The experiences of language minority students in mainstream English classes in United States public high schools: a study through in-depth interviewing.

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THE EXPERIENCES OF LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS IN MAINSTREAM ENGLISH CLASSES IN UNITED STATES PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS: A STUDY THROUGH IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING

A Dissertation Presented

by

JOHN GABRIEL

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

School of Education

September 1997
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Behind and beside every doctoral student and dissertation writer, stands a small army of supporters and advisors. I am most grateful for all the support I have received.

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thought and language. He helped me deepen and refine the meaning of mentor and scholar.

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Finally, my wife, April, transcribed most of the interviews and responded insightfully to participants’ stories. She shared her own experiences as a Japanese American going to school and growing up in America. She stands strong alongside throughout.

I played two or three games less of basketball with our son, Graham. Dissertation over, though, we now play those games this summer. Graham’s and April’s love and support played a vital role in my completing the doctoral program and my dissertation. To them, I dedicate this work.
ABSTRACT

THE EXPERIENCES OF LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS IN MAINSTREAM ENGLISH CLASSES IN UNITED STATES PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS: A STUDY THROUGH IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING

SEPTEMBER 1997

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Using phenomenological interviewing as a methodology, this study reconstructs the urban high school experiences of sixteen language minority students through the participants' words. Three sixty-minute interviews were conducted with each of the participants. The study explores the social, cultural, and educational experiences of the participants before they entered high school, their experiences in ESL classrooms, the transition from ESL to the mainstream, and the mainstream English classroom.

The study finds that participants learned English in a variety of ways, both inside and outside the classroom. In both the ESL and mainstream classrooms, talking, reading, and vocabulary study were considered the most important of all literacy activities, writing less so, and grammar the least. Participants considered reading aloud as vital to their learning English and they cited the short story and the plays of Shakespeare among the most compelling literary genres. In addition to how and what they were taught,
participants wanted teachers who listened to, cared for, and respected them.

The study suggests that secondary English teachers, within a social construction of literacy perspective, need to contextualize language learning more in accord with students’ sociocultural and ethnolinguistic backgrounds and experiences. They also need to integrate an instructional skills and a whole language approach to language learning, not one or the other; to sound out, enact, and present language with a range of instructional strategies and methods; and to listen to, care for, and respect students.

Generally, teachers and administrators should communicate continually to ensure the social and academic success of this growing population.

Further, preservice and inservice English teacher education programs should make curricular changes to address the academic and affective needs of an increasing language minority student population.

Finally, future research should focus on more in-depth studies of specific cultures or ethnicities, such as the Vietnamese who come from an Eastern to a Western culture, to gain a deeper understanding of their lives and their particular needs and goals. Educational researchers need to continue to interview students to bring their voices, concerns, and knowledge into educational dialogue and debate.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation study I explored the experiences of language minority students in mainstream English classes in United States public high schools. I interviewed Spanish-speaking and Asian students, the two fastest growing populations in the nation’s schools, and one Arabic student, sixteen altogether. As a former middle and high school English teacher in Los Angeles, I had taught language minority students from all over the world. Yet I had never really got to know my students as well or as in-depth as I would have liked to. I knew them, but I did not know their individual life stories or their educational experiences prior to their coming to my mainstream English class. Knowing their stories more deeply might have informed how and what I taught them.

My Own Experiences in Los Angeles Secondary Schools

My study grew out of my experiences with language minority students - formerly enrolled in English as a Second Language classes or in bilingual classes - who then entered the mainstream English classroom. I wanted to know more about the needs and goals of these students.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore through phenomenological in-depth interviewing the experiences of limited English proficient (L.E.P.) students
or students whose first language was not English who were presently enrolled in mainstream English classes in United States' public schools. The study grew partly out of my experience as a teacher of limited English proficient students in Los Angeles junior and senior high schools. I taught at Sepulveda Junior High School from 1984-1988 and at Monroe High School from 1990-1993. When I arrived at Monroe High School in 1990, the school population of approximately 2300 students was comprised of 60% Hispanic or Spanish-speaking, 15% White, 15% Black, and 10% Asian. Of those 2300 students, about 1000 were placed in ESL classrooms. In which ESL classes they were placed - beginning, intermediate, or advanced - depended on a number of factors, including the students' age, educational background, English language proficiency, and available space in any given classroom. To my knowledge, there were few, if any, bilingual classes.

