the *Questionnaire for Students about Linguistic Identity and Cultural Identity* (Appendix J) about the main reasons their interest in reading increased, very few chose the item about reading those books as a reason. This may have meant that the other top three reasons of *choosing independent readings, some topics being more interesting than others, and learning about the positive aspects of Latino culture* had much more impact. However, for the students whose interest did not increase, those readings were one of the top three reasons. Also, during focus group dialogues, while some students indicated that those books should be read with Latino students, several others indicated that they did not enjoy them. The data I gathered about *Cuando era puertorriqueña* was the most troublesome since more students liked that book less than *Cajas de cartón*. While about half of my focus group participants saw some value in that book, the other half did not enjoy it at all. The following field notes which I wrote during the time we were reading *Cuando era puertorriqueña* illustrate how convinced I was that the students were enjoying the reading:

During class today as we were reading *Cuando era puertorriqueña* aloud, I asked students if they liked *Cuando era puertorriqueña*. Most of them nodded. Elmer said that “It reminds me of when I came from El Salvador.” Dinaida explained that she

enjoyed it “because I like it how she describes what she describes when she was a kid”. And then I asked Isabel if *Cuando era puertorriqueña* was her favorite story and she answered “yes”. Then I asked “why” to which she answered “because it is interesting how she describes how she moved from Puerto Rico to New York”. So I went ahead and asked her, “So do you like that topic?” to which she answered “Yes, that is why”. (January 25, 2010)

[...] Then I said that I had finally copied the second part of the book (*Cuando era puertorriqueña*), that we were not going to finish this first part. Tony immediately remarked “But I liked that book...” I added “We will continue reading this book but we are going to go ahead with the second part because, if not, we will never finish it”. They expressed excitement when she was describing the airplane, then they got into speaking about roller coasters. Some of them enjoyed the narrator’s description of the plane’s stewardess and the narrator’s first impression of an airplane. Then some of the students spoke about when they first got into a plane. When we speak about books sometimes it becomes like a big hangout place in which we talk about various topics. They seem to enjoy that; they seem relaxed. Most of them follow the book. The majority of students continue to seem very interested. Even though I kept reminding them that they needed to speak in Spanish, the conversation really became one big conglomeration of Spanglish words. I explained “When I was a child I thought an airplane landed at a higher place”. (March 5, 2010)

It is also possible that the lack of choice in reading those books may have been a factor in my students not choosing them as the top reasons for increased

interest in reading. Moreover, I believe I made a mistake in showing the movie “Casi una mujer” (adapted from the sequel to *Cuando era puertorriqueña*) to my students before we had finished reading *Cuando era puertorriqueña*. Several students advised me not to do that in the future. Below is a discussion we had about both books several weeks after we had read them:

Teacher: “So what do you think about *Cuando era puertorriqueña*?”

Santos: “I liked the message”.

Tony: “I liked them about the same. Similar writing styles and topics. In emotional terms, why would it be attractive to students? Because it is autobiographical; they are interested in knowing other people’s stories”.

Isabel: “I liked *Cuando era puertorriqueña* more than *Cajas de cartón*”.

(May 18, 2010)

But for other students such as 1.5 generation Chris and Enid, the book was not engaging at all. “I slept” (May 18, 2010), Chris remarked. Enid explained that “To me it is boring. It is confusing. Does not entertain. Does not engage you” (May 24, 2010). Nevertheless, Enid found *Cajas de cartón* quite engaging as I demonstrate below.

Second generation Santos thought *Cuando era puertorriqueña* had some value but mostly to help 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants develop their own sense of identity:

“*Cuando era puertorriqueña* would affect first [generation] immigrants more. Not me because I was born here, I already have my own sense of identity” (May 18, 2010).

Tony thought that those books “reflect a certain percentage or so of our students”

(May 18, 2010). To my question “Do *Cajas de cartón* and *Cuando era*

*puertorriqueña* reflect the life of our students?” Santos answered, “It does not reflect



the lives of our students; they are very specific experiences; all Hispanics are bicultural but those are specific things” (May 18, 2010).

While Margarita and Karen liked both books, they, like the majority of the focus group participants, preferred *Cajas de cartón*. Margarita, a 1.5 generation immigrant, felt intimately connected to *Cajas de cartón*. To my question “Does *Cajas de cartón* reflect the life of our students?” she replied “I think that most (Latino) students really have to fend for themselves; I kind of in a way relate to it because their parents work so hard.” Then I asked her, “Do you mean that the parents of the white kids don’t work as hard?” She explained the following:

No. I am saying that a lot of the parents of immigrant kids work harder than most because of the fact that they are immigrants and it is hard to find a job and some of them did not graduate from high school. I like *Cajas de cartón* because it kind of reminded me of how much I used to move. [...] it kind of reminded me since I moved so many times when I was a kid. And I guess, how things look different to you, you don’t know what you are and what it feels like when someone is like alien-like to you. (May 10, 2010)

To my question, “So would you recommend it?” she replied, “I think I’d recommend it.”

Enid, another 1.5 generation immigrant, clearly identified with *Cajas de cartón*. Even though she had not liked *Cuando era puertorriqueña*, she had been seriously impacted by *Cajas de cartón* earlier in the year when she chose to read it independently. She expressed how much she had identified with the book. As I mentioned earlier, she replied: “I liked it a lot, I cried reading it. It reminds me of all

the times I had to move. Just when I thought I had made close friends I was told that I had to leave.”

While I had initially considered both books to be of the same kind, I now realize that *Cuando era puertorriqueña* and *Cajas de cartón* have to do with two different kinds of immigration experiences. As Santos explained, *Cuando era puertorriqueña* has to do with the experience of the 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrant, one that none of my students could directly relate to. On the other hand, *Cajas de cartón* told a story that several of my students had lived as 1.5 generation immigrants. Not too long ago they had been immigrant children going through nomadic-like experiences, full of hardships, instability, forced detachment from family members and friends, marginal experiences, poverty, and adult-like obligations. Even if students were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, they had also experienced many of those hardships as children since their parents had been recent immigrants.

I also realize that it is possible that many students considered those two books as just two of a large number of readings to which they were exposed through me or through their own search. After all, we read one book or the other once a week or four classes a month. Students could also remember *Cajas de cartón* more vividly since we read it after *Cuando era puertorriqueña*. It is also possible that, as with the Tertulia, my students did not appreciate not being given a choice in reading those books. Nor did I ask for their ideas on how to discuss the books until later in the school year. I still believe that both books, especially *Cajas de carton*, have the potential to guide students through their identity exploration and to engage them in literacy. Finding the best ways to teach both books deserves more exploration. The

question of which age group the books are more suitable for needs some attention as well.

### Borderlands Reading Topics

My students' appreciation for being able to choose their own reading topics led me to inquire about their preferred reading choices. This part of my research had to do with my students' preferred reading topics as indicated by the three independent readings they chose to read and write essays about during the second, third, and fourth quarters. Twenty males (13 from 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and seven from 1.5 generation) and twenty females (14 from 2<sup>nd</sup> generation and six from 1.5 generation) chose three books each and wrote one essay about each reading. Hence, there were a total of 120 books read and 120 essays written by all males and females. I documented the titles and topics of each book, kept copies of the essays and read them (essays) all. My data analysis led me to find four topics which had to do with the borderlands experience: *Latino life in the United States; immigration; social & home marginalization; and ancestral & more current Latino and Latin American experience* (Appendix R). *Social and home marginalization* consists of the experiences of growing up at the lower end of the socio-economic hierarchy and of lacking social and cultural capital. According to Wikipedia, "In sociology, marginalisation (British/International), or marginalization (U.S.), is the social process of becoming or being made marginal (to relegate or confine to a lower social standing or outer limit or edge, as of social standing)."

These four borderlands topics made up approximately half of the topics preferred by the overall number of students: *social and home marginalization* (23%);

*Latino life in the USA* (10%); *immigration* (10%); and *ancestral and more current Latino and Latin American experience* (5%). This combination of borderlands topics was slightly preferred by 2<sup>nd</sup> (51%) over 1.5 generation (41%) students. Females (55%) also slightly preferred the borderlands combination over males (42%). These combined topics were also preferred by 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males (54%) over 1.5 males (20%). On the other hand, 1.5 females (67%) selected these topics more than 2<sup>nd</sup> generation females (50%). In comparison, both 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation females preferred these topics more than males Appendices U, V).

The borderland topic of *immigration* consistently figured as one of the top choices, about 10%, for each disaggregated group. This finding is noteworthy since, despite the order of generation and of having had first or second hand immigration experiences, this topic was persistent for all of the groups: females, males, 1<sup>st</sup> generation and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation (Appendices U, V).

The most noteworthy difference was between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1.5 generation males in the choice of *home and social marginalization* versus more global topics. Global topics involved experiences that did not have to do with personal experiences or, most specifically, the direct experience of living as a Latino immigrant in the United States. The topics that I considered to be the most global were *adventure and mystery*, *philosophical*, *social injustice*, *Latin American literature*, and *international literature*. While for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males *home and social marginalization* consisted of 31%, for 1.5 generation it was only 5%. There were other marked differences between both groups in regards to these five global topics. Whereas 66% of the topics selected by 1.5 generation males were global, 29% of these topics were selected by 2<sup>nd</sup> generation

students. Also while 10% of the topics selected by 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males had to do with *Ancestral & More Current Latino and Latin American History*, that topic was not selected by 1.5 generation males. This finding may indicate that some male students who lacked a point of reference were searching for it (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008) (Appendix S). Moreover, while more than 60% of the topics chosen by 1.5 generation females consisted of the borderlands combination, these borderlands topics amounted to less than 20% for 1.5 males (Appendices U, V).

These findings suggest that being born in the USA may trigger more interest in marginalized topics than having been born in another country. A possible reason for this phenomenon may be the internalization of the immigration/minority experience which may manifest in terms of a marginalized identity. Thanks to living outside of the United States, 1.5 males may identify much less with the marginalization experience. It was notable that, while 1.5 females identified much more than 1.5 males with marginalization experiences, this was less common for them than for their 2<sup>nd</sup> generation counterparts. But in contrast with 1.5 generation males, 1.5 females were more in tune with the topic of living marginal experiences than were 1.5 generation males. The high percentage of 1.5 females who identified with marginalization experiences despite a shorter time of living in the USA than 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students may indicate that females' perceptions of society's inequalities may occur earlier than for males. Another possibility may be that, because my sample is so small, this finding may be idiosyncratic, in other words, more specific to individuals. This may not be a genuine pattern in a different and larger group.

Nicolas, Carlos, Nelly and Dinaida exemplified students' interest in *social and home marginalization*. Nicolas' quote was a good example of a student's identification with a literary figure (in this case, a real person in a biography) who lived a marginal life: "Some similarities between Tupac and me are that we grew up in poverty, listened to music, knew people with special kinds of jobs. We ran out of home and used to get into a lot of problems" (November 5, 2011). Tupac Shakur, who was killed at the age of 25, was a rapper whose songs had to do with "growing up amid violence and hardships in ghettos, racism, other social problems and conflicts with other rappers [...]" (Wikipedia). Tupac personified the marginalized experiences several of my students identified with.

My homeroom student Carlos was another good example of one of several students who identified with characters who lived at the margins. He was the son of a Vietnamese mother, whom he had recently met, and a Guatemalan father who had thirteen children with various women. But Carlos actually lived with his Guatemalan stepmother. His favorite sport was boxing. One of the first books he chose to read related the life of a boxer who lived back and forth between his Latin American country and the USA where he had been deported from several times. Carlos remarked that he had really liked that book. A book he read in his spare time during winter break was *Precious*. He was impressed by the Ebonics used in that book. The next book that he chose was about a boy whose father was an alcoholic, a story that also reflected Carlos' life. Often during homeroom Carlos would talk about the arguments or the physical altercations he had had with his alcoholic father when the latter visited Carlos' home. Carlos' life and book readings resembled each other.

Nelly, one of the students I mentored, also chose books whose characters did not live “picture perfect lives”. The first book she chose was the story of a teenage girl who became pregnant. And the last book she chose was *Freedom Writers*, about students who lived painfully marginal lives but found a sense of liberation through writing about their experiences.

Dinaida, who had recently experienced the deportation of her father, recounted her favorite story that school year:

My favorite book is about this girl whose parents did not get to finish college. She has so many brothers and sisters and she has to stay with them cause her parents are working and she does not get to finish her homework until 11:00 at night. Her brother only watches TV, her mother has to go to Mexico. (May 4, 2010)

When I asked Dinaida if the book had to do with her identity, she nodded and answered, “Because she needs to figure out who she is and I have to do the same. I really relate because she does not know how she feels about her country because she is from Mexico” (May 4, 2010).

The books by Latino writer Gary Soto have to do with Latino life in the USA. Soto’s books, whose main themes have to do with Latino youth, were chosen by several students. As Edith explained, Soto’s *Accidental Love* was by far her favorite book that school year. Her enthusiasm while reading that book, which monopolized her Tertulia, was indeed contagious. As I mentioned before, another series of books that many of my students enjoyed was the *Bluford* series which had to do with the lives of mainly African American high school students. In a way both kinds of books,

one about mostly African Americans and one about mostly Latinos, had to do with being minority teenagers.

In contrast to students who were interested in borderlands topics, 1.5 generation Elmer and Tony were interested in more global topics. Tony's choices throughout the year were mainly the philosophically inclined of Brazilian Paulo Coelho. Despite the fact that he arrived to the USA from Bolivia when he was only seven, Tony was well versed in Latin American literature. His favorite book was Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) which, as I had told him, was probably mine as well. Tony preferred to read in Spanish. He said, "I read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in English and then in Spanish; I kind of switch back and forth" (May 18, 2010).

Tony recommended that book to Juan early in the year. However, Juan, a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant, preferred the tale about immigration, *The Line*. Tony uttered a comment about another of his favorite authors, Chilean Isabel Allende, to indicate how much she engaged him. "With Isabel Allende, she is really good. She is so pretty. She looks like your grandma who takes care of you and makes you cookies" (May 18, 2011). After we all laughed, I replied, "When I read Isabel Allende, I feel like she is my best friend and we are having a conversation."

We all knew that Tony was way ahead intellectually. Students also knew that he could read even faster in Spanish than in English, which many of them could not imagine ever doing. He brought more of the Latin American flavor and Spanish/Bolivian language/dialect to the classroom. The class felt richer thanks to his contributions which came from growing up in his country of origin under an



authoritarian father who forced him to read instead of allowing him to play with friends.

Another 1.5 student, Elmer, who made the highest grade in my class, found most literary topics I presented uninteresting. In a manner similar to Tony, he chose books with global or philosophical themes such as destiny versus human intervention, international issues and social justice. Issues that had to do with more universal social issues such as his chosen *Animal Farm*, were much more interesting to him. Another book he chose was *Nectar in a Sieve*, about a family in India. The book dealt with the dichotomy between human will and divine intervention. The last book he read was *Night* about the Holocaust.

Another important matter students in focus groups informed me about was the interest of many of them in the topic of history, *Ancestral & More Current Latino & Latin American History* included. Margarita, Karen, Elmer, Nicolas, and Enid, all coincided in their intense interest in history. Enid attributed her love of history to a teacher she had in Honduras: “She would make us close our eyes and picture what we were reading. She would say, ‘pretend you are there’” (May 25, 2010). Of the five students, Nicolas was the most interested in the remote history of his ancestors, the Mayan and Aztecs, as I explained above. It is possible that, for some students, *lacking a point of reference* (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008) or remembering their childhood experiences in another country made them yearn for a connection/reconnection to their roots (Caplan, Choy & Whitmore, 1992; Giroux, 1992; Godina, 2003).