With increasing numbers of ESL students enrolling in the school, students were often moved ahead to the next class simply because there was no longer any place for them in the class where they belonged academically. As soon as feasible or possible, ESL students were promoted - pushed forward ready or not - to "regular" English classes. As an English teacher, I welcomed many former ESL students into mainstream academic English courses. In my 12th-grade English classes I had language minority students from Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Korea, Israel, Taiwan, Ghana,
Nigeria, Iran, Jordan, and many other countries. Not all classes were thus constituted, but neither was it unusual for students from all these countries, cultures, and languages, to be in the same class. Were they ready for me? Was I ready for them? What did they want or need? What could I provide? These and other questions about language minority students sowed the seeds of this present study.

I had often heard my older colleagues in the English department say, "These kids today aren’t like the kids we had years ago." That was true enough. In the 1960s, when many of my colleagues began teaching, the majority of students at Monroe were Jewish, middle to upper middle class. At that time, few minority students at all attended the high school. Now, however, the demographics and the reality had changed. Teachers realized that they could no longer teach what they used to teach - Silas Marner, perhaps - nor could they teach in the ways they used to teach. Some teachers held bravely to standards they had established for students years earlier, for they were not willing or able to change those standards for their new students. Teachers bemoaned the numbers of failing students. But who was failing? Teachers or students? Schools? School policy? It was not easy - or productive - to try to finger a single culprit. I began to see the complexity and scope of the issues of educating language minority youth.
I learned, for instance, that Jorge had only completed third grade in El Salvador before he came to the United States. And when he came here he was shuttled from one ESL class to another in four different schools, then finally mainstreamed into regular English class - mine - as a 10th grader. I found out about Jorge by talking with him and asking him to write about his previous educational experiences. I began to see the possible connections between prior educational experiences and first language literacy and how that influenced his learning English (see Cummins, 1989; Minami & Ovando, 1995).

The Experiences of Language Minority Students in Mainstream English Classrooms

Using phenomenological interviewing as a research methodology for this study, I asked language minority students to reconstruct and make meaning of their experiences in mainstream English classes. I conducted three (approximately) sixty-minute interviews with each of sixteen students who had been enrolled in mainstream English classes for seven years or less.

Little qualitative research has been done from language minority students' perspectives about their experiences in mainstream English classes. No discussion of schools, teaching, and learning is complete without including those most affected by educational policy and pedagogy - the students themselves. My interview study fills in a research gap, and brings language minority
students' stories, the meaning they make of their stories, and my analysis and interpretation of those stories, into the larger discussion of educational theory, practice, and reform.

In Chapter 1, I provide a brief history of immigration to the United States and discuss some of the issues related to the "education of the immigrant." I also define some terms related to language minority students. In Chapter 2, I review research relevant to language minority students' experiences in public schools and to their learning of English. I specifically examine literature which uses interviewing as a research methodology. I quote verbatim and at some length three passages which pertain to federal laws and court rulings, so that the reader may see the letter, if not the spirit, of those laws and rulings. In Chapter 3, I discuss phenomenological in-depth interviewing as qualitative research and explain why I chose this methodology for my study. In Chapters 4 - 7, I present, analyze, and interpret the data from all the interviews, and, in Chapter 8, I present my overall findings, recommendations, and conclusions. I begin first with a brief historical overview of immigration to the United States from the nation's beginnings to the start of the twentieth century.
Immigration to the United States, From Colonial Days to the Turn of the Twentieth Century

The United States historically is an immigrant nation. With the writing and signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, a "new nation" was founded, "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." At that time - as now - English was the dominant language of those who governed, themselves primarily of English origin although, they represented only about 60% of the total population. The other 40% were Germans, French, Scots, Scotch-Irish, Dutch, Swedes, Welsh, and Spaniards, not to mention Native American Indians and Africans, all of whom spoke languages other than English as their first language (Crawford, 1989). Those committed to the principles on which the nation was founded, a commitment to democratic ideals, left their countries to become part of the United States.

The traditional markers of nationality - language, customs, religion, and blood - were seen as outmoded, inconsistent with the universalism of the American experiment. Ethnic exclusiveness would have deflated Jefferson's grandiose conception of a government in harmony "with the rights of mankind." (Crawford, 1989, p. 28).

Immigrants came to the United States by the millions (see Appendix A, "Immigration to the United States by Decade: 1821-30 through 1981-90"). Most people who immigrated to this country settled here of their own free will. Some, including the Louisiana French and the Southwest Mexicans, became United States residents by
virtue of the United States' annexation of those territories where the French and Mexicans already lived. The Louisiana Purchase (1803) and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848) which ended the Mexican-American War effectively changed the national identity of those two groups of people, respectively from French and Mexican to American.¹ Also, most Africans were brought here against their will, and the Native Americans were already here. To the new nation these peoples, immigrant, enslaved, and indigenous, all brought their unique customs, cultures, and languages (Cordasco, 1976; Crawford, 1989).

From 1607 to 1819, the majority of immigrants who came to the United States came from Northern and Western Europe. A small minority came from other parts of Europe, and approximately 300,000 Africans were brought here, mostly as slaves. In the year 1664, when Peter Stuyvesant surrendered New Netherlands to the British, Manhattan Island "was already home to a cacophony of nationalities - including Portuguese Jews, Spaniards, Germans, Scandinavians, Finns, Bohemians, Poles, Italians, and Africans (both free citizens and slaves) - who jostled, courted, and swindled each other in eighteen different languages, not counting those of nearby Indians" (Crawford, 1989, p. 34).

From the years 1819 to 1882, a period often referred to as the "old migration," about 10 million immigrants arrived, again mainly from Northern and Western Europe -
Germany, Britain, Ireland, and Scandinavia. They were predominantly English speaking and ethnically similar to those who already lived in the United States (Cordasco, 1976; NCAS Research and Policy Report, 1988). Those immigrants whose first language was not English, the Germans for example, were able to maintain their language and culture successfully for years, through bilingual programs sponsored by their churches. As early as 1775 the Lutherans had established more than 100 schools for the religious education of their children. In 1834 "a free school law was passed in Pennsylvania allowing instruction in German for students who were not native speakers of English" (Salazar, 1993, p. 4). With the advent of World War I in 1914, however, it became unpopular, un-American, and, in some states such as Ohio, illegal to speak German on the streets (Cremin, 1988).

From 1882-1921, during the so-called "new migration" (Cordasco, 1976), the number of immigrants rose steadily and reached its height, as an estimated 23.5 million immigrants entered the United States. Among those who came were the Japanese, roughly 200,000 Chinese, and immigrants from Central and Southern Europe, predominantly people from Italy, Hungary, Poland, and Russia. Most of them spoke no English and were both poor and Catholic (Muller & Espenshade, 1985; NCAS, 1988).

All told, immigrants from more than 40 nations entered the country during the "new migration," and while they
still came from Northern and Central Europe and the British Isles, increasingly those who came did not speak English. The immigrants brought with them more than twenty European and Asian languages to add to the forty-five Native-American dialects spoken during this time. Bilingual education began to diminish at the time the numbers of those whose first language was not English was increasing dramatically (Salazar, 1993). The nationalistic mood of the country during the First World War spurred efforts not only to decrease bilingual education programs in schools and churches but also prompted a movement to "Americanize the foreigner" (see Cremin, 1988; and also Neumann, 1918). Teaching English to immigrants who did not speak English as their first language became a major goal of Americanization.

**Immigrants in the Schools**

Schools at the turn of the twentieth century faced innumerable problems in trying to educate the immigrants, not the least of which was their sheer numbers. They entered the country at a time when the "common school" of the late nineteenth century had come into its own, though it would soon be transformed into the junior and senior high schools of the twentieth century. The population of the cities, where the majority of immigrants lived, exploded. Schools could not accommodate all those who sought to enroll. Conservative estimates showed that in
1890 New York City lacked the accommodations necessary for some 10,000 school age children (Cordasco, 1976).