In comparison to the independent reading topics many students demonstrated little interest in most textbook reading topics as I explain in the following section. As I mentioned earlier, Miguel, a student of Peruvian heritage, said that those readings “are for old people.” In reference to one of the readings that had to do with a donkey and his owner, Dania, the fluently bilingual daughter of the Salvadorian minister said, “I really did not like the story about the animals at all. I tried my best to understand it like five or six times” (May 24, 2010)

As I learned from my focus groups, one of the few textbook readings that the majority of my students liked was a poem by Cuban hero Jose Martí, the one Chris (of Cuban heritage) had read in front of the class. Martí’s poem had to do with simple things in life such as friendship. That poem also originated one of the best known songs in the Latin American world, “Guantanamera.” Many students had heard the song before but knew nothing about its origin. Perhaps that musical connection or the personal connection they could make when Chris proudly shared what he knew about his Cuban heritage made a difference. Or possibly they could associate with the universal topic of friendship as most teenagers tend to value their friendships. Perhaps it was the fusion between the universal, the personal, the cultural, and the musical that made a lot of sense to them.

Several students also expressed their enjoyment of the only textbook reading by Gary Soto. Gary Soto is a Mexican American writer who writes about Latino topics. His books were among the most frequently chosen by my students for independent reading. I consider Gary Soto’s literary topics for Latino teenagers to be analogous to *Bluford High School* series for African American teenagers. Several of

the poems I monthly send to Ricardo in jail have been written by Gary Soto. In one of his letters, Ricardo wrote that he has read some of Gary Soto's books. Gary Soto's textbook reading had to do with a Latino high school student who was trying to catch the attention of a young Latina.

### Choice in Reading What Was Meaningful to Them

I often thought about the possible issues that could emerge from allowing my students to choose their own readings. The first issue that came to my mind had to do with language choice. Was I making a mistake by allowing my students to read in English for a Spanish class? Should I have required them to read only in Spanish at home? After much thinking I concluded that, first of all, few of my students were literate enough in Spanish to be able to read a whole book without assistance. Second of all, I complemented what they read at home with Tertulia discussions and essay writing/rewriting in Spanish. Moreover, independent reading was one of the many venues I used to get my students more acquainted with the practice of going to the library and of reading.

The other question that came to my mind was the level of reading that my students were picking. Were the reading levels not appropriate for them, not challenging enough? After much reflection I concluded that my goal in allowing my students to choose their own readings in either English or Spanish was to impact their motivation. I meant to impact their motivation in reading by acknowledging their agency and by allowing it to guide them through their exploration of topics that they identified with – in either language. In class I tried to bring them to the next level of fluency they were capable of. My goal was to facilitate my students' acquaintance

with characters that mirrored their lives. I intended to facilitate encounters which would grow into partnerships between my students and the texts, on their way to developing heightened social and reader identities (Athanases, 1998; Hinchman & Thomas, 2008). My students were having, during my class, and would have, in the near future, plenty of opportunities to become acquainted with a myriad of higher level readings, especially when they reached the Advanced Placement level I was preparing them for. Allowing them the freedom to select their own readings was my way of instilling joy in reading which could positively impact them for the rest of their lives. In other words, as a Spanish teacher I also took on the responsibility of getting my students engaged in reading through choice. My goals went beyond those for a Spanish language class. I intended to increase my students' interest in literacy in both English and Spanish as they developed Spanish literacy and explored their linguistic and cultural heritage which could potentially lead them to develop a stronger sense of identity.

The student who initiated me in this way of thinking was Miguel. Early in the year Miguel, of Peruvian heritage, had been caught by my principal reading one of the books he had chosen for his independent reading for my class during his English class. When I asked him why he was reading a book for my class in his English class he answered, "Because English class is not interesting, but in your class we read things that have to do with us." Miguel made this comment after we had finished watching the movie "Stand and Deliver." This piece of information that I learned from Miguel helped me to gain the realization that many of my students identified with and enjoyed readings that had to do with their lives.

During focus groups' discussions, most of my students pointed out the great difference that it made to allow them to select their own readings. Students as intellectual as Tony agreed that "students may not do their best if they don't choose the reading or like the book" (May 17, 2010). But students who needed extra academic support also recommended that all teachers provide a similar degree of choice. Carlos' quick answer to my question, "What has made you enjoy reading the most in my class?" was, "The books we chose" (May 20, 2010).

But the second, less obvious phenomenon that I noticed was that, besides their comfort in choosing their own books, many of my students had another thing in common: the topics they chose. Many of the books told stories about characters who regularly crossed national borders between the United States and their country/countries of origin, who crossed cultural borders between the minority and mainstream worlds, and/or who simply stayed at the margins.

The characters in the book choices of a notable number of my students dwelled in marginal socioeconomic conditions. The protagonist of the first book chosen by Carlos was a boxer, like him, who experienced illegal immigration issues. Nolo, the student who had not finished a book since fourth grade, read a three-book autobiographical series by a former gang member. Other males who were not taking my class or who were not too engaged academically ended up in my office to read Nolo's books with me. Nolo was convinced that Rafael, in juvenile detention, would love to read them as well. When I took three books to Rafael in the detention center, his eyes lit up when he saw *Crystal Castle*, the biographical account of neglected, poor children. I had given him that book to read before he got in trouble. It was found

in his locker by one of our security staff. Furthermore, the universal topic of death seemed to attract the attention of many of my students when we read excerpts of *Paula*.

Some females like Cloe chose to read books about characters, many of them minority, who struggled through rape, imprisonment, abuse and worse, but who found a sense of deliverance despite it all. Nelly also read books about marginalized teenagers who found relief through literacy such as *Freedom Writers*. Jessie, who did not read much and was identified as an at-risk student, remembered fondly all of the *Bluford Series* books in which she read about the high school experiences of racial minority students. Francisca, who was receiving literacy services, expressed excitement when she read the beginning pages of the biography of an alcoholic female. While Francisca never expressed any interest in drinking, for some reason she could identify with what she was reading about in the life of that female.

The focus group discussions demonstrated that several students who had not previously been avid readers, preferred topics which were more intricately related to their own lives. Even the more remote topic of history related to their own lives in their connection to their roots. On the other hand, several students who had been interested in reading from before, tended to demonstrate more intellectual and global tendencies. They did not seem to be as interested in reading something so concretely related to their lives. Some of the lower level readers associated reading with deciphering and being able to pronounce the words out loud. Until the end of the school year, most students preferred to have someone else read aloud while they listened.

Margarita, who was exploring her sexuality, identified strongly with homosexual literature. She even interviewed a self-identified lesbian immigrant for her immigration project. Margarita explained the following about her choice of books: “The book I chose made me remember the love I had for someone - to me personally I connected to it because I am a lesbian” (May 11, 2010).

Since my students’ reading, writing and speaking interest might have been linked to increased comfort, I decided to explore if there was a connection between increase in reading, writing, and speaking comfort and increased interest in reading, writing, and speaking.

#### Reading Comfort and Reading Interest

Regarding increased comfort in reading in the heritage language, 36 students answered the related questions in the *Questionnaire for Students about Linguistic Identity and Cultural Identity* (Appendix J). A noteworthy number of students (73%) indicated that their comfort in reading either *increased some* or *a lot*. There was not a very notable difference between the students for whom the comfort level *increased some* (42%) and the students for whom the comfort level *increased a lot* (31%).

In contrast to speaking comfort as I demonstrate below, 28% of the students (four males and six females) indicated no increase in reading comfort. It is significant to note that six of those ten students already enjoyed reading a lot from the beginning, so there was room for reading comfort gain for only four of those ten students.

There was not a notable difference in the *some* or *a lot* category for improved comfort in reading between males and females. Males constituted 41% for *some* and 35% for *a lot*. Females consisted of 42% for *some* and 26% for *a lot*. There was no

noteworthy difference between 1.5 males and females and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males and females (Appendix U).

As to the relationship between reading comfort and reading interest, I did not count the six students who from the beginning indicated *a lot* of reading comfort or the student who did not provide such information. Therefore, the total number of students for this category consists of 29. The students who from the beginning demonstrated *a lot* of reading comfort were five 1.5 generation students, three males and two females, and one 2<sup>nd</sup> generation female. The majority of students (24%) demonstrated *a lot* of reading comfort and *little* or *some* reading interest. The second top category was *little* or *some* reading comfort and *no* reading interest with (14%) (Appendix V).

The topic of the relation between increased reading comfort and increased reading interest (also the relation between writing comfort and writing interest) needs further exploration. From the limited data I gathered, there was no clear indication of whether an increase in reading comfort would relate with an increase in reading interest. With parallel questions in mind, I inquired into the possible impact of comfort in speaking Spanish on interest and comfort in writing Spanish.

#### Speaking Comfort and Speaking Interest

My focus group students indicated a heightened sense of comfort in speaking in Spanish which allowed them to communicate more with their parents, other relatives, and their Latino communities in general. Those findings confirmed the data I gathered through the *Questionnaire for Students about Linguistic Identity and Cultural Identity* (Appendix J). The great majority (97%) of the 36 students who



completed the questionnaire indicated *some* or *a lot of increase*. Of those two categories, *increased some* was the highest category with 78%. There was no significant difference between males and females in their choices of *increased some* or *increased a lot* (Appendix U). The higher increase in speaking comfort over reading comfort may be a result of allowing my students to read in English for their independent reading and of having more direct extensive experience with speaking in Spanish than with reading in Spanish during class.

My twenty focus group participants indicated a clear interest in becoming more fluent in spoken Spanish. While increased comfort may have been a factor in their increased interest, several of the students indicated that their interest had also grown as a consequence of valuing the culture more due to increased knowledge or of discerning the need to connect better with their parents and their heritage in general. It is also probable that the comfort increase may have come as a consequence of increased practice caused by two factors: a higher level of appreciation of their heritage and an interest in connecting or reconnecting with their heritage culture. The illustration below demonstrates these possible connections (Figure 11).

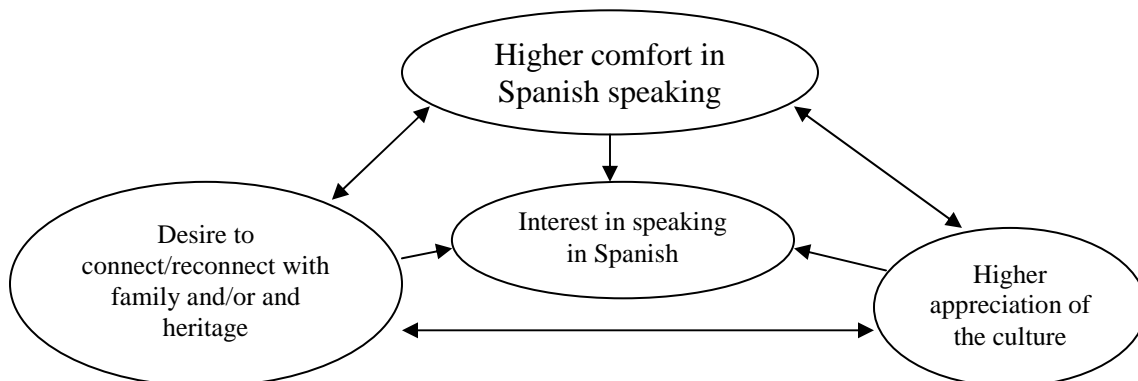


Figure 11 Higher Comfort in Spanish Speaking

There was no clear indication of which factor had the most impact in my students' interest in becoming more fluent in Spanish. As with the topic of increased comfort in reading in Spanish, this is a topic that merits further attention. The comments below indicate the different reasons students felt more inclined to develop their fluency. While some students linked increased comfort with desire to develop fluency, others demonstrated a heightened sense of appreciation which guided their desire to improve their fluency. Others felt a clearer sense of social identity and interest in connecting with their families. One student felt the need to develop his fluency in case he had to move back to his country of origin.

For Dania, Enid and Dinaida there appeared to be a link between increased appreciation for the language and desire to develop their fluency. Dania remarked, "I like it more; I used to only speak English but now I speak more Spanish to my friends and stuff" (May 24, 2010). Enid expressed that, "I used to think it was just a language, but now I can tell how rich Spanish is. El español es como un adorno [Spanish is like an ornament]<sup>21</sup>" (May 25, 2010). Dinaida explained that: "I like talking in Spanish, I am not embarrassed. My mom asked me if I think I like Spanish or English more and I did not know what to answer. I guess Spanglish" (May 10, 2010).

Carlito connected his desire to speak Spanish more fluently to his need to have better vocabulary if he moved back to Bolivia: "I don't know if I am going back

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<sup>21</sup> I uttered the phrase "El español es como un adorno" earlier to their class, referencing the richness in the variety of influences that have impacted the Spanish language, the very elaborate baroque movement among others. I often also referred to Spanish as the language of Don Quijote, "uno de mis ídolos".

to Bolivia. I want to learn more words since I keep repeating the same words” (May 17, 2010).

Enid connected speaking more Spanish to her heightened identity as a Latina and to her connections to her family and heritage: “I would like to speak more Spanish and know more. I feel more Latina in general” (May 24, 2010). To my question, “Do you feel good?” she answered, “It is positive! I do feel more confident than before.” Then she added,

I always hated taking Spanish. It was a fun class but after that I really did not care; but this class made me think how good my parents’ country is. I learned about all these countries and I was like wow. I only spoke to my parents in English; now it is surprising that I am speaking to them in Spanish. Spanish has connected more to my personality and to my parents; I am more connected to my roots. I want to keep learning Spanish. (May 24, 2010)

Several students expressed a gained sense of comfort which they linked to their interest in becoming more fluent in Spanish. Enid explained that, “Now I only speak to my mother in Spanish, It is surprising [...]. I got better at speaking. (The other students in her focus group nodded). I would like to speak more Spanish” (May 25, 2010). Santos made a connection between gained confidence in speaking and *not* speaking English only anymore: “Language-wise I am more confident now. Before, I only spoke in English.” His higher comfort was starting to impact his interest in becoming more fluent:

I think I have improved, like now I go home and talk to people in my house in Spanish more than before. Now I can hold a conversation and stuff. Before I went

like 'hola' (smile). And I understand it better too, but I am not totally comfortable with it. I have been trying to speak in Spanish so I guess that, subconsciously, I want to learn more. (May 18, 2010)

While Ana wanted to be fluent in Spanish, she felt quite uncomfortable speaking it which meant that comfort and interest conflicted with each other. Ana: "I can read perfectly but my accent is so like Americans, I get so shy with my boyfriend's mom." To my question, "But, do you want to be fluent one day?" she replied, "Yes, I want to speak more but I get shy" (May 11, 2010).

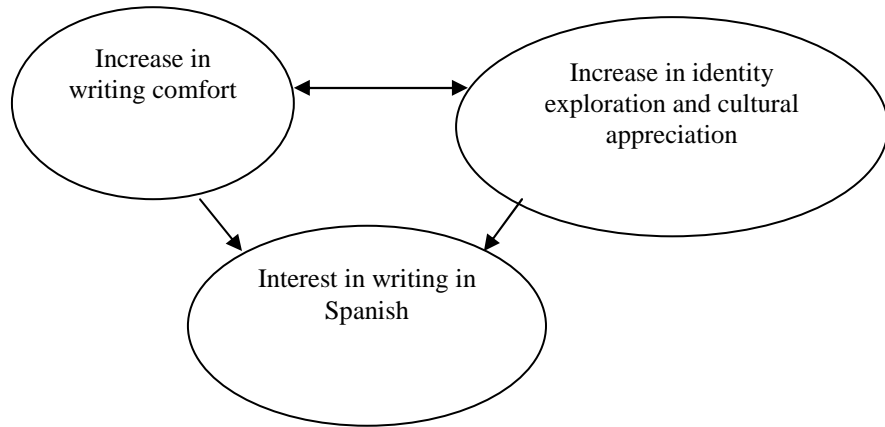
#### *Writing Comfort and Writing Interest*

In a similar manner to speaking Spanish, all of the focus group participants with the exception of one expressed an increase in writing comfort. This confirmed responses on the *Questionnaire for Students about Linguistic Identity and Cultural Identity* (Appendix J). Of the 36 students who answered the related questions, a notable number (86%) indicated that their comfort in writing had either increased *some* or *a lot*. Forty percent of students indicated that their level of comfort had increased *some*. Thirty eight percent of students indicated that their level of comfort had increased *a lot*. Twice as many students indicated *a lot* of increase in writing comfort as indicated *a lot* of increase in speaking comfort. Again, the higher increase in writing comfort over reading comfort may be the result of having strict requirements for writing in Spanish only in contrast with the more flexible reading requirements.