Educators and the schools struggled to accommodate the huge numbers of entering students. Increasingly aware of the extraordinary range of students and student abilities, educators created different classes for different students. In New York City, for example, District Superintendent Julia Richman got permission from the Board of Superintendents to create special classes for children with a simplified and individualized course of study. By the end of the 1904-05 school year there were more than 250 such special classes in New York City, mainly for non-English speaking children (Cordasco, 1976). The formation of these special classes led a few years later to three different categories of placement: Grade C, for foreign-born children who did not speak English; Grade D, for those pupils approaching age 14 who could not finish elementary school and wished to obtain work certificates; and Grade E for those who hoped to graduate but needed special help to enter the 7th grade (New York City Department of Education, 1905-06).

**Illiteracy Among Immigrants and Native-Born Americans**

In New York City in 1910, there were roughly 422,000 persons 10 years of age or older who could not speak English and nearly 250,000 who were illiterate (Wheaton, 1915). Of those who were illiterate, that is, those unable
to read or write in any language, 0.3% were native white, 6.7% foreign-born white, and 3.6% African American (United States Bureau of Education, 1913). Approximately 17% of the total school enrollment was foreign-born, or nearly 120,000 out of a total school population of more than 700,000 (Cordasco, 1976).

In the cities generally, illiteracy was about half of what it was in rural areas. The percent of illiteracy among foreign-born Whites in the cities was roughly ten times greater among native-born whites, though African American illiteracy was higher than that of both native and foreign-born whites. New York City was the exception, however, as foreign-born illiteracy was nearly double that of African American. As the cities were the immigrants’ gateways into United States society, the high illiteracy rates among immigrant populations in the cities should come as no surprise.

Nationally, according to the 1910 Federal Census, more than 5.5 million persons 10 years of age and older could not read and write, about 7.7% of the total population. The greatest percentage of illiteracy was in the population over 20 years old. Of the roughly 5.5 million illiterates, only 818,550 were between the ages of 10-20. Of these, roughly 28% were native-born White, 30% foreign-born white, and 40% African American. The remaining 2% were Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and others (United States Bureau of Education, 1913).
While the figures for illiteracy do not necessarily represent all those whose first language was not English, they provide an approximate idea of the numbers of children of school age who entered the schools unable to read or write in any language. In any event, there was an increase "in every part of the country" of immigrants who could not speak English. One in eight was unable to write in any language; one in four was unable to speak English (Thompson, 1920, p. 34). Schools were confronted not only with immigrant students who spoke little or no English, but also with considerable numbers of foreign-born and native-born Whites and especially African Americans who could not read or write in any language.

Methods of Teaching English to the Immigrants

At the turn of the twentieth century, students whose first language was not English were taught English through a variety of methods. The effective English teacher of the foreign student, theoretically at least, designed activities related to the students' worlds and their experiences. She (for much more often than not, the teacher was female) used pictures or concrete objects so that the children could connect the word with the object it represented. By involving them in activities such as pantomime or dramatization, she got students out of their chairs to enact stories or scenes. She used the direct method of teaching English, in which students were
instructed to think in English, so that the English word summoned the concept without the intermediate link of the foreign word (Goldberger, 1920; Neal, 1929).

Conversation played a significant role in English instruction, especially when students were just beginning to learn the language. It was important for the child to hear how English sounded naturally. Words that related directly to the students' experiences, "usable English" in Goldberger's (1920) phrase, were much more important to students when they first began to learn English than the language of Wordsworth or Wharton. And while oral language was most important, reading and writing were integrated to allow for multiple and reinforcing associations. Vocabulary was also considered important, but in the context of the sentence or paragraph or story, the meaning of words and sentences was derived from the greater, more expanded context (Reynolds, 1933; Thompson, 1920).

**Americanization of the Immigrants**

James Hosic (1917), one of the founders of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), realized that little had been done to teach English to foreign-born students. This concerned him. He saw the study or the learning of English as tied to Americanization. In 1917, NCTE, barely five years old, passed an official resolution urging educators across the country to strengthen their efforts to teach English to foreigners. In spite of the
resolution, NCTE did little about teaching English to non-
English speakers until about 1960 (Hook, 1979). The
"Americanization" of the student was a major educational
goal at the beginning of the century. Immigrants were
expected to leave their language, culture, and values
behind when they entered the schools (Cremin, 1988; Greer,
1972). A few educators such as Neumann (1918) advocated
cultural pluralism, with the express purpose of encouraging
foreign or immigrant students to retain their language and
culture. But Neumann’s was a minority voice for the
minorities.

Mexican Immigration to and their Segregation in the United
States in the Early Part of the Twentieth Century

Mexican immigration to the United States increased
rapidly from the early 1900s to about 1920, due mainly to
the Mexican Revolution(s) of 1910 and 1916, as well as to
typhus and cholera epidemics which swept through the
northern part of the country. Many who fled the Revolution
had money, but the majority who left the country were, like
their Italian contadini counterparts, poor farmers and
laborers. As a result of the immigrations, California’s
Mexican population tripled in the 1920s, and it became
increasingly common to segregate Mexicans in most public
facilities - restaurants, swimming pools, theaters, and
schools. Often the schools they attended were the most run
down, worst equipped, least funded of all the public
schools. In the late 1920s there were about 60 schools in
eight different Southern California counties that had 90 to 100 percent Mexican enrollments (Menchaca & Valencia, 1990).

There are contrasting points of view about such segregation. Gonzalez (1974) has argued that segregation reinforced the status quo and cut off possibilities for social change. Also, if the Mexicans became too literate, they might not want to labor in those jobs that the majority culture refused to do. An opposing view was that segregation actually served the Mexicans well because they did not face the discrimination that they otherwise would have if they attended predominantly white middle class schools. In the non-segregated schools, the Mexicans were often at a disadvantage, arriving at school with little or no English, and hence doing poorly until they learned English. Too often, however, they became discouraged, fell behind, and eventually left school (Bogardus, 1930-31).

Another view of segregation was highlighted in a court case in California. Prompted by Mexican parents' protests over their children being ordered to attend segregated schools, the judge in the case ruled in favor of the parents. He stated that the proposed segregation was against California law and that it further deprived the Mexican children of the presence of native English speakers so necessary for them to learn English (Reynolds, 1933). One of the ironies of segregation was that while educators believed that learning English was critical to
Americanizing the immigrant, their segregating non-English speakers from native English speakers, a prime source for learning English, effectively cut off one of the most important lines to Americanization.

Immigration to the United States from the 1920s to the Present: Increasing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

With the immigration restriction laws of the 1920s, immigration from the 1920s to the 1940s ebbed considerably, especially from the heights at the beginning of the century. During World War II, immigration fell to its lowest point since the early 1800s (NCAS, 1988). It was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s, that immigration began to rise again.

The "third great migration" (NCAS, 1988) began in the late 1960s and continues to the present day.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 represented a marked shift of [United States government] policy. It did away with the national origins system, replacing it with selection criteria focusing on family reunification and desired occupational skills. The nation regained its conscience as immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere were for the first time allowed to enter the United States without regard to national or racial origin (Stewart, 1993, p. 6).

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, "... very much a legacy of the Kennedy Administration" (Rockett, 1983, p. 14), established preference categories which emphasized family reunification and occupational need rather than ethnicity (Rockett, 1983). The first, second,
fourth, and fifth preferences, comprising 74% of the total immigration quota, related to family reunification. The third and fifth preferences, comprising 20% of the total immigration, related respectively to "professionals or persons of exceptional ability in the sciences and the arts," and "skilled and unskilled workers in short supply." The remaining 6% of the immigrant population related to "conditional entrants" (United States Department of Justice, 1991).

The Act allowed for more immigrants to enter the United States from such regions as Southeast Asia, Central America, and the Middle East, those regions of the world where the United States had vested military, economic, or political ties. At the same time, Western European immigration declined significantly, falling from roughly 42% of the total immigration in 1964 to 12% in 1978 (see Appendix B, "Immigrants Admitted by Country of Birth"). With relatively stable economies and societies, those who lived in Western European nations were less inclined to leave their countries in the 1960s, a much different situation than a century earlier, when they left their countries in droves to pursue greater economic and social prosperity in the United States.