Fourteen percent of the students indicated no increase in their comfort in writing. The largest subgroup with *no increase* was 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males with 30%

(Appendix U). All of my focus group participants with the exception of one expressed a desire to become better writers in Spanish. In fact, more than half of the participants indicated that their increase in interest in writing was larger than in reading.

As several of the comments below illustrate, the increase in writing comfort, particularly as illustrated by the *a lot* category, may have played a strong role on students' increased interest in writing. Nevertheless, as some of their comments indicated, identity exploration may have also been an influential factor. I discerned an increase in writing intensity as my students wrote in their journals after having had discussions, watched movies and/or read about topics that had to do with borderlands cultural identity exploration. Students seemed to concentrate as they wrote. They wrote longer essays and I did not see the need to refocus their attention as much as when they had written about other topics. Essay writing also demonstrated some degree of identity exploration since students were writing about books of their own choosing whose topics they may have identified with. The strongest example was Nicolas who, after finally finding a book about indigenous history to his liking, wrote his longest essay (and the longest written by any of my students). There is also a chance that both comfort and identity exploration played a role in increased interest in writing as several focus group participants indicated below. There is also a chance that writing comfort and identity exploration impacted each other (Figure 12).



*Figure 12: Writing Comfort, Writing Interest, Identity Exploration and Cultural Appreciation*

The comments below illustrate focus group participant thoughts about increased interest in writing. Writing was linked mostly to gained appreciation, comfort, the practice of reading, and/or identity exploration.

As I mentioned in chapter four, Carlos sounded as if he had miraculously, suddenly learned how to write in Spanish: “I just learned how to write in Spanish. I did not know how to do it” (May 20, 2010). His appreciation for the culture also impacted his interest in writing (and reading) as he expressed that he wanted to learn how to write and read more because, as stated before, “Latin culture is strong” (May 20, 2010).

As I explained in chapter four, Enid, Elmer and Dania’s desire to know how to write better was linked to their increased comfort in learning how to write, accents in particular. Likewise, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Ana felt more comfortable about writing letters to her 1<sup>st</sup> generation boyfriend. In contrast, Tony had always felt quite comfortable writing in Spanish: “I like writing in Spanish more than in English since it is much more free” (May 18, 2010).

For students such as Margarita and Dinaida, who identified more as writers than as readers, writing helped them explore who they were. Dinaida also expressed a connection between a higher level of writing comfort and her social and writer identities. When I asked her if my class had given her a better level of comfort in writing than in reading, she nodded and answered, “The Spanish class has helped me see myself more as a writer. My life is kind of boring and I make it up as I write in your class. And writing helps me explore my identity. Teenagers are trying to learn who they are, so writing helps you do that” (May 10, 2010).

### Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the shift in the number of resistant, semi-resistant and non-resistant readers over the course of the academic year. The combined semi-resistant/non-resistant group almost doubled from 43% to 80%. Six students had demonstrated a lot of interest from the beginning, leaving eight students who, despite the possibility of increased interest, did not indicate it. Second generation students, many of whom were of Salvadorian heritage, had the highest level of increased interest in literacy, which suggests that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students may be more engaged by borderlands topics than 1.5 generation students. Female 1.5 generation students demonstrated a higher level of interest in borderlands topics than 1.5 males. The latter group of students demonstrated more interest in global topics such as *adventure and mystery, philosophical, social injustice, Latin American literature, and international literature*.

A majority of students expressed that being allowed to choose their own readings was the main reason their interest in literacy increased. A noteworthy

number of students demonstrated interest in topics that involved positive aspects of the Latino culture. Moreover, they expressed more interest in some topics than in others. Males differed from females in their preference for both positive and negative aspects over positive aspects. Both groups appreciated the exposure they had to a variety of topics.

The most frequently selected topics had to do with borderlands topics of *social and home marginalization, Latino life in the USA, and immigration*, in that order. While more 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students seemed to prefer *social and home marginalization*, more 1.5 generation students, particularly males, preferred global topics such as the ones mentioned above. Despite their order of generation, an equivalent number of students could identify with the topic of immigration. Most students did not seem to enjoy the textbook readings with the exception of Gary Soto's reading about a Latino teenager in high school and Jose Marti's poem about friendship, which was tied to one of the best known songs in the Latino/Latin American world, "Guantanamera." More 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males than 1.5 generation males preferred *ancestral and more current Latin American history*.



## CHAPTER 7:

### ENGAGING LATINO/A STUDENTS IN READING THROUGH THE EXPLORATION OF THEIR BORDERLANDS IDENTITIES

Through my ethnographic action research I intended to increase my Latino/a students' interest in literacy in their heritage language by getting them acquainted with borderlands topics with which they could identify. My aim was also to guide my students' exploration and construction of a more positive sense of linguistic and cultural identity as I acquainted them with numerous readings about topics that reflected their experiences. I followed Athanases' (1998) suggestion that minority students experience a validated sense of identity when they see their lives reflected in literature. As I strived to grow into a culturally responsive teacher (Gay, 2000; 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995), I drew on my students' linguistic and cultural perspectives and experiences to learn about and apply the kinds of literary experiences that would best engage them.

As a way to draw a *bridge between dominant and non-dominant forms of discourse* (Leslie, 2008; Moje, 2000), I acknowledged my students' current language expressions, including Spanglish, as a legitimate form of expression that was full of possibilities for them to develop into fluent bilinguals (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Moreover, I incorporated readings that dealt with marginalized experiences after I noticed that a noteworthy number of my students were attracted to those topics. In addition, I relied on my students' agency to choose their own readings so they would freely inquire about their own topics of interest (Cone, 1994). I also welcomed their

agency and voice to guide me through my teaching. My ethnographic action research led me to the following findings regarding my students' linguistic and cultural identities as well as their experiences with reading.

#### The Linguistic and Cultural Identity of the Latino Student

Research has suggested the need to explore the complicated identity of the Latino/a child in order to instill a stronger sense of identity (Trueba, 1989; Vigil, 1988). There is also concern about the negative impact of society's identification and labeling of racial minority children on their sense of identity (Cross, 1993; Gans, 2007; Oboler, 1995; Rumbaut, 1990; 1996). The potential negative impact of the immigration experience on academic engagement has also been pointed out (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). The greatest concern involves the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation student, the one *who lacks a point of reference* and has not experienced selective acculturation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). Researchers have also referred to the negative impact of lower social status (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008) and the need to help minority students explore and construct their own sense of identity as a way to alleviate this negative impact (Zarate, Bhimji & Reese, 2005). The time recommended to guide these students to explore their social identity is middle adolescence or around the time they are in tenth grade (Phinney, 1989; 1993).

Regarding language, some researchers have pointed to the lower status generally attributed to the Spanish language by American society as another factor adding to the at-risk identity of the Latino/a child (Freeman, 2000; McCollum, 1999; Potowski, 2007; Sleeter, 1991). The inclusion of the heritage language in the

curriculum has been recommended for its positive impact on the academic and social identity of the language-minority student (Kenner, Gregory, Mahera, & Al-Azami, 2008). Normative bilingualism in schools has been recommended as a way to help Latinos become fluent bilinguals and engage in selective acculturation and as a vehicle to combat dissonant acculturation between parent and child (Porter & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut, 2001). Furthermore, the most recent research on bilingualism suggests numerous cognitive benefits for the bilingual person (Cummins, 1996). And despite the well-documented benefits of diglossia, research has recommended the acknowledgement of Spanglish as a legitimate form of expression reflecting the borderlands experience the Latino student (Chappell & Faltis, 2007; Freeman, 2000; McCollum, 1999; Sayer, 2008).

My findings on the cultural and linguistic experiences of the Latino/a student answered the following research question: “How do my students view their cultural and linguistic identities?” My data analysis led me to conclude that, besides living borderlands experiences, the majority of my Spanish for Heritage Speakers students socially identified in multiple ways. While there was only one *cultural mainstreamer* (Carter, 2005) who identified nationally as unhyphenated American, only one more identified panethnically as unhyphenated Hispanic. The rest chose mostly national and panethnic/national combinations. The panethnic/national combination demonstrated that their ethnicity as minority in the United States played an important role in their social identity. In other words, their identity had been problematized by their identification by society as ethnic beings, as minority, not part of the mainstream

community (Oboler, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008).

Besides the only student who plainly identified as American, only two students identified as more American than the other half of their identities (Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Also, the students who had dual national heritage identified more in dualistic national terms than in panethnic or in combined national/panethnic terms. This may mean that their dual national Latin American heritage took precedence over the ethnic component of their identities. This phenomenon is one that may need more attention as the identity of an increasing sector of the Latino population with similar experiences may be further problematized as a consequence of the additional dual national heritage factor.

Data on students of Salvadoran heritage, my largest group of students who shared a common national background, suggested that they identified mostly in panethnic/national terms. In self-labeling as such, these students who were mostly 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, demonstrated a borderlands identity as they integrated their national Salvadoran or American label with a variety of panethnic labels which defined them in their current situation in the United States as part of the wider Latino community and as minorities. Also as expected, a higher percentage of 1.5 generation students identified nationally although there was no noteworthy difference between them and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students. This made sense since the majority of the 1.5 generation students had arrived to the United States when they were children and had spent a significant part of their lives in the United States. Moreover, students of one heritage country identified more as the combined panethnic/national category, again

demonstrating their ethnicity as an important aspect of their situation as ethnic minority inhabitants of the United States. While for some students the national portion of their dual identities was American, for others it was Latin American. However, for all of them a transformation occurred as they or their parents entered the United States: they became *ethnicized* (Oboler, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut 2001; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova 2008). While their identity became fragmented between mainstream and minority, they did not really feel that they were part of mainstream society. Last but not least, the different labels and the more complex use of self-labels indicated that they were beginning or had already begun to explore their social identities (Oboler, 1995; Zarate, Bhimji & Reese, 2005).

Of my students' independent reading choices, *social and home marginalization*, *Latino life in the United States*, and *immigration* were among the most frequently selected topics. While the majority of 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation females and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males preferred *home and social marginalization* topics, it was notable that 1.5 males were much more varied in their interests. They were barely interested in marginalized topics and preferred Latin American and other more global topics. This finding suggested that males may be the ones who experience deeper transformations as they go from 1.5 to 2<sup>nd</sup> generation. In other words, as the literature I reviewed suggested, it is possible that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males experience with downward assimilation may be reflected in the marginalization topics a good number of them preferred to read (Leslie, 2008; Moje, 2000; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Moreover, the social marginalization topics being the top choice for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation

students may demonstrate their internalization as marginalized ethnic minority immigrants.

Regarding the topic of language, my findings suggest that, while both genders were versatile in their use of language, females demonstrated more versatility. Contrary to males, some of the females acknowledged Spanglish as a legitimate and/or transitional form of expression leading to bilingualism which they viewed as a higher form of expression. Female students simply saw more possibilities in communication. While a noteworthy number of males considered bilingualism as the ideal option, many of them did not consider themselves bilingual or considered the possibilities in between. My study also confirmed Arriagada's (2005) finding that females are more bilingual than males. While more than half of my female students indicated that they spoke English and Spanish equally well, only about one-third of males said the same. However, both males and females were able and ready to speak in whatever language/s was/were needed according to the person they spoke with.

Teachers of heritage speakers should acknowledge their students' versatility and guide them to understand all of the possibilities comprised in such versatility. They should lead them to understand that Spanglish is an acceptable, yet transitional, vehicle towards diglossia. Teachers should also understand that diglossia in combination with increased cultural exploration and appreciation may help increase selective acculturation for Latino students, especially males (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Last, teachers should be aware that, just as in my students, bilingualism is latent in all of their students. With teacher persistence a noteworthy number of students may manifest increased interest in reading, writing and speaking in Spanish.

While the great majority of my students demonstrated a borderlands identity, many of them possessed limited knowledge about their cultural and linguistic heritage as well as about the experiences of other Latinos of different national origins. By the end of the school year, after much exposure to an extensive number of readings, a noteworthy number of students expressed an increased appreciation for their Latin American and Latino heritage. And as Enid had expressed, they were starting to feel a panethnic sense of community as they shared their experiences with students of different heritage backgrounds. Teachers of heritage speakers should emphasize the sense of panethnic community that connects them with one another (Oboler, 1995). In the next section I present my findings on how my students' interest in literacy changed after becoming acquainted with borderlands topics.

#### Changes in Latino Student Literary Engagement through Culturally Responsive Teaching

Research has suggested a bidirectional relationship between literacy and identity and literacy's potential as a source of construction, exploration and expression of identity (Athaneses, 1998; Vyas, 2004). However, it may be challenging for the teacher of minority students to find topics that engage these students' multiple identities (Gay, 2000; Hinchman & Thomas, 2008). One way to simultaneously engage minority students in reading and develop a heightened sense of identity may be through their exposure to literature that reflects their life experiences (Athaneses, 1998). Another way may be to add writing activities as a way to further facilitate student identity exploration through borderlands literary topics (Bean et al., 1999). Moreover, the power of unsanctioned literature in the lives

of marginalized teenagers has been considered (Lelie, 2008; Moje, 2000). It is also possible that, for students who have lost their *point of reference*, literature may provide a needed sense of connection to their roots (Caplan, Choy & Whitman, 1992; Giroux, 1992; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). A culturally responsive approach to teaching literacy to Latino/a students may be an effective way to link identity exploration with literary engagement. A research method conducive to helping teachers become culturally responsive is ethnographic action research (Gay, 2000; 2003; Jacob, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

My findings on changes of my students' interest in literacy dealt with the following question: "Can I, through the exploration of culturally relevant topics impact my students' interest in literacy?" They suggested a shift in the number of resistant, semi-resistant and non-resistant readers from the beginning to the end of the academic year. The 20 students who had been resistant readers at the beginning of the year decreased to seven. The number of semi-resistant students more than doubled from nine to 19. Non-resistant readers increased from six to ten students. Thus, while at the beginning of the academic year only 15 students had not been resistant readers, the number almost doubled to 28 by the end of the year. In other words, the combined semi-resistant/non-resistant group increased from 43% to 80%. Six students had demonstrated a lot of interest from the beginning, leaving only eight students who, despite the possibility of increased interest, did not indicate it.

My findings also suggest that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students, many of whom were of Salvadorian heritage, had the highest level of increased interest in literacy. This finding suggests that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students may be more engaged by borderlands



topics than 1.5 generation students. Female 1.5 generation students demonstrated a higher level of interest in borderlands topics than 1.5 males. The latter group of students demonstrated more interest in global topics such as *adventure and mystery*, *philosophical*, *social injustice*, *Latin American literature*, and *international literature*.

A noteworthy number of students demonstrated interest in topics that involved positive aspects of the Latino culture. Most of them also indicated appreciation for the opportunity of choosing their own topics. Moreover, they expressed more interest in some topics than in others. Males differed from females in their preference for both positive and negative aspects over positive aspects. Both groups appreciated the exposure they had to a variety of topics.

The independent reading topic most frequently selected was *social and home marginalization*. The second most frequently selected topic was *Latino life in the USA*. The third most frequently selected topic was *immigration*. While more 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students seemed to prefer *social and home marginalization*, more 1.5 generation, particularly males, preferred global topics. While 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males preferred *social and home marginalization* with 31%, only 5% of 1.5 generation males preferred that topic. There was no difference between the disaggregated groups of males, females, 1.5 generation and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation in the preference for the immigration topic which may indicate that, despite their order of generation, an equivalent number of students could identify with the topic of immigration. Most students did not seem to enjoy the textbook readings with the exception of Gary Soto's reading and Jose Marti's poem about friendship. This poem had connections with one of the most well known songs in the Latino/Latin American world,

“Guantanamo.” More 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males than 1.5 generation males preferred *ancestral and more current Latin American history*.

#### Contributions and Limitations of my Research

One of the greatest limitations of my study was the time in the year when my research was finally approved by my district. While I had been unofficially documenting my observations since the beginning of the year, my students could not complete the questionnaires or participate in the focus groups until the month of May. While listening to their perspectives earlier in the year would have impacted some of my decisions as an action researcher, I did not have the opportunity to listen to my students’ perspectives in a more structured way until almost the end of the school year. For example, finding out my students’ opinions about the Tertulia book club format earlier in the academic year would have led me to experiment with other book discussion arrangements. Moreover, while I had originally intended to ask my students to complete the identity questionnaire several times in the school year in order to detect marked changes in their identities, I only had the chance of making use of the questionnaire once, toward the end of the school year. While I changed several questions to compare the way they felt at the end of the school year to how they felt at the beginning, it would have been more informative to have students complete those questionnaires a few times throughout the year.