Languages of Recent Immigrants

Before the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, most immigrants came from Western European countries. The
languages immigrants brought with them shared a common heritage of Latin roots and the Roman alphabet (NCAS, 1988). Notable exceptions were the Chinese and the Japanese. The majority of Japanese, however, had studied English in middle and high schools in Japan before coming to the United States and were among the most literate in their own language of all those who came here at the turn of the twentieth century (see Gabriel, 1995).

The languages of many immigrants who came to the United States in the years following the Act of 1965 have little relation to English. For example, Cambodian, Laotian, and Thai writing systems do not use the Roman alphabet. Creole-speaking Haitians have only had a written language for roughly sixty years and the Hmong people from Laos have only had a written language in the past 40 years (NCAS, 1988). In addition, those from Middle Eastern countries, such as Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, speak and write in Arabic, another non-Roman language, which is written and read from right to left, unlike most other languages which are read from left to right. The number of languages now spoken in the United States has proliferated from the more than twenty European and Asian languages in the 1920s to over 100 languages in the 1990s (Salazar, 1993). Students in Los Angeles schools, for example, speak and write in over 80 different languages.

Even as the customs, cultures, and languages represented in the most recent immigrations have changed
from primarily European to Korean, Nicaraguan, Iranian, or Filipino, the historical legacy of immigration to the United States continues, and with those who come here, a commitment to democratic ideals as expressed by the nation's founders 220 years ago.

Changes in Immigrant or Language Minority Student Education in the Twentieth Century

With regard to immigrants in the public schools, fundamentally not a great deal has changed over the course of the twentieth century. Methods of teaching English, for instance, have not changed much, though the terms used to describe those methods differ. Krashen's (1983) notion of "comprehensible input" reflects the earlier concern with using pictures and objects to show students concretely whatever it was to which a word referred. Cummin's (1989) idea of "communication," language that students can readily use and understand, everyday English as it were rather than literary English, has its counterpart in Goldberger's (1920) idea of "usable English." Pierce (1994) recognizes the importance of a second language speaker's need to be "invested" in the language she uses; her predecessors, Thompson (1920) and Neal (1929), also saw the importance of relating language to the child's interests and experiences. Graman (1988) points to the value of conversation among students as an integral part of second-language learning, a technique he shares with many of his counterparts at the
beginning of the century (Barrows, 1922; Kellor, 1914; Wade, 1903).

Though language minority students still face discrimination today (Cummins, 1989; Nieto, 1994), there is less overt discrimination now than there was in earlier years. The Japanese and the Mexicans, for example, once faced aggressive or hostile discrimination in the public schools (Bogardus, 1930-31; Gonzalez, 1974; Kennan, 1907) and were often segregated from the majority culture as I mentioned earlier. Also, the terms used to describe students who do not speak English as their first language have changed from alien, foreigner, or immigrant, to language minority, second language learner, or English limited proficient.

A more substantive change occurred in 1974 when the Supreme Court in Lau vs. Nichols...

... held that [the San Francisco] school system’s failure to provide English instruction denied meaningful opportunity [to approximately 1800 Chinese students] to participate in public educational programs in violation of Civil Rights Act of 1964.... The petitioners do not contend, however, that the respondents have affirmatively or intentionally contributed to this inadequacy, but only that they have failed to act in the face of changing social and linguistic patterns (Supreme Court Reporter, pp. 786, 790. Emphasis added).

For Chief Justice Berger and Justice Blackmun, the numbers (approximately 1,800) of students denied the opportunity to participate in public education influenced their decision. The ruling might not have been as conclusive, in terms of federally funded schools providing
special instruction to language minority students, if there had only been a few students. As it was, the ruling spurred a movement towards bilingual education, as controversial and political an issue in education as it had been long before the Supreme Court decision (see Crawford, 1989; Stewart, 1993, Chapters 13-15). It was not that bilingual education was a new phenomenon, for it had been around for several hundred years, at least in private schools and in church-sponsored programs (Salazar, 1993). The Supreme Court decision did not mandate bilingual education, but it lent credence and mandated federal dollars to schools that provided bilingual education to their language minority students.