Regarding the questionnaires, as I stated earlier, I eventually realized that grouping *Cuando era puertorriqueña* and *Cajas de cartón* under the same question (Appendix K) was a mistake since, as I realized through the focus group discussions, both books referred to different immigration experiences. In fact, I would have

encountered much more valuable information if I had included each as part of a separate question. While *Cuando era puertorriqueña* had to do with the first generation experience that none of my students identified directly with, *Cajas de cartón* involved the nomadic experiences many of my students were so familiar with, whether they were 1.5 or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants. I still believe that both books, especially *Cajas de cartón*, have potential to guide students through their identity exploration and to engage them in literacy. Finding the best ways to teach both books deserves more exploration. The question of which is the most appropriate age group to read them needs some attention.

Despite its limitations, this study contributed to the body of knowledge about the borderlands linguistic and cultural experiences of Latino students as well as to a deeper understanding of the differences and commonalities between the experiences of 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Latino immigrants. The study added heterogeneity to the body of research about the Latino students by inquiring about the experiences of diverse students, mostly of Salvadorian background, a topic that has not been explored by research. Meanwhile, my research on the contrasting reading experiences of the 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Latino immigrant drew from and expanded research of these two immigrant groups, linking the immigration experience with the reading experience (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). The research also explored contrasts and similarities between males and females and between students of one and two Latin American origins. Responding to a need discussed by several researchers, I worked to help the Latino/a student develop a more positive sense of identity (Trueba, 1998; Vigil, 1988). The study also inquired

into the experiences of some of my school's most academically at-risk students and drew conclusions about their cultural, linguistic and reading experiences. Meanwhile, the study described the experience of a student going through downward assimilation and depicted the experiences of two tenth-grader students undergoing identity exploration.

Knowing the significance of helping develop both the social and reader identities of my students, I linked both in my action research. I provided a detailed account of the processes involved in achieving that as I simultaneously illustrated my own growth in becoming a culturally responsive teacher. I documented how I drew on the perspectives of my students and the expert teachers as well as on my own, providing an in-depth description of the strategies I implemented to create a culturally responsive class. I also demonstrated step-by-step the strategies I used to guide my students through the exploration of their cultural and linguistic identities as I got them acquainted with a large number of borderlands topics (Gay, 2000; 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 1991).

My research also addressed the concern of some researchers about the invisibility of the Latino experience in the curriculum (Cammarota, 2006; Nieto, 2004) by moving the experience of the traditionally marginalized student and his/her identity needs, to the center of the curriculum. I demonstrated how I acknowledged my students' agency and let it lead what we did in the classroom. By permitting my students to select their own readings, I allowed their agency to help them discover their own preferred reading topics. I listened to and helped develop my students' voices as they helped me create a curriculum that was more reflective of their lives

(Banks, 1994). Moreover, I answered the call of Giroux (1988) to incorporate the voices of minority children in action research and illustrated the various ways action researchers may draw from the agency and voice of the Latino/a student. Thanks to the extensive interaction I had with my students they opened up and became candid, especially my mentees with whom I spent the most quality time (Delpit, 1988; Diaz-Greensberg, 2003; Freire, 1993; Giroux, 1986; Nieto, 2004; Sleeter, 1991).

I followed Vias' (2004) suggestion about the importance of exploring the bidirectional relation between identity and literacy. Responding to Athanases' (2004) finding that students who see their lives reflected in literature experience a heightened sense of identity, I got my students acquainted with numerous readings that reflected their experiences. I expanded on Moje (2000) and Leslie's (2008) research by using literature about marginalized experiences that regarded the particular experience of Latino/a children. I also described my efforts to create encounters and partnerships between my students and text (Hinchman & Sheridan-Thomas, 2008). Furthermore, I expanded the research of Bean et al. (1999) by adding identity exploration as a third component to the connection between reading and writing.

Concerning the topic of language, I demonstrated how I drew on my students' linguistic experiences and versatility. Moreover, I acknowledged Spanglish as a natural phenomenon that, in addition to reflecting my students' borderlands experiences, served as a transitional condition that was full of possibilities for transforming my students from limited to fluent bilinguals (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Last, I drew from Vygotsky's (1978) Theory of Proximal Development to relate it to my students' linguistic experience.

Overall my methodology was strong since it was triangulated through a large variety of data gathering sources. Moreover, the combination between ethnography and action research that I used in my effort to become a culturally responsive teacher was meaningful. Culturally responsive teaching that follows students' voices and acknowledges their agency reaches them at their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Culturally responsive teachers who are open to their students' voices and agency are better able to understand where their students are as far as linguistic, social, cultural, and literary experiences and identities. Culturally responsive teachers go out of their way to reach their students in their zones of proximal development. On their way to meeting their students in their zones of proximal development, teachers need to take risks by naturally becoming teacher researchers as they experiment with all possible and alternative methods to better reach their students. And concerning literacy, some students will need much more direct attention from the teacher in order to create *meaningful encounters* (Athanases, 2004) between student and text.

Similarly to the teacher in Flores-Dueñas' study (2005), I took the risk of acting more as a community member than as a teacher. I did away with traditional classroom practices such as expecting students to raise their hands before talking and implementing a curriculum that does not follow students' voices or agency. I risked appearing vulnerable by sharing intimate parts of my life with the goal of resembling what they were familiar with and bridging the gap between home and school. Ultimately, I meant for them to feel more comfortable in expressing their opinions and experiences, hoping to make the learning experience more genuine, and to help

students identify with the material. My students' experiences, instead of existing at the margins, were at the core of what we did in our classes.

In regards to language, while I kept my commitment to making my students more bilingual, I acknowledged the validity of Spanglish as their current, natural state in their borderlands existences. Culturally responsive teachers must understand that the linguistic experience of Latino students is multidimensional, transitional, versatile, and full of possibilities for becoming fully bilingual. Culturally responsive teachers must do their best to understand their students' linguistic current state in order to be able to reach them in their zones of linguistic proximal development.

Becoming a culturally responsive teacher takes a lot of hard work and caring for the whole child. With that in mind I wonder if being Latina, trying to do my best for my ethnic group, had a lot to do with what I did with/for my students. I wonder if caring a great deal about students can actually cross ethnic borders. Will a teacher who is not Latina go out of her way a great deal for the sake of *other people's children* (Delpit, 1988)? Should Latino/a teachers be the ones to teach heritage speakers?

Similar to Ladson-Billings (1994), not all of the expert teachers I chose to interview were Latinas. The one white teacher was well-known to be as effective with Latino/a students as the other four. But this teacher had always demonstrated a high level of involvement with the Latino community. When I once asked her why her house had the resemblance of a Mexican house, she explained that she had spent a considerable and the best part of her childhood in places in which there was significant Latino influence. She also is the only white American in my Spanish book

club and often socializes with us outside of book club time. Similarly, the white teachers in Ladson-Billings' study demonstrated high levels of knowledge about and involvement with the African American community. This may be a noteworthy fact for teacher preparation programs. The level of exposure to the cultures of traditionally marginalized children may make a significant difference in the amount of cultural responsiveness that white teachers may engage in.

Ethnography in combination with action research is conducive to reaching students at their zones of proximal development. My cultural tacit understandings combined with my daily experience of observing and sharing with my students helped me be in tune with their perspectives and experiences. Also as part of my students' ethnic group, their consideration of me as one of their own led them to open up to me. Ethnography does much more than observing isolated events. As a researcher, my eyes and ears were habitually open and students knew that I was listening, ready to include their voices in my inquiry.

My experience of becoming the mentor of one of my focus groups, the one which consisted of low academic achievers, also became key to my research. Our daily contact, reading discussions, and conversations about what their lives as traditionally marginalized teenagers were like became quite informative and helped me acquire a more holistic perspective.

When ethnography is done by action researchers who belong to the ethnic group of their students, trust and community naturally unfold allowing students to open up and express their views. Helping students develop their voices is important in ethnographical and action research studies. When students open up, action researchers



are informed about the next steps to take in order to reach their students in their zones of proximal development. Their voices let the action researcher determine the effectiveness of his/her actions and the need for new courses of action. As part of my ethnic group I was trying to work towards the advancement of my students. In order to achieve that, I tried to become the best culturally responsive teacher I could be. Ethnographic action research helped me accomplish that.

#### Implications for Future Research

Research should look at all of the possibilities and connection between reading, writing and the social identity exploration of Latino teenagers. It should also inquire into how other sources can guide the exploration of social identity such as music, projects, movies and the electronic media. Moreover, the development of minority students' voices through writing should be delved into. Regarding reading, research should longitudinally explore how to take resistant readers from less global/more concrete topics to more global/intellectual topics. Research should also inquire about the best ways of applying the oral tradition format and other forms of community-oriented literary arrangements such as book discussions.

The exploration of identity through literary topics should be studied longitudinally by following teachers who are committed to integrating identity exploration into their curriculum throughout the three levels of heritage speakers' classes. More research is also needed on how to help students connect to history topics that interest them. Additional teacher research should be devoted to finding the most effective ways of guiding students through their social identity exploration by getting them acquainted with *Cuando era puertorriqueña*, *Cajas de cartón*, Gary

Soto's books, and marginalized literature such as Reymundo Sanchez's. Furthermore, more teacher research should also inquire into the most effective ways to help students explore/create their social identity through the topic of labels.

Beneficial research would include the longitudinal inquiry of the differences and similarities between 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5, and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students in their social identity and the literary formats and practices that optimally engage them and help them construct a more positive sense of identity. Furthermore, exploring how to bridge the responses to their needs in classes that include the three groups is important. Moreover, since I had no 1<sup>st</sup> generation students in my classes, it would be useful to conduct a similar study to mine with that group of students. The experiences of other growing Latin American groups of immigrants such as Bolivians and Peruvians should also be looked into.

Special efforts should be devoted to researching how to reverse Latino teenagers' downward trajectory and help them become more bilingual and engaged in literary practices. Research regarding Latino teenage inmates should focus on the following: impact of listening and developing their voices; guiding them to explore their national roots and panethnic current condition; helping them explore/construct their own sense of identity through literary topics that acquaint them with positive aspects of their heritage; and exposing them to a great variety of reading topics with the goal of helping them find topics that interest them. It would be valuable to study these inmates longitudinally past their prison term and into adulthood to inquire if they end up having a more positive sense of identity and are able to engage in more

selective acculturation. More success stories are also needed about Latino/a students who can *keep it real* (Carter, 2005) as they become more engaged in literacy.

### Implications for Teaching and Learning

Several researchers have demonstrated concern about the at-risk academic identity of the Latino/a student. They refer to the oppositional stand of many Latino/a teenagers and their *bonds of solidarity* that pull them away from the academic environment (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Research has also pointed out that many 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Latinos identify decreasingly as “unhyphenated” Americans over the course of their high school years, which may happen as a consequence of their experiences with marginalization (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). According to other researchers, this phenomenon may be caused by these students’ capacity to construct their own sense of identity, a capacity that grows after students go through the period of social identity exploration typical of the minority teenager (Phinney, 1989; 1993; Zarate, Bhimji & Reese, 2005). This heightened ability to construct social identity is considered beneficial by some researchers (Zarate, Bhimji and Reese, 2005). Other researchers have also pointed to invisibility in the curriculum as one of the causes of the at-risk condition of a large number of minority students (Nieto, 2004; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). These researchers have recommended the minority student’s assistance in constructing the curriculum (Banks, 1994) and a culturally responsive approach that reflects the experiences of the minority child (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2000, 2004; Sleeter, 1991). In the following sections I describe how I drew on my students’ cultural, linguistic and reading experiences in

order to engage in culturally responsive processes that impacted my students' interest in reading.

*Drawing on Students' Cultural and Linguistic Experiences*

In the first part of chapter five I answered the following subquestion: "How do I attempt to draw on my students' linguistic and cultural experiences, voice and agency as a guide to teach them literacy?"

By listening to my students' voices and acknowledging their agency, I strived to learn about and draw on my students' borderlands experiences in order to understand the kinds of topics with which they could identify. I also drew on what I learned from the expert teachers as well as what I had derived from my tacit understandings of my students' cultural experiences. I applied flexibility to what I knew about my students' linguistic comfort levels and versatility in order to meet them at their linguistic level of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) with the goal of increasing their bilingualism. After I learned that a large number of my students were resistant readers, I strived to facilitate encounters and partnerships between them and text (Hinchman & Sheridan Thomas, 2008). By listening to my students' voices I also grew to understand the literary topics and practices that better engaged them -- such as experiences with conflict, split families, immigrant experiences, and complex and triple identities. I drew on what I knew and had experienced regarding the Latino community's oral tradition and communal experiences to conduct interactive literary experiences. I acknowledged my students' agency by providing them with independent reading choices, listening to their voices about a variety of topics, and keeping up my high expectations for them. In the following section I describe the

strategies I used to guide my students' exploration of their linguistic and cultural identities as I acquainted them with borderlands literary topics.

*Guiding Student Identity Exploration through Literary Topics*

In the second section of chapter five I answered the following subquestion: "How do I guide my students' exploration of their cultural and linguistic identity through culturally responsive literacy topics with which they identify?"

I spent most of the school year guiding my students' exploration of their multiple identities through numerous activities based on borderlands literary topics that I coded as language, roots, borderlands experiences, marginal experiences, voices of Latino teenagers, and cultural gender roles. The activities included reading in group/s, discussions, writing assignments and projects. When I realized that a large number of my students were lacking in heritage knowledge, I decided that a great portion of their learning about their heritage would come through their own research channels and initiative in addition to the literary activities we did in class. My students also explored borderlands experiences related to traveling, differences in order of immigration generation, colonial relationships, social and cultural capital, teachers' expectations on Latino students, nomadic conditions, and obligations. Movies - "Stand and Deliver," "Almost a Woman" and "Under the Same Moon" – were alternative literary forms to text. I guided my students to explore marginalization topics such as poverty, social injustice, incarceration, gang involvement, and the experiences of minority children. With the goal of helping my students experience literature as a liberation vehicle, I brought them the real-life story of a person who overcame her marginalized experiences. My students also explored

their cultural gender roles. The death topic in its connection with magic realism, which is typical of Latin American literature and which they will eventually come in close contact with in AP Literature, was another topic they explored. Last, writing became a vehicle to expand the exploration initiated through literary discussions. My experiences as I endeavored to become a culturally responsive teacher led me to form some conclusions which I lay out in the following two discussions.

*The Culturally Responsive Teacher for the Latino/a Student*

Culturally responsive teachers of Latino/a students are cultural mediators (Suarez-Suarez, Suarez-Suarez & Todorova, 2008). These teachers help their students build connections in order to compensate for their students' uprootedness. They present their students with extensive information about their national heritage as well as about topics that connect to their lives. The connections also have to do with their panethnic identities. That connection will provide students with a sense of solidarity with other Latinos and with knowledge about the richness in the diversity of their different backgrounds (Oboler, 1995). It is important for Latinos to be guided to follow the lead of African Americans who have created frameworks of solidarity in their experience with discrimination. In contrast with the more recent Latino experience with discrimination, African Americans' more extended experience has often led them to develop more sophisticated compensatory mechanisms to deal with the experience of discrimination. This higher level of awareness about discrimination frequently brings about stronger degrees of social identity exploration which can assist in the development of a more positive sense of social identity (Pahl & Way, 2005). Culturally responsive teachers of Latino/a students need to understand the role

they play in the lives of their students as far as raising in them a similar level of awareness, helping them develop a stronger sense of identity and guiding them to examine how to form frameworks of panethnic solidarity.

Regarding literacy, culturally responsive teachers help create meaningful encounters between their students and text (Hinchman & Sheridan-Thomas, 2008). They immerse their students in topics with which their students identify. Moreover, these teachers extensively acquaint their students with as many aspects of their heritage language as possible. These should be done with the intent of helping students explore their sense of identity and come out of the process with a stronger sense of identity and a higher level of selective acculturation.

Culturally responsive teachers help their students build connections between reading and writing and their combined possibilities for identity exploration. They build bridges between speaking/reading/writing comfort and cultural appreciation and exploration through extended exposure to a great variety of literary topics. This combination may help instill a thirst for knowledge. The more exposure students have to different literary topics, the faster they will find their topics of interest.

My focus on helping my students connect/reconnect with their parents and communities was appreciated by several of them. These students' reactions were consistent with Bearse and Jong's (2008) finding from the study that Latino students valued becoming more fluent in Spanish since it could help them stay *true to their roots and their family*. Similarly, my students were thankful for their increasing ability to communicate in purer forms of Spanish with their parents and communities. Culturally responsive teachers understand their important roles as mediators and

agents in their students becoming selectively acculturated bilinguals (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). They also go out of their way to listen to their students' perspectives as a guide to their teaching. In addition, they understand their important role in reaching their students in their zones of proximal linguistic, social, and reader development as I explain later in this chapter. In the next section, I discuss the culturally responsive curriculum as a fundamental component of Spanish for heritage classes.

*A Culturally Responsive Curriculum for Spanish for Heritage Speakers Classes*

Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco and Todorova (2008) have suggested that for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 1.5 generation immigrant student, academic achievement is the exception, not the rule. Moreover, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) have expressed their concern about the downward trajectories of many 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students, especially males. Those findings alone should serve as a guiding light in the curriculum creation for Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes. A culturally responsive curriculum should make a difference.

A culturally responsive curriculum that reflects Latino/a students' borderlands experiences is meaningful, engaging, and helpful for them. It acknowledges that Latino students do not identify in unhyphenated ways, not even as Latino or Hispanic or in national terms alone, that they in fact have different variations of borderlands-related identities (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). It builds connections between the different borderlands experiences. Culturally-speaking, these borderlands experiences may be different variations and combinations of the national and panethnic. Linguistically-speaking, the connections may be widespread between English



monolingualism, variations of Spanglish, and Spanish/English bilingualism. The curriculum acknowledges that a number of Latino students may identify in terms of marginalization and that efforts are needed to focus on making them feel less marginalized.

Social identity is a fundamental component of the culturally responsive curriculum. It consists of various activities that combine identity exploration with borderlands literary topics. Some of these activities include discussions, projects, writing assignments and research assignments. Furthermore, the curriculum does not only focus on identity exploration but also on identity construction. Last, the three levels of heritage speakers' classes include an increasing critical focus culminating on the third level. As it happened with my students, several of the discussions meant to develop their critical thinking may not really ascend to a higher level and may simply linger as rhetoric questions. But the seed of critical thinking has been planted. These discussions should start more superficially in level one and become more critical as the students progress towards level three (Diaz-Greensberg, 2003; Pahl & Way, 2006; Phinney, 1989, 1993; Zarate, Bhimji & Reese, 2005).

Culturally responsive literary practices have a strong component of resemblance to community-related interactions and to the oral tradition. Some of these comprise reading activities in different kinds of group formations as well as reading discussions that resemble conversational styles which include reference to real life experiences. In the following section I discuss my conclusions about culturally responsive reading practices.

### *Culturally Responsive Reading Practices*

As Hinchman and Sheridan-Thomas (2008) have stated, a crucial role of the teacher of minority students is that of creating meaningful partnerships between their students and literature. This could be a life-saver for students who exhibit little engagement with reading and with academics in general. Schools and curriculum makers should dedicate more attention to the kinds of reading topics that they present to borderlands as well as traditionally marginalized students. If reading topics don't reflect or address the experiences lived by those students, it is possible that those topics will most likely not be engaging to them. As I stated above in reference to traditionally marginalized readers, Leslie (2008) has specifically called for alternative, even non-sanctioned, ways to inspire them to read.

The persistent exposure of resistant readers to a great variety of topics -- including unsanctioned ones that reflect marginalized and/or borderlands topics included -- is crucial (Leslie, 2008; Moje, 2000). For the students who exhibit more intellectual/global tendencies, the curriculum must also acquaint them with topics that are engaging to them. Reaching a balance and finding the commonalities between the less global/intellectual and the more global/intellectual students who share the same class may be challenging but beneficial for both groups of students. Ideally throughout the three heritage speakers classes, reading topics would be articulated that range from less intellectual to more intellectual experiences in preparing students to think at the higher levels expected in Spanish AP Literature. All students in heritage classes should be instilled with the hope that they will one day become Spanish AP Literature students.

Readings should also address the need for students to connect or reconnect with their roots (Caplan, Choy & Whitmore, 1992; Giroux, 1992; Godina, 2003; Machado-Casas, 2009). Likewise, readings should relate to their current situation as Latinos in the United States. Solidarity with other members of the Latino community can be initiated in the classroom via the exploration of their commonalities and differences through literary topics (Oboler, 1995).

My research suggested the benefits of Cone's (1994) recommendation to allow resistant readers to choose their own readings. Having the freedom to choose their own reading topics was in fact one of the main reasons the majority of my resistant readers became less resistant. By allowing students to choose their own reading topics, we show them we acknowledge and respect their agency. We also facilitate their finding topics they would not have found otherwise. Moreover, we make possible their exploration of their identities through the topics they choose to read. And by allowing them to choose their reading topics we can discern the reading topics they prefer as a guide to our teaching. Another important way of helping students to explore their identities and interests on their own terms is by allowing them to choose their own research topics.

Reading with students should be done and experimented with in different formats. Alternative literacy forms such as movies, music, projects, and internet sources should also be widely used and experimented with. Even the entries written by students might be used as an alternative form of reading whose topics could be explored through discussions and writing assignments. More personal forms of

literacy which intimately reflect the lives of students and teacher are also recommended.

My findings suggest that there is a bidirectional relationship between literacy and social identity when borderlands students are acquainted with literature which reflects their life experiences (Athanases, 1998). As I answered Rosenblatt's (1995) call to explore the relation between literature and cultural identity, I noticed that a noteworthy number of my students expressed a heightened cultural and linguistic appreciation by the end of the school year. The positive aspects of their linguistic and cultural heritage in the reading topics I acquainted them with were among the three most frequently selected reasons their interest in reading increased. More males than females expressed that the positive *and the negative* had heightened their interest in reading. Perhaps the negative had a strong connection with marginalized topics, a topic with which a noteworthy number of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation males identified with.

It is possible that after much exposure to engaging literary topics, Latino students may identify more in Latin American national terms and/or in panethnic Latino terms, which may raise the concern of some (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). However, it is possible that students' increased literary engagement may better equip them to succeed academically. As Ladson-Billings (1995) indicated, these students may become less resistant to learning since they don't have to abandon who they are in order to learn (Carter, 2003). These students may also become more critical as they continue exploring their social identities as traditionally marginalized ethnic minorities. While some of my questions aimed at developing students' critical thinking were not answered to the level I expected, I interpreted their staring at me

wide-eyed in silence as a first step in the growth of their critical awareness. While my main focus was their extensive exposure to literary borderlands topics with which they could identify, I felt that I planted the seed for critical thinking which would hopefully be further developed in the next level.

My main focus the whole school year was helping my most resistant readers become less resistant. One of my most resistant readers, who also had one of the worst psychological profiles, was Rafael, who, at the time of this writing, was in jail. To my mind, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Rafael exhibited all of the characteristics of dissonant acculturation and downward assimilation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Rafael was a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation male<sup>22</sup> who had no *point of reference* (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, 2008) with his heritage country of El Salvador since he had never visited it. He was a limited bilingual (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) which meant that he was much more fluent in English than in Spanish. In contrast to females such as Dania, the fluent bilingual daughter of a minister who spent a lot of time with her parents, Rafael spent a lot of time on the streets. “I want to go home,” he told me when I visited him at the correctional center. “Now you want to go home but when you could you were never there,” I commented. He smiled and said, “Yes, I was never home, I would get home like at 3:00 in the morning every day, even on school days.” It seems to me that Rafael did not become fluent in Spanish since he was barely ever at home, in *the most intimate social sphere* (Arriagada, 2005). On the other hand, Rafael’s mother could barely speak English. She needed an interpreter when she testified in court on behalf of her son. She and her son did not undergo consonant acculturation

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<sup>22</sup> According to Vigil (1988), *cultural transitional* Latino youngsters join gangs more commonly if they are 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants.

(Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) as she never became fluent in English as her son spoke limited Spanish. This phenomenon may have caused role reversal (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). At a teacher-parent conference she complained at her difficulty making Rafael stay at home at night. She was a single mother. Rafael's parents had divorced when he was a child. According to Cloe, Rafael became a gang member as a consequence of his parents' divorce which made him a sad child. Moreover, Rafael's father was barely involved in his life. Rafael once told me, "I don't talk with my dad." Rafael also lived in a low-income neighborhood. His mother's desire was to move away from it when Rafael came out of jail. His mother's intention to move also had to do with distancing him from his troubled friends (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Rafael associated with youth who were considered to be at-risk academically by our school. In fact, the group of students he committed the crime with had been our students at different times. None of them was considered to be in good academic standing at the time of the incident. They all are currently serving jail sentences. As a student experiencing downfall acculturation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) Rafael seemed to live *bonds of solidarity* that, far from helping him succeed academically, pulled him away from advancement. As Portes and Rumbaut (2001) stated, "Youthful solidarity based on opposition to the dominant society yields an adversarial stance toward mainstream institutions, including education" (p. 285). As his former teacher I continue to strive to reverse Rafael's downward trajectory towards selective acculturation as well as to change his non-reader identity to a reader identity. Each month I send Rafael a letter containing a literary excerpt or a poem normally in Spanish or in Spanglish. In each letter I remind him in Spanish to continue reading

and painting. I am committed to doing this each month until Rafael comes out of jail when he becomes an adult. Hopefully by then he will have become more of a diglossia speaker, more of a reader, and, especially, better able to drag out of the downward trajectory. In the following section I present recommendations for teacher preparation and professional development programs on how to generate culturally responsive teachers.

*Teacher Preparation and Professional Development for Culturally Responsive  
Teachers of Borderlands Children*

Teacher education and professional development programs should emphasize the link between the social and academic needs of borderlands children. One phenomenon with direct impact on academics is the identity of the borderlands child. In these programs teachers and teacher candidates should get acquainted with strategies to guide students' identity exploration and creation through literary discussions, writing exercises, research and movies. Discussed literary topics should include language, roots, borderlands experiences, marginal experiences, voices of minority children and cultural gender roles. Furthermore, ways to explore the topic of labels, identification and identity should be examined as well. Another important phenomenon that deserves serious consideration is order of generation. Downward assimilation, consonant and dissonant acculturation and selective acculturation would go a long way in understanding the needs of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants.

Teacher preparation programs and professional development should also focus on the topic of connections in its myriad manifestations. One manifestation has to do

with helping students develop a stronger sense of linguistic and cultural self-awareness as it relates to their panethnic experience and to their roots. And what connects them to their roots should also be linked to their academic experiences as much as possible. Explore how to draw from that source of connection to bridge the academic experience for the student. In addition to world languages, connections to students' linguistic and cultural heritage can be found in different subject areas such as art, history, art history, human geography, anthropology, biological sciences, statistics, geography, geology, government, English, health, music, science and more. In each one of these classes, the background experiences of borderlands children can be used to discern connections, contrasts and similarities.

Teachers and teacher candidates should be guided to draw from and help build on the cultural and linguistic experiences and perspectives of borderlands children in order to meet them at their linguistic and cultural zones of proximal development. The experiences of marginalization of these children should cease in order to become an intrinsic part of the curriculum. The acknowledgement and development of the minority language should help them become fluent bilinguals as part of the effort to help them become more selectively acculturated child. Bridges should be drawn from English and heritage language regarding comparisons, contrasts and similarities. As part of the formation of teacher candidates, they should be required to become close fluent bilinguals. In this way, they would gain sensitivity and understanding regarding the importance of diglossia in the lives of these children.

Regarding literacy, teacher preparation and professional development programs should emphasize going out of one's way to meet children at their zones of



reading proximal development in order to facilitate meaningful partnerships between socially marginalized children and text. Independent reading should be encouraged as a way to acknowledge and allow students to follow their own agency which may help them gain motivation and self-reliance in regards to finding the kinds of reading topics that they enjoy and with which they can identify with. A significant number of literary topics should reflect their own experiences and some of the important characters should resemble them socioeconomically but at the same time offer them some kind of sense of liberation and progress. Programs must emphasize the important link that should exist between literacy and social identity in the borderlands student. Alternative forms of unsanctioned reading students can identify with should be allowed as a bridge to sanctioned reading. These programs should also explore how to balance out less and more global topics as well as lower and higher level thinking.

Attention should be given to pedagogy that bridges the gap between home and school cultures. Exploration of the characteristics of the more traditional cultures should be intrinsic to these teacher preparation and professional development programs in order to implement in the classroom some of the familiar traits that are characteristic of Latino/a students' cultures such as familism, oral traditions, and communal interaction. These programs should also examine how to bridge the gap between oral traditions and literacy in a communal kind of way.

Teachers and teacher candidates should be driven to explore their of own assumptions of own culture and the cultures of traditionally marginalized children. They should also be guided to examine their own values, dispositions, and cultural

behaviors that may further alienate or may alleviate the marginal experiences of traditionally marginalized child. There should be extensive emphasis on exposure to and immersion in the community of the socially marginalized child. Forms of community service in these communities should be an integral part of the training of these teachers. In addition, they should be taught to become habitual learners who constantly draw from the perspectives and experiences of their students. Exercises similar to ethnographic action research should be encouraged instead of fit-for-all inservices which may tend to stereotype the children's cultures more than help teachers understand and allow the agency of the child to drive their instruction. The role of being perpetual, reflective learners is also crucial in order to reach students at their zones of proximal development. These programs should also guide teachers to acknowledge and draw from student agency and to help develop and follow Latino/a students and fellow teachers and teacher candidates in regards to curriculum and pedagogy. These professionals should also be trained on how to work in professional learning communities to collaborate about the characteristics of socially marginalized children and how to bridge the gap and connect curriculum to their experiences. Efforts such as PD through professional learning communities and ethnographic action research to find how to reach students in their zones of linguistic, cultural and reader development should be rewarded by principals. Last, teacher and teacher candidates should be guided to explore the concept of caring for other people's children as if they were one's own and how to demonstrate caring, whether or not teachers belong to their students' ethnic group or not, by becoming the best possible culturally responsive teacher.

## Conclusion

This study sheds light into the cultural and linguistic identities of my 43 Latino/a students, focusing on what set them apart – national background, order of generation and gender – as well as what brought them together panethnically. It illustrates how I became culturally responsive by drawing from my students' perspectives and experiences as I guided their identity exploration through borderlands literary topics. In this study I also demonstrate how I relied on the agency and voice of my students to make curricular and pedagogical decisions and to let them decide their preferred literary topics. Furthermore, my research refers to the positive impact on the interest in literacy elicited by high levels of exposure to a large variety of literary topics as well as to positive aspects of Latin American and Latino cultures, histories, and language.

Through my research, I worked to draw a direct line between the social identity of borderlands students and the literary experience by facilitating encounters and helping create partnerships between them and text. My goal was for my students to see their lives reflected in the lives of the characters portrayed in literature. What's more, I directly represented the lives of my students in my "book". My students became "characters" in my thesis, adding to their visibility. Not only did traditionally marginalized students become more visible in my curriculum and pedagogy, they also became more visible to the readers of my thesis. By creating mini-portraits of my students, I tried to provide the kind of exposure to my readers that I recommended above for professional development and teacher preparation programs. Many of my students have demonstrated joy, excitement and pride for their portrayal in my thesis.

I hope that my attempt to make them more visible will help make their experiences more familiar to teachers so that these teachers may regard them more as their *own* children.

This study indicates that guiding the exploration of, and the connection and reconnection to cultural and linguistic heritage and to panethnic experience helps “demarginalize” students. As the expert teachers expressed, there is much more to the job of the teacher of heritage speakers than the specifications of a teacher’s job description. The role spreads out according to whatever may be needed to help heal a fractured sense of identity and to connect it to learning and literacy. The connection with text should serve, not only to inspire the borderlands student to read and write more, but also to gain a deeper sense of self-value and of liberation.