Finally, due to increased educational research, a rich and informative knowledge base in second language learning and child development has grown enormously in the last thirty years. Current educators have insights about second language learning not available to educators at the beginning of the century (Minami & Ovando, 1995; Stanford Working Group, 1993). And though the terms used to describe such a growing body of knowledge have changed, some of the issues and teaching methods are remarkably similar to the issues and teaching methods at the beginning of the twentieth century.
Definition of Terms and Concepts

In the closing paragraphs of this chapter, I will discuss the issues and implications of the presence of immigrant or language minority students in schools today. Before that discussion, however, I want to define some terms and concepts related to language minority students. In any discussion of "minority" students, many terms and acronyms might need to be clarified, or for my purposes, defined in the context of this study.

First of all, some of the terms and their definitions are problematic to say the least, for example, the acronym LEP, which stands for Limited English Proficient. Moran and Hakuta (1995, p. 445) note the controversy over the use of the term LEP, "for both its deficiency orientation and the unfortunate auditory association with leper." They suggest placing periods in between the letters to encourage readers to "read the letters independently." While I agree, I acknowledge the usefulness of the term in helping to locate information about those peoples to whom it refers.

The term LEP - and others - are the main connections to indexes and data bases of limited English proficient (LEP), language minority (LM), ESL, second language learners, and other terms used this study. In short, the terms have a history in educational research not easily changed. And finally, adding to some of the problems with
the terms there is not even complete agreement on how to define some of them (Stanford Working Group, 1993).

Some of the terms are used interchangeably in different contexts. LEP, ESL, and second language learners, all fall under the broader category of language minority (LM) (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990). Language minority students live in a home where they do not speak the majority’s language (Fitzgerald, 1995). For the purpose of this study, the majority may be defined or categorized as those who speak English as their first language, and the minority as those whose first language is not English.

Clearly, there are broader ways to define majority and minority to include ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural differences. Indeed, students whose first language is not English are often ethnically, socio-economically, and culturally different from native English speakers who are primarily white and middle class.

The terms "Limited English Speaking" (LES) and "Non English Speaking" (NES) were derived from the 1968 federal Bilingual Education Act, known later in 1973 as the Comprehensive Bilingual Education Amendment Act, and re-written once again in 1988 as the Bilingual Education Act. Essentially, the Act provided federal financial assistance to those educational programs involved in the teaching of students who came from environments where English was not the dominant language. In the 1978 amendments to the 1968 Act, the concept of LES was changed so that instead of just
including speaking as part of its definition, it was broadened to include reading and writing. Therefore, as a result of the 1978 amendments, for students to be considered proficient in English they had to be able to speak, read, write, and understand English. Limited English Speaking (LES) and Non English Speaking (NES) thus became Limited English Proficient (LEP) and Non English Proficient (NEP) (Crawford, 1989; Giacchino-Baker, 1992; Macias, 1993; Salazar, 1993).

Defined by the federal government (Public Law 100-297, 1988, p. 276), Limited English Proficient refers to

A) individuals who were not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; B) individuals who come from environments where a language other than English is dominant; and C) individuals who are American Indian and Alaska Natives and who come from environments where a language other than English has had a significant impact on their level of English language proficiency.

Finally, ESL describes students whose first language is not English who are studying English as a second (third or fourth) language. Bilingual students, who study both English and their own native language, may be enrolled in one of several different kinds of bilingual programs. What kinds of bilingual programs a school or school district offers depends on how many bilingual students the school has, the kind and number of languages students speak, available money and personnel to teach the students, and school policy towards bilingual education (See Nieto, 1992,
and Stewart, 1993 for comprehensive descriptions of several kinds of bilingual education programs).