By depicting my own growth, I demonstrated that there is a lot of room for growth throughout a teaching career. Even though I possessed tacit understanding as a member of my students’ ethnic group, my positionality limited my understanding due to my socio-economic background, level of education, and order of immigration generation. As a 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrant I had chosen a book, *Cuando era puertorriqueña*, that referred to an experience that was in a way more like mine than my students’, none of whom was 1<sup>st</sup> generation. My extensive amount of learning during the year of my study made me think of teachers with much less exposure to Latino/a students’ experiences. These teachers’ positionality by belonging to middle class, racial majority and/or immigration experiences beyond second generation may limit their levels of exposure and familiarity to Latino/a students’ experiences. Just as I benefited, these teachers would benefit from conducting ethnographic action

research. My constant inquiry by observing and listening to my students and my daily experimentation with how best to teach them picked up the pace of my learning considerably. With the exception of my first year of teaching, I don't ever remember learning so much in a one-year period. Most of my reflections were full of self-doubt and many of my experiences felt like trial-and-error. But my extensive learning experience, which ran parallel to my students', finally made me feel qualified to assertively consider myself a culturally responsive teacher of borderlands students.

## APPENDIX A

### Glossary of Terms

*1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrant* – Immigrant who enters the country after the early teenage years.

*1.5 generation immigrant* – Immigrant who enters the country during or before the early teenage years.

*2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant* – Child of 1<sup>st</sup> or 1.5 generation immigrant parents who is born in the United States.

*Borderlands literary topics* – Topics that refer to the person who lives between two cultures and/or languages.

*Consonant acculturation* – When immigrant parents and their children acculturate and learn English in a parallel fashion.

*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy* – Pedagogy that draws from the cultural experiences of the minority or traditionally marginalized student and bridges the gap between his/her home culture and the school culture.

*Diglossia* – Speaking two languages without combining them.

*Dissonant acculturation* – When immigrant parents and their children do not acculturate and learn English in a parallel fashion.

*Downward assimilation* – Eventual academic disengagement experienced by the immigrant student.

*Ethnographic action research* – Combination of the reflective spiral processes involved in action research and ethnographic concepts and anthropological methods.

*Fluent bilingual* – Person who is equally fluent in two languages and does not typically combine them.

*Limited bilingual* – Person who is more fluent in one language than the other.

*Selective acculturation* – The experience of the immigrant who retains his/her original language in addition to English and continues to have contact with his/her original culture in addition to American culture.

*Social and home marginalization* – Experiences that are typical of the socio-economically marginalized person.

*Spanglish* – Lexical and syntactic combination of English and Spanish.

*Tertulia* – Biweekly book club to discuss independent reading.

## APPENDIX B

Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 Syllabus (Translated by Magda Cabrero)

### **RULES AND REGULATIONS**

1. Arrive to class on time.
2. Bring all school supplies: binder, book if applicable and the class planner. You must maintain a clean and organized binder, and the binder should only be for this class. (Do not doodle!)
3. Behave appropriately in class. Do not inconvenience the rest of the students. Do not talk when I am talking or when someone is presenting.
4. Please maintain a clean room. Put garbage in the trash can.
5. You must dress according to the provisions of the school.
6. School supplies and the task of the day must be on your desktop when the bell rings.
7. Bring your planner to class every day so you can write down your assignments.

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

1. Write the following information on all of your assignments: full name, date, period, title, and page number.
2. Hand in all of your assignments on time.
3. If you have been absent on the day of a test or quiz, you will need to make up the work within five days after you are back in school.

### **LIST OF MATERIALS**

1. One inch binder with three rings
2. White paper with lines.
3. 5 dividers with tabs (tabs)

### **GRADING SYSTEM**

1. Each quarter will be computed in the following manner:

20% Tests & projects  
20% Diaries, essays/compositions  
20% Oral presentations  
10% Homework assignments  
30% Quizzes

2. The end of the year grade will consist of 20% for each quarter (80%), 10% for the semester exam and 10% for the final exam.

3. Grade Scale

A	93-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-92	C	73-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-72
B	83-86	D+	67-69
B-	80-82	D	64-66
		F	63 -0

### CLASS REQUIREMENTS

- 1 You must speak only Spanish during class.
2. The journal must be written during class. If you are absent, you will need to write your entry after class. Your entries must consist of no less than 10 lines. Use 7-10 words of connection and/or extension. Highlight the words of connection or extension the first time you use them.
3. Your binder will have the following sections in the following order: **notes, geography/history/culture, homework, testing and reviews, journals and miscellaneous.** Papers must be archived chronologically by date. The most recent will be the last page under all others.

### CODE OF HONOR

It is expected that all students demonstrate integrity in everything that has to do with Spanish class. All work must be done individually, unless the teacher gives the authorization to do group or collective work. Cheating will not be tolerated and the student will have to adhere to the consequences prescribed by the student manual.

#### Contact me:

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have during the school year. Sometimes I call home to inform parents' about their student's academic performance. Complete the information that is requested below. You can also contact me by e-mail. These worksheets must be kept in the "Miscellaneous" section throughout the school year.

Thank you

Magda a. Cabrero



**Please write clearly:**

Name of the student

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of the father /  
mother/guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

Father/ mother/guardian's \_\_\_\_\_ signature

Phone number: home \_\_\_\_\_ work \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Return to the teacher as soon as possible.

APPENDIX C

Program of Studies: Themes and Topics

<u>Level 1</u>	<u>Level 2</u>	<u>Level 3*</u>
<p><b>Personal and Family Life</b>            Greetings and Introductions            Physical Descriptions and Personality Characteristics,            Feelings and Emotions            Family Members            Clothing and Colors</p> <p><b>School Life</b>            Numbers and Time            Days, Months and Calendar            Classes, Schedules and Supplies</p> <p><b>Social Life</b>            Interests and Leisure Activities            Weather and Seasons</p> <p><b>Community Life</b>            Cities, Places, Activities and Transportation            Shopping            Restaurants and Food</p>	<p><b>Home Life</b>            Daily Routine            Rooms of the House and Household Chores            Food            Childhood Experiences (Spanish only)</p> <p><b>Student Life</b>            Classes and School Routines            School-Related Activities            Health and Fitness</p> <p><b>Leisure Time</b>            Indoor and Outdoor Activities            Shopping            Special Events</p> <p><b>Vacation and Travel</b>            Travel Plans and Activities            Countries and Nationalities            Asking For and Giving Directions</p>	<p><b>Rights and Responsibilities</b>            Home, School and Community            Voting and Civic Responsibilities            Driving            Civil and Military Service            Chores</p> <p><b>Future Plans and Choices</b>            Education Plans            Vacation Plans            Careers and Jobs</p> <p><b>Teen Culture</b>            Student Life            Fashion/Clothes            Entertainment            Leisure Time            Sports/Extreme Sports</p> <p><b>The Environment</b>            Nature and Wildlife            Ecology            Conservation            Eco-Tourism</p> <p><b>Humanities</b>            Current Events            History, Holidays and Traditions            Art, Architecture and Literature            The Arts</p>

APPENDIX D

Culturally Responsive Additional Topics

Culturally Relevant Topics	Readings	Description
Language	<p>“El origen de la lengua española”</p> <p>“Your Accent, your Accent”</p> <p>“Language and intimacy”</p> <p><i>Spanglish</i></p> <p>“Lecciones de inglés”</p> <p>Excerpts of <i>Legacies</i></p>	<p>Article about the origin, different components of, and influences of the Spanish language.</p> <p>My son’s poem about my accent.</p> <p>My essay about the relationship between language and intimacy in my life.</p> <p>Book that acknowledges the existence of Spanglish as a natural phenomenon.</p> <p>Short story about the difficulties of learning English for a Latin-American person.</p> <p>Explains the benefits of being bilingual for second generation Latinos.</p>
Roots	<p>“Yo soy un hombre sincero” (poem)</p> <p>Salvadoran legends</p> <p>Reading describing El Salvador’s national emblem</p> <p>Positive aspects of national heritage</p> <p>“Mi Perú”</p> <p>“Pirámide alimentaria”</p> <p>Glossary of <i>Excelencia en la cocina</i></p> <p>“The Health Benefits in Spanish Food”</p>	<p>Poem by Cuba’s national hero. One of its themes has to do with patriotism.</p> <p>Emailed to me directly from El Salvador by a former student.</p> <p>Downloaded from internet.</p> <p>Research conducted by students on positive aspects of their cultural and/or linguistic heritage.</p> <p>Patriotic poem.</p> <p>Food Pyramid.</p> <p>Cookbook written by my grandmother.</p> <p>Downloaded article.</p>
Borderlands Experiences	<p><i>Borderlands/La frontera</i></p>	<p>The colonial experience of living as a Latino in the United States and the inequitable experience of being a Latina in the Latino culture.</p>

	<p>“La reforma migratoria para el 2010”</p> <p>Un latino influyente</p> <p>“¿Qué es el mes de la hispanidad?”</p> <p>“I am who I am, so what”</p> <p>Excerpts of <i>Learning a New Land</i></p> <p><i>Cajas de cartón</i></p> <p><i>Cuando era puertorriqueña</i></p> <p>Excerpts in <i>Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives</i></p> <p>Excerpts in <i>Legacies</i></p> <p>“Boricua en la luna”</p>	<p>Newspaper article on “The Immigration Reform for 2010”.</p> <p>Students’ own research on a Latino/a of influence.</p> <p>Articles downloaded from internet about multiple Latino topics in relation to the “Hispanic month”.</p> <p>Poem about being of Mexican heritage in the United States.</p> <p>The experiences of first generation immigrants.</p> <p>Autobiographical account about the childhood of the child of migrant workers.</p> <p>Autobiographical account of a female teenager who moves to the United States from Puerto Rico.</p> <p>Labels that impact the identity of Latinos in the United States.</p> <p>The experiences of second generation immigrants.</p> <p>Poem about Puerto Ricans immigrating to the United States.</p>
Marginal Experiences	<p>“En el fondo del caño hay un negrito”</p> <p>“Indias sin reservas”</p> <p>Excerpts of <i>Rigoberta Menchú</i></p> <p><i>Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice Among Latina Youth Gangs.</i></p> <p>Excerpts from <i>My Bloody Life: The Makings of a Latin King</i></p> <p>“Ana Gutierrez: From Migrant Farmworker to Ph.D.” in <i>The Transcendent Child</i></p> <p><i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i></p>	<p>Short story about a poor dark child.</p> <p>Autobiographical accounts by indigenous women who have surmounted many obstacles.</p> <p>Guatemalan Nobel Prize winner tells the story of her oppressed indigenous family under the Guatemalan military regime.</p> <p>Research on two female gangs.</p> <p>Autobiographical account of a former gang member.</p> <p>Biography of successful Latina who surmounted many obstacles.</p> <p>The life of a Dominican nerd.</p>

	“El llamado”	Poem about a prisoner.
Voices of Latino Children	<i>Affirming Diversity</i>	Minority students speak about their school experiences.
Cultural Gender Roles	<p>“Las medias rojas”</p> <p>“Preparación de la mujer al matrimonio”</p> <p>“Casa de Bernarda Alba”</p> <p>Excerpts of <i>Borderlands/ La frontera</i></p> <p>“La niña fea”</p>	<p>Short story about a Spanish father who disfigures his daughter so she will not leave him alone in Spain to move to America.</p> <p>Ultra-conservative Spanish manifesto that gives recommendations for married women.</p> <p>Play about oppressed women.</p> <p>Oppressive role of women in Latino society and of Mexican Americans in American society.</p> <p>Short story about the discrimination against an ugly girl.</p>

## APPENDIX E

### Catalogue of Themes

A. Under major theme of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:

Linguistic identity exploration; cultural identity exploration; borderlands literary topics; connection to roots, family and community; cultural gender exploration; voices; agency; and classroom culture.

B. Literary Topics:

Language; roots; borderlands experiences; marginal experiences; voices; and cultural gender roles.

C. Linguistic Identity Exploration:

English monolingualism; Spanglish; and Spanish/English bilingualism.

Unexplored identity; beginning of identity exploration; and identity exploration.

D. Cultural & Linguistic Exploration:

National identity; panethnic identity; roots; positive and negative cultural characteristics; identification vs. identity; and labeling.

Unexplored identity; beginning of identity exploration; and identity exploration.

E. Reader/Writer Identity:

Resistant reader; semi-resistant reader; non-resistant

F. Literacy Interest:

Low interest in Spanish literacy; exploration of different culturally relevant literary topics; and developed preference for specific literacy topics.

Low or limited identity due to limited acquaintance with topics; exploration of identity due to extensive acquaintance with topics students identified with; and higher identity as readers and writers.

G. Action Research:

Processes as code; perspectives and strategies are subcodes of processes code.

## APPENDIX F

### Data on Borderlands Experiences

#### **Samples of Students' Journal Entries**

Dinaida (January 18, 2010): “The conflict of Negi’s mother in *Cuando era puertorriqueña* is that she [her daughter] is acting like an ‘americana’. But it is not her fault that she is acting like that. It is the culture. The mother [...] does not want her to act as an ‘americana’, because she does not like how they act and dress”.

Dania (February 16, 2010): “Many times the child of the immigrant goes through experiences that are different from the ‘gente americanizada’ (Americanized people). For example, the culture is different. In my experience my parents have to know my female and male friends to know the kinds of people I get together with. The people who are ‘americanizada’ simply go out and that is it. I don’t think that the ‘padres hispanos’ (Hispanic parents) don’t trust their children; simply they protect their children more”.

Dania (April 19, 2010): “I could see and understand how difficult is the life of an illegal immigrant...my friends tell me how they miss their countries, their parents, their family, their friends. You can see in this story what it means to suffer as a result of being an immigrant”.

Karen (April 19, 2010) “These things happen a lot. Children stay in their country of origin while the parents are in the United States working for them. It is very difficult for them because they can’t see their parents and they stay with their uncles, aunts, grandparents and, if something happens, how can their parents know? But that is life because I have many cousins, nephews and nieces who have not seen their parents



and wish to see them. It is very sad. That is why the parents work to send them money and get their papers and passports to be able to see them”.

Enid (April 19, 2010): “My impressions of “Under the Same Moon” are strange since my mother, father and siblings are immigrant and I remember as it were yesterday when I came to the United States that it was very painful for me. I cried like I had never cried before. When I watched the movie for the first time I became sad. It felt as if I had gone through the pain they went through. That is why I don’t like to watch movies like that, since I think that I have gone through the same as the boy”.

Francisca (April 19, 2010): “When I saw this movie for the first time I started to cry because I went through something similar. When my father came to the United States it was very sad for me and hard not to see him every day. But through the years he could save money to bring me to the United States. And for him that was really hard since he had to work night and day to make money to be able to bring us. That is why I appreciate all he does for me and my siblings. I don’t plan to get in trouble because he does not deserve that I fail him that way”.

Elmer (April 19, 2010): “For two years I lived in el Salvador with my aunt. During those years I spent fun time with my cousins. [...] The movie “Under the Same Moon” made me think about my own past. For two years I lived with my aunt, during the time that I was waiting for the residence in the United States. I remember how much I missed my mother. And I used to think like the child in the movie. I thought that she did not love me, but when I grew up I realized that she did. Even though I lived with my aunt and used to see my oldest sister, it was not the same as seeing my mother with me. The idea of leaving my whole life in El Salvador caused me a lot of

fear. I did not know how things were going to be here. When I used to live in El Salvador I did not have to attend school but I was told that when I came to the United States I would have to go since that was the law in the United States. I felt terribly since I did not want to leave my cousins and could not bring my toys in my suitcase. When the day arrived I felt really badly. When I arrived to the airport my stomach started to hurt. I was so afraid that I lost my appetite [...]. Then the time came to get into the airplane. I started to cry. All of my relatives hugged me and told me goodbye. I got into the plane with my uncle and cousins. In the airplane I slept several hours. Finally the airplane landed. There were my mother, brother and sister waiting for me”.

Marcos (February 16, 2010): “The second time that I came to the United States was when I was 12 years old. My mother lied to me that we were only going to be here for one week, but we have stayed for three years this time. That time, only my mother, my brother, my sister and I came. Three months later my father came to stay also. A year later my brother came to work as a doctor here since he already was a doctor there”.

Juan (October 5, 2009): “I work in McDonalds with my mother. We both work together to pay the rent. Only she and I live in our apartment. Also in the summer I helped her with another job of hers. When I have money after paying the rent, my phone, cable/internet, I send money to my sisters and grandmother in Salvador. I also help other family members. When I have money left I deposit it in the bank for school” (Translated by Magda Cabrero).

Juanita's journal: "I am the only one of my siblings who is in school. They are in El Salvador" (Translated by Magda Cabrero).

Tony's journal: "When I used to live with my father, while children went to play outside and spoke with their friends, my father made me study since that was better than 'wasting time doing those silly things'. Before I moved with my mother, that was the only culture that I knew. After I moved to the United States I got acquainted with the American culture. One full of rock'n'roll music, freedom and double cheeseburgers" (Translated by Magda Cabrero).

Dinaida's journal: "I have become introverted. I was expressive before but I have changed. My father was deported; can no longer enter here. Now I cry a lot and I am sad and pretend to be happy when I don't want anyone to know what happened. Now you know something about me and I hope you will understand why I don't speak much in your classroom" (Translated by Magda Cabrero).

Dania's journal: "My parents tell me that from the age of one more or less I used to travel to El Salvador. I never went with my parents. I traveled with my grandparents, my uncles and aunts. My mother tells me that [...] I always used to come back speaking with the accents of the children from there. I used to come back as an entirely new person...each time that I go back to El Salvador I cry while I go towards the airport and take the plane to go there. I feel that I will miss my loved ones in the United States...but when I come back the same thing happens to me, I come sobbing because I feel that I leave who I really am there. Even though I was not born in El Salvador, I feel I am from El Salvador. It is in my blood, it runs through my veins. I feel, like India Maria (comedian) says, 'I am neither from here, nor from there.'

Inside of me there is always a voice that wants to come out. I understand the importance of being bilingual and bicultural in this country but in reality almost always only English is the language that is used. The only places where I feel that I can allow that second person to come out are in Spanish class and in my home. I wish I could change that in one way or another” (Translated by Magda Cabrero).

Isabel’s journal: “I am multicultural. My father was born in Chile and my mother was born in Ecuador. I love the sayings of Chile. The accents stick easily with me” (Translated by Magda Cabrero).

Nadine’s journal: “My culture is Bolivian and Guatemalan. I would say that I am more Bolivian since I am closer to my mother’s side. One of the things that make me more Bolivian is that I love Bolivian food. I also dance in a folkloric Bolivian dance group and I like it very much” (Translated by Magda Cabrero).

Margarita’s journal: “My mother and I are from Nicaragua but my father is from Guatemala and my siblings are from the United States, that is why we have many traditions and cultures. My father’s culture is more indigenous and the culture of my mother and mine is more from the city” (Translated by Magda Cabrero).

Lola’s journal: “My family is not like the ones who are in El Salvador. They have gotten accustomed to the American life. The one who is still purely Salvadorian is my grandma who visits once a year. She brings back the culture to my home” (Translated by Magda Cabrero)

### **Samples of Focus Group Discussions (Individual Quotes)**

Carlos (May 18, 2010): “I was born here but I am not Americanized, I guess. How white people live like, like they live in those big houses. They have everything they want like picture perfect lives”.

Francisca (May 21, 2010): “I am not Americanized, I prefer to speak Spanish and my home is not American at all”.

Nicolas (May 25, 2010): “I want to learn about Mayans and Aztecs. I feel connected because it is my culture; I am Mexican, Mayans love art. American history is boring, not background, ancient history, what people are capable of doing; genocide and all of that”.

Karen (May 10, 2010): “I wish I know more about my ancestors. I just want to know what happened. The book about Salvadorian children... was back at the time when the Salvadorian war started and my family was there when the war started. I actually saw the video of it about five years ago, they went against each other; if my family had gotten killed I wouldn't be here right now. When I read that book I realized that a lot of children are suffering over there. And it is kind of cool that an American woman adopted a kid over there...you know that is kind of cool. That is like awesome. You're like making something new. You are actually bringing another culture back to us”.

Carlos (May 21, 2010): “Latino culture is strong, I want to read more, write more, those accents”.

Dinora (May 4, 2010): “Now I know more Spanish. It has connected me to my culture, now I know more about Peru, etc., such an important part of who I am.

Nicolas (May 25, 2010): “We are always together. I am proud to be Hispanic; I don’t care what people say, it is my culture not theirs”.

### **Samples of Focus Groups (Dialogue Segments)**

Francisca: “*Cuando era puertorriqueña* got my attention. It got my attention because it talks about my culture and that she can do whatever she wants. It got my attention because just because you don’t know the American culture and language that well they can treat you wrong. That is not right”.

Teacher: “Would this book be good for Latinos to explore who they are and feel good about themselves?”

Francisca: “Yes, this book would be good to explore who they are”.

(May 21, 2010)

Francisca: “I am not Americanized, I speak more Spanish at home”.

Carlos: “I was born here but I am not Americanized, I guess”.

Teacher: “What does been Americanized mean to you”

Carlos: “What white people are like, like they have those big houses. They have everything they want like picture perfect lives.

Jessie: “I think teachers should teach *Cuando era puertorriqueña*”.

Francisca: “It teaches that you are who you are, stay with what you have and be proud of it”.

(May 21, 2010)

Teacher: “Have you thought about who you are more, less or not at all because of reading in my class?”

Enid: “The class has brought more of my Hispanic side”. I feel more Latina in general.

Teacher: “Do you feel good about it?”

Enid: “It is positive! I do feel more confident than before”.

Enid: “I always hated taking Spanish before. It was a fun class but after that I really did not care; but this class made me think how good my parents’ country is; I learned about all of those countries and I was like wow. It connected me more to my personality and to my dad and to my roots’.

(May 25, 2010)

Teacher: “Do you live between two different worlds?”

Carlito: “My dad is different from Americans. Being Latino in the United States you experience racism. I like being Hispanic but people already assume that I don’t speak English; but I like being Hispanic; our class makes me feel better about being Hispanic. It makes me feel more proud all the different countries in our class. I have gone through a lot of identity crises. I have gone a lot through it. I felt ashamed because I heard things about being Hispanic. Tenth grade was when I thought about it for the most time. You start thinking about who you are and one of the things you are is Hispanic and I have gone a lot through that. [...]. I know I am Hispanic and can’t

do anything about it. I am in eleventh grade. My parents are the nicest people I know. And I know many Hispanic people that aren't like".

Karen: "There are a lot of Latinos but don't want to be called Latinos. They say when they are asked where are you from, they say, my parents are this...but you're part of it too! I mean you look like them, you have their skin color, you have the culture and all that but you don't want to be called that way" (May 4, 2010)

### **Samples of Field Notes & Teacher Journal Entries**

"To my comment, 'Maybe you identify yourselves with being 'norteamericanos', Yara, one of the sisters of Honduran heritage, abruptly replied with a serious, imposing expression on her face, 'I am not American'" (November, 20, 2009).

"When we read about baseball I said, 'one of these days we are going to talk about sports. And Nolo said: 'I will bring football to El Salvador and the team is going to be called pupusera'. We all laughed" (January 14, 2009).

"Today Karen said that she is Salvadorian American. I asked, 'Is it Salvadorian first and then American?' She answered 'yes'" (February 19, 2010).

Melina asked me to help her write her quinceañera speech which she is supposed to give in Spanish (March 3, 2010).



“Then we start reading about Peru. I identify Miguel and Dinora and I ask what they know about Peru. I can see Michael’s sense of pride on his face. He is 2<sup>nd</sup> generation” (April 18, 2010).

### **Sample of Teacher Interviews**

Magda: “Do Latino students feel American?”

Aurora: “I have never seen Latino students who say they are American only. Place of birth has nothing to do with where they are from”.

Aurora: “If teachers don’t teach them who they are, they are up in the air, since they will never connect to their culture”.

## APPENDIX G

### Interview for Teachers of Spanish for Heritage Language Speakers Classes

The questions comprised in my interview for the six teachers of *Spanish for Heritage Speakers* are based on my inquiry questions on chapter 1. The questions are also based on the literature review I have done. They are based on the theories of the following:

Gay (2000, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2010); Ladson-Billings (1995); Educational Research Service, (2003): *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*

Phinney (1989; 1993): *Social Identity Development Theory*

Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992): *Funds of Knowledge*

Gee (1996): *Sociolinguistic Theory*

Rosenholtz's (1984): *Reader Self-Perception Theory*

Giroux (1988; 2007) *Voice Development Theory* and *Critical Theory*

Freire & Macedo (1987): *Praxis through studying the world and the word*

The questions are grouped under the following titles:

#### I. CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC IDENTITY

- 1) How do you explore cultural and linguistic topics with your students?
- 2) Have you ever talked with your students directly about their cultural and linguistic identity? Please explain how you did it and what happened.
- 3) In your experience, have you noticed if your students ever think about their cultural and linguistic identity? Please explain.
- 4) Does discussing their cultural and linguistic identity make a difference in the awareness of their identity? Please explain.
- 5) Do you think that exploring your students' identity with them is a worthwhile endeavor? Please explain.

#### II. CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC IDENTITY AND LITERACY

- 6) Do you know books that explore the bicultural and bilingual identity of Latino children?
- 7) Have you ever asked your students to read books independently at home?

- 8) What cultural, linguistic topics do you explore through literature and writing assignments?

III. FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE (I will explain Moll's theory and will provide at least one example)

- 9) What would you say are the funds of knowledge that your students bring from their home cultures?
- 10) Do you use their funds of knowledge to teach them? How?
- 11) Have you ever used their funds of knowledge to increase their interest in reading? Why?

IV. CRITICAL THEORY

- 12) Do you ever discuss issues regarding the place of your students in the American society and how they can improve it?
- 13) Do you use literacy related activities to explore their place in American society, unequal distribution of power, and schools' reproduction of inequality?
- 14) Do you ever discuss how they can have more voice and change their place in the world?
- 15) How can I develop my students' voices?

V. SELF-PERCEPTION AS READERS

- 16) Do your students perceive themselves as readers?
- 17) Have you ever attempted to change the way they perceive themselves as readers? How?
- 18) Do you think your students are resistant to literacy in English?
- 18) Do you think students may be less resistant to read in Spanish? Why?

## APPENDIX H

### Focus Group Questions for Students

I will ask about eight questions to students when we meet in focus groups. The focus group questions are based on my inquiry questions. They are also based on the following theories:

Phinney (1989; 1993): *Social Identity Development Theory*

Gee (1996): *Sociolinguistic Theory*

Rosenholtz's (1984): *Reader Self-Perception Theory*

Giroux (1988; 2007) *Voice Development Theory* and *Critical Theory*

Freire & Macedo (1987): *Praxis through studying the world and the word*

Dance (2002): *"Down" Teachers for Street-Savvy Students*

Carter (2005): *Keeping It Real for Minority Students*

Bourdieu (1990): *Social and Cultural Capital Theory*

Ogbu & Simmons (1998): *Voluntary & Involuntary Minorities*

Gay (2000, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2010); Ladson-Billings (1995); Educational Research Service, (2003): *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*

- 1) Have your perceptions about the Latin culture and language changed since the beginning of the school year? How have they changed and why?
- 2) Do you think that any or some of the readings have made the students explore who they are and what/who they identify with? Can you provide some examples of the readings that have done that?
- 3) What is your level of comfort now with reading and writing in Spanish in comparison with the beginning of the school year?
- 4) Has your level of interest in reading changed since the beginning of the school year? How and why?
- 5) Has your perception of yourself as a reader changed since the beginning of the school year? Why do you think this has happened?

- 6) Did being able to choose your own books to read independently and discussing what you read at “La Tertulia” impact your interest in reading? How and why?
- 7) Did readings such as *Cuando era puertorriqueña* and *Cajas de cartón* impact your interest in reading? Were there other more memorable readings than those two this school year? How and why?
- 8) What recommendations would you give to teachers of Heritage Speakers classes to make Latin students more interested in reading and writing?

APPENDIX I

Interview for Student to Ask a Family Member or a Friend who Immigrated to USA

1) Country person emigrated from: \_\_\_\_\_

2) Years in USA: \_\_\_\_\_

3) What made you decide to come to the USA?

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4) Please describe your experience when you first came to the United States.

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5) How has your experience with the English language been? Are you bilingual?

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6) Do you miss something about your country of origin? What?

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7) Are there any cultural values from your home country that you wish you (and your children) would not lose while living in the United States?

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8) What has your experience of living in the United States been like? Have you adopted values or characteristics of the American culture? Do you consider yourself bicultural?

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9) How does your child's upbringing in this country compare to your own upbringing in your country of origin?

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10) Is there anything from your home culture (like a meaningful strength, family value or cultural value) that you wish your child's teachers understood so they could teach your child better?

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11) What do you feel your family or you are very good at? Like a special kind of intelligence, aptitude or skill?

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12) What are your proud of in the Latino culture?

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## APPENDIX J

### Questionnaire for Students about Linguistic Identity and Cultural Identity

The first part of this questionnaire will be given only once at the beginning of the semester. The second part will be given twice during the beginning and end of the semester. This questionnaire will inform me about basic aspects of my students' cultural and linguistic background. It will also inform me about the way my students identify culturally and linguistically. It will also help to determine if my students' sense of cultural and linguistic identity changes throughout the semester.

#### I. First Part

- I. I was born in \_\_\_\_\_.
- II. (Only answer this question if you were born in another country)  
  
I came to this country when I was \_\_\_\_\_ years old.
- III. My parents were born in \_\_\_\_\_.
- IV. At home my parents speak mostly in \_\_\_\_\_.
- V. My parents speak English fluently.    Yes        No
- VI. I speak with my parents in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(leave second answer blank if you speak in only one language).
- VII. I speak with my siblings mostly in \_\_\_\_\_.
- VIII. I speak with my grandparents and other members of my family in \_\_\_\_\_.
- IX. The culture of my parents and the culture of my school are: \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. Similar
  - B. Somewhat different
  - C. Very different



## II. Second Part

- I. I speak: \_\_\_\_\_
- A. English better than Spanish
  - B. Spanish better than English
  - C. Spanish and English pretty much equally well.
  - D. Other: \_\_\_\_\_.
- II. My level of comfort in speaking Spanish as compared to the beginning of the year \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. has gone down
  - B. has not changed
  - C. has increased some
  - D. has increased a lot
- III. I prefer to speak in: \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. English
  - B. Spanish
  - C. Both English and Spanish separately
  - D. Spanglish
  - E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_.
- IV. I: \_\_\_\_\_
- A. Am monocultural: The \_\_\_\_\_ culture
  - B. Am bicultural: The \_\_\_\_\_ culture and the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - C. Have a combination between my home culture and the American culture in which the \_\_\_\_\_ culture is more evident than the \_\_\_\_\_ culture.
  - D. Other: \_\_\_\_\_.
- V. My appreciation now for the positive qualities of the Hispanic culture \_\_\_\_\_ from the beginning of the school year.
- A. Has gone down
  - B. Has stayed the same
  - C. Has increased some

D. Has increased a lot

VI. I prefer to read in: \_\_\_\_\_

A. English

B. Spanish

C. Either in Spanish or English (I am equally fluent in both)

D. Spanglish

VII. My level of comfort in reading in Spanish as compared to the beginning of the year \_\_\_\_\_.

A. has gone down

B. has not changed

C. has increased some

D. has increased a lot

XIII. I prefer to write in: \_\_\_\_\_

A. English

B. Spanish

C. Either in Spanish or English (I am equally fluent in both)

D. Spanglish

IX. My level of comfort in writing in Spanish as compared to the beginning of the year \_\_\_\_\_.

A. has gone down

B. has not changed

C. has increased some

D. has increased a lot

APPENDIX K

Questionnaire for Students about their Reading Interests

I. Regarding reading, at the beginning of this school year, I had \_\_\_\_\_ interest in reading.

- A. no
- B. little
- C. some
- D. a lot of

II. Now, I have \_\_\_\_\_ interest in reading.

- A. no
- B. little
- C. some
- D. a lot of

III. If your interest in reading has not increased, select the reasons in order of importance. The most important reason starts with #1. Check all that apply.

- A. \_\_\_\_\_ The reading topics were not interesting.
- B. \_\_\_\_\_ I just don't like the practice of reading.
- C. \_\_\_\_\_ Reading is difficult for me.
- D. \_\_\_\_\_ Topics that we read about in *Cuando era puertorriqueña* and *Cajas de cartón* are not interesting to me.
- E. \_\_\_\_\_ I did not like reading books of my own choice independently at home.
- F. \_\_\_\_\_ The discussions we had during the *Tertulia* every two weeks did not really change my interest in reading.
- G. \_\_\_\_\_ Topics related to the positive aspects of Hispanic culture and language are not interesting to me.
- H. \_\_\_\_\_ Topics related to different aspects (positive and negative) related to the Hispanic culture and language are not interesting to me.
- I. \_\_\_\_\_ None of the above. State your own reason:

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IV. If your interest in reading increased, select the reasons in order of importance. The most important reason starts with #1. Check all that apply.

- A.  The majority of the reading topics were interesting to me.
- B.  Some of the reading topics were much more interesting than others.
- C.  The more exposure I had to a variety of reading materials, the more I got interested in reading.
- D.  The discussions we had during *La Tertulia* every two weeks made me more interested in reading.
- E.  I could choose my own independent (home) reading topics.
- F.  Topics related to positive aspects of the Hispanic culture and language are interesting to me
- G.  Topics related to different aspects (negative or positive) of the Hispanic culture and language are interesting to me.
- H.  Topics that we read about in *Cuando era puertorriqueña* and *Cajas de Cartón* are interesting to me.
- I.  None of the above. State your own reasons:

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V. My teacher had  impact on my interest in reading:

- A. No
- B. A little
- C. Some
- D. A lot of

Explain why:

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## APPENDIX L

### Questions about Independent Readings and Other Readings for La Tertulia

- 1) Describe the main characters, including their cultural and linguistic experiences.
- 2) What is the biggest challenge they face?
- 3) Describe what you think are the best characteristics of the main characters.
- 4) Are they influenced by other characters?
- 5) Do you think the main characters are good role models? Why?
- 6) Do they change themselves/their surroundings through the book? How?
- 7) What is the self-concept of the main characters like?
- 8) Is there a character you identify with? Why?
- 9) Is there a character who has a strong drive to get ahead?
- 10) Are there any socioeconomic issues that take place in the story? Explain.
- 11) What advice would you give to the main characters?
- 12) Please change the story. Add anything you deem interesting and/or important.
- 13) How much control do the characters have over their lives?
- 14) How do other characters perceive the main character?
- 15) Who is the character you admire the most? Please describe.
- 16) What do you like the most about this book?
- 17) What is the best description used by the author in the book?
- 18) Describe the setting of this story.
- 19) Give a descriptive summary of the plot.
- 20) What is the best story that you have read this quarter/semester/year? Explain why.

## APPENDIX M

### Student Journal Entries

- 1) Mi experiencia veraniega (7<sup>th</sup>) (My Summer Experience)
- 2) Mi cultura (My Culture)
- 3) Cuando era niño (When I Was a Child)
- 4) Yo (Me)
- 5) Diferencias y similitudes entre un personaje de mi libro y yo (Differences and similarities between a Character in My Book and Me)
- 6) De lo que estoy agradecido (What I am Grateful For)
- 7) Los conflictos de Esmeralda Santiago (The conflicts of Esmeralda Santiago)
- 8) Las experiencias de los hijos de los inmigrantes (The Experiences of the Children of Immigrants)
- 9) La experiencia escolar del inmigrante de primera y segunda generación (The School Experience of the Immigrant of First and Second Generations)
- 10) Spanglish o bilingüismo (Spanglish or Bilingualism)
- 11) El rol femenino y masculino (The Feminine and Masculine Roles)
- 12) Las etiquetas (Labels)
- 13) Mi reacción a la película “Bajo la misma luna” (My Reaction to the Movie “Under the Same Moon”)
- 14) Un viaje (A Trip)
- 15) Cómo me divertía cuando era niño (How I Used to Enjoy Myself When I Was a Child)
- 16) Mis obligaciones (My Obligations)

17) La Amistad (Friendship)

APPENDIX N

Speaking Preference

	English Only		Spanish Only		Both English & Spanish Separately		Spanglish Only		Spanglish Only + English Only		Both English & Spanish Separately + Spanglish Only	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1.5 males	2	29%	0	0%	5	71%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
1.5 females	0	0%	1	17%	2	33%	1	17%	1	17%	1	17%
Total 1.5 Students	2	15%	1	8%	7	54%	1	8%	1	8%	1	8%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. Males	6	60%	0	0%	4	40%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. Females	5	38%	0	0%	3	23%	4	31%	0	0%	1	8%
Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. students	11	48%	0	0%	7	30%	4	17%	0	0%	1	4%
Total males	8	47%	0	0%	9	53%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total females	5	26%	1	5%	5	26%	5	26%	1	5%	2	11%
Total number of students	13	36%	1	3%	14	39%	5	14%	1	3%	2	6%



APPENDIX O

Reading & Writing Preference

Reading Preference										
	English Only		Spanish Only		Both English & Spanish Separately		Spanglish Only		Spanglish & English Separately + Spanglish Only	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1.5 males	3	43%	0	0%	4	57%	0	0%	0	0%
1.5 females	2	33%	0	0%	2	33%	1	17%	1	17%
Total 1.5 students	5	38%	0	0%	6	46%	1	8%	1	8%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	8	80%	0	0%	2	20%	0	0%	0	0%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	8	62%	1	8%	3	23%	0	0%	1	8%
Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. students	16	70%	1	4%	5	22%	0	0%	1	4%
Total males	11	65%	0	0%	6	35%	0	0%	0	0%
Total females	10	53%	1	5%	5	26%	1	5%	2	11%
Total number of students	21	58%	1	3%	11	31%	1	3%	2	6%
Writing Preference										
	English Only		Spanish Only		Both English & Spanish Separately		Spanglish Only		Spanglish Only + English Only	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1.5 males	3	43%	0	0%	4	57%	0	0%	0	0%
1.5 females	4	67%	0	0%	2	33%	0	0%	0	0%
Total 1.5 Students	7	54%	0	0%	6	46%	0	0%	0	0%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. Males	6	60%	0	0%	3	30%	0	0%	1	10%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. Females	10	77%	0	0%	2	15%	0	0%	1	8%
Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. students	16	70%	0	0%	5	22%	0	0%	2	9%
Total males	9	53%	0	0%	7	41%	0	0%	1	5%
Total females	14	74%	0	0%	4	21%	0	0%	1	5%
Total number of students	23	64%	0	0%	11	31%	0	0%	2	6%

APPENDIX P

Language/s Spoken with Siblings

	English Only		Spanish Only		English & Spanish		Spanglish	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1.5 males (one student has no siblings)	5	83%	1	17%	0	0%	0	0%
1.5 females	6	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total 1.5 students	11	97%	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	5	50%	0	0%	5	50%	0	0%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	8	62%	1	8%	3	23%	1	8%
Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. students	13	57%	1	4%	8	35%	1	4%
Total males	10	63%	1	6%	5	31%	0	0%
Total females	14	74%	1	5%	3	16%	1	5%
Total number of students	24	69%	2	6%	8	23%	1	3%

APPENDIX Q

Changes in Reading Interest

	Interest stayed the same		Interest increased		Interest decreased		No answer	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1.5 male	5 (2 of the 5 had a lot of interest from the beginning)	71%	2	29%	0	0%	0	0%
1.5 female	3 (2 of the 3 had a lot of interest from the beginning)	50%	3	50%	0	0%	0	0%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. male	2	22%	6	67%	1 (some > a little)		1	11%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. female	4 (2 of the 4 had a lot of interest from the beginning)	31%	9	69%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	14 <i>6 of the 14 had a lot of interest from the beginning</i>	40% <i>22% had no interest from the beginning</i>	20	57%	1	3%	1	3%

APPENDIX R

Reasons for Increase & Lack of Increase in Reading Interest

Reasons for Increase in Reading Interest									
Reasons	1.5 gen. males	1.5 gen. females	Total 1.5 gen.	2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen.	Total # positive reasons for males	Total # positive reasons for females	Total # positive reasons
A	1 (top choice)	1	2	1	2	3	2	3	5
B	1 (top choice)	2 (both top choice)	3	3 (1 top choice)	4	7	4	6	10
C	0	2	2	2 (1 top choice)	3 (1 top choice)	5	2	5	7
D	0	1	1	1	3	4	1	4	5
E	2 (1 top choice)	3 (1 top choice)	5	5	7 (4 top choice)	12	7	10	17
F	1	2	3	1 (top choice)	4	5	2	6	8
G	1	1	2	3	2	5	4	3	7
H	0	2	2	1	2 (only Cajas de cartón)	3	1	4	5
Total # of Reasons	6	14	19	17	27	44	23	41	64
Reasons for Lack of Increase in Reading Interest									
Reasons	1.5 gen. male	1.5 gen. females	Total 1.5 gen.	2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> gen.	Total # neg. reasons for males	Total # neg. reasons for females	Total # negative reasons
A	1 (1 top choice)	2	3	3 (1 top choice)	4 (2 top choice)	7	4	6	10
B	0	1	1	2	1	3	2	2	4
C	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	2
D	4 (1 top choice)	2 (both top choice)	6	2	2	4	6	4	10
E	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
F	3	1	4	2	1	3	5	2	7
G	0	0	0	1	2	3	1	2	3
H	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total # of Reasons	8	6	14	11	12	23	19	18	37

APPENDIX S

Independent Reading Topics

Reading topics	Total Male & Female (3 x 20 Males & 3 x 20 Females)		Books Chosen by 2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation (3 x 13 Males & 3 x 14 Females)		Total Books Chosen by 1.5 Generation (3 x 7 Males & 3 x 6 Females)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Social & Home Marginalization	28	23%	23	28%	5	13%
Latino Life in the USA	12	10%	6	7%	6	15%
Immigration	12	10%	8	10%	4	10%
Adventure & Mystery	10	8%	6	7%	4	10%
Teenage Topics	9	8%	6	7%	3	8%
Philosophical	8	7%	6	7%	2	5%
Social Injustice	7	6%	4	5%	3	8%
Latin American Literature	6	5%	3	4%	3	8%
Ancestral & More Current Latino and Latin American History	6	5%	5	6%	1	3%
Self-Discovery	6	5%	5	6%	1	3%
Heterosexual Romance	6	5%	6	7%	0	0%
International Literature	5	4%	2	2%	3	8%
Sports	2	2%	1	1%	1	3%
Homosexual Romance	2	2%	0	0%	2	5%
Religion	1	1%	0	0%	1	3%
Total	120 Books		81 Books		39 Books	

APPENDIX T

Reading Topics Selected by Males & Females

Reading Topics Selected by Males						
Reading Topics	Male (3 x 20 Males)		Books Chosen by 2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation (3 x 13 Males)		Books Chosen by 1.5 Generation (3 x 7 Males)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Social & Home Marginalization	13	22%	12	31%	1	5%
Adventure & Mystery	8	13%	5	13%	3	14%
Immigration	6	10%	4	10%	2	10%
Philosophical	6	10%	4	10%	2	10%
Latin American Literature	5	8%	2	5%	3	14%
Ancestral & More Current Latino and Latin American History	4	7%	4	10%	0	0%
Social Injustice	4	7%	1	3%	3	14%
Self-Discovery	4	7%	3	8%	1	5%
Teenage Topics	3	5%	2	5%	1	5%
International Literature	3	5%	0	0%	3	14%
Latino Life in the USA	2	3%	1	3%	1	5%
Sports	2	3%	1	3%	1	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60 Books</b>		<b>39 Books</b>		<b>21 Books</b>	
Reading Topics Selected by Females						
Reading Topics	Female (3 x 20 Females)		Books Chosen by 2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation (3 x 16 Females)		Books Chosen by 1.5 Generation (3 x 7 Females)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Social & Home Marginalization	15	25%	11	26%	4	22%
Latino Life in the USA	10	17%	5	12%	5	28%
Immigration	6	10%	4	10%	2	11%
Heterosexual Romance	6	10%	6	14%	0	0%
Teenage Topics	6	10%	4	10%	2	11%
Social Injustice	3	5%	3	7%	0	0%
Self-Discovery	2	3%	2	5%	0	0%
Homosexual Romance	2	3%	0	0%	2	11%
Adventure & Mystery	2	3%	1	2%	1	6%
International Literature	2	3%	2	5%	0	0%
Ancestral & More Current Latino and Latin American History	2	3%	1	2%	1	6%
Philosophical	2	3%	2	5%	0	0%
Latin American Literature	1	2%	1	2%	0	0%
Religion	1	2%	0	0%	1	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60 Books</b>		<b>42 Books</b>		<b>18 Books</b>	<b>18 Books</b>

APPENDIX U

Comfort in Reading, Speaking & Writing in Heritage Language

Comfort in Reading in Heritage Language						
	No increase		Increased some		Increased a lot	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
1.5 males	2	29%	2	29%	3	43%
1.5 females	2	33%	2	33%	2	33%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	2	20%	5	50%	3	30%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	4	31%	6	46%	3	23%
Total males	4	24%	7	41%	6	35%
Total females	6	32%	8	42%	5	26%
Total	10	28%	15	42%	11	31%
Total increased some & increased a lot				26/36 = 72%		
Comfort in Speaking in Heritage Language						
	No increase		Increased some		Increased a lot	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
1.5 males	1	14%	4	57%	2	29%
1.5 females	0	0%	5	83%	1	17%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	0	0%	9	90%	1	10%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	0	0%	10	77%	3	23%
Total males	1	6%	13	81%	3	19%
Total females	0	0%	15	79%	4	21%
Total	1	3%	28	78%	7	19%
Total increased some & increased a lot				35/36 = 97%		
Comfort in Writing in Heritage Language						
	No increase		Increased some		Increased a lot	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
1.5 males	0	0%	4	57%	3	43%
1.5 females	1	17%	2	33%	3	50%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. males	3	30%	2	20%	5	50%
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen. females	1	8%	9	69%	3	23%
Total males	3	18%	6	35%	8	47%
Total females	2	11%	11	58%	6	32%
Total	5	14%	17	47%	14	39%
Total increased some & increased a lot				31/36 = 86%		

APPENDIX V

Relation between Reading Comfort and Reading Interest

No reading comfort and no reading interest		
Total	1.5	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation
1 male	1 male	0 male
3 females	1 female	2 females
4 students	2 students	2 students
Some reading comfort and little or some reading interest		
Total	1.5	2 <sup>nd</sup> gen
2 male	0 males	2 males
3 females	0 females	3 females
5 students	0 students	5 students
A lot of reading comfort and a lot of reading interest		
Total	1.5 generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation
0 male	0 male	0 male
1 female	0 female	1 female
1 student	0 student	1 student
No reading comfort < a little or some reading interest		
Total	1.5 generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation
2 males	0 male	2 males
2 females	1 female	1 female
4 students	1 student	3 students
Some reading comfort > no reading interest		
Total	1.5 generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation
3 males	1 male	2 male
1 female	0 female	1 female
4 students	0 students	0 students
Some reading comfort < some + reading interest		
Total	1.5 generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation
0 male	0 male	0 male
1 female	1 female	0 female
1 student	1 student	0 students
Some reading comfort < a lot of reading interest		
Total	1.5 generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation
0 male	0 male	0 male
2 females	0 female	2 females
2 students	0 students	2 students
A lot of reading comfort > no reading interest		
Total	1.5 generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation
1 male	1 male	0 male
0 female	0 female	0 female
1 student	1 student	0 students
A lot of reading comfort > a little or some reading interest		
Total	1.5 generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation
5 male	2 male	3 male
2 female	1 female	1 female
7 students	3 students	4 students



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