**Issues and Questions About Current Immigrant and Language Minority Students’ Education**

By the year 2000, roughly 40% of the total school-age population will differ ethnically, linguistically, and socio-economically from the European American or Anglo American middle class majority (Colville-Hall, Macdonald & Smolen, 1995).² The Asian and Hispanic populations are expected to triple by the year 2040 (Stanford Working Group, 1993). Presently there are approximately 2.3 million students enrolled in the schools identified as "limited English proficient" (LEP) (United States Department of Education, 1992). The Stanford Working Group (1993) places the number much higher at 3.3 million limited English proficient students between the ages of 5-17. In 25 of the nation’s largest school districts the LEP population is already the majority (Banks, 1993).

What effects will the increased language minority population have on the teachers, administrators, and school systems which serve them? How will educators reform curricula to accommodate the changing student population? These are not new questions to educators. As we have seen, the 1980s or the 1990s were not the first decades in which the nation and its schools faced the challenges or the changes affected by immigration.
What are some of the issues for language minority students in the 1990s? What does it mean to be a limited English proficient student in a secondary English classroom? How may language minority students increase our understanding of the complex issues of teaching English in mainstream English classrooms to those whose native language is not English? The following study will try to provide answers to these questions.

Just for a moment, however, imagine what it is like to learn English for those whose language systems are so different! To get a glimpse of how that must feel to an immigrant to the United States and to the English language, Feuerverger (1994) suggested that the native English speaker and writer go to a bookstore where nothing but Chinese or Japanese books were sold. How much would we understand of their language, hieroglyphic looking to those unfamiliar with it? What would that experience be like? What is it like for our Chinese or Japanese or other Asian speaking students, then, as they enter a new culture, language, and society? In this study I explore these and other related questions.

End Notes

1. In her 1992 book, Nieto distinguishes between North, Central, and South American, an important distinction. In the context of this study, I use America or American to signify the United States or those who live in the United States.

2. All people have an ethnicity (Nieto, 1992), and describing the majority population in the United States as Euro or
Anglo American acknowledges their ethnicity and identifies their nations(s) of origin. In other places in the text I use the more generic term "white" synonymously in referring to Euro or Anglo American. The use of all the labels and the terms in this study is problematic at best, and I certainly respect other views or definitions of particular terms.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RESEARCH RELEVANT TO THE EXPERIENCES OF LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS AND IN ENGLISH CLASSES

Introduction

In the review of research for this chapter, generally I have sought studies where students were interviewed as part of the research methodology. I approached the review this way since, as mentioned at the end of Chapter 1, I interviewed students for my own study. Not every study I reviewed, of course, was an interview study, and in one section of this chapter I will provide a brief review of quantitative studies. Essentially, the approach to the review was two-pronged, focusing on both the topic of language minority experiences in secondary schools and in English classrooms and interviewing as a research methodology.

School Culture as Context: Students' Experiences in Schools

Because language learning takes place in such varied and variable contexts, I first wanted to explore the experiences of students in the schools generally to see what influence the broader school culture might have on their experiences in the English classroom. Schools, for example, that hold high expectations of their language minority students, support their second languages and cultures, promote self-esteem, provide in-service teacher
training related to language minority students, have strong counseling support services, involve parents in decision-making, better enable students to succeed socially and academically (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990).

On the other hand, schools that relegate language minority students to an inferior place within the school's hierarchy, make them feel invisible or not wanted, or show little respect for students' language and culture, end up building barriers instead of bridges, alienating the students, and contributing to their failure. Students either drop out actually, or if they remain in school, find ways to "drop out" while still enrolled (Zanger, 1994). Clearly, having a school policy that actively promotes language minority students' success does not guarantee that every teacher or administrator will comply with such a policy. Individual beliefs and prejudices will surely arise.

Nevertheless, talking to students about the ethos or culture of the school they attend provides a backdrop for asking them about their experiences in the English classroom. Feuerverger (1994) discovered just how much teachers cared about their students, while Zanger (1994) found out in interviews that students felt that they were not good enough. She noted further how students' feelings about school in general influenced their performance in the English classroom. How then can we listen to students' experiences, listen to the meaning students' make of those
experiences, and incorporate their ideas and insights about teaching and learning into practice?

When provided with the opportunity to speak for themselves, or to become co-researchers (Oldfather, 1993), what have ethnolinguistically diverse students said about their experiences as students and learners of English, as they interact in American schools and society? Bode (1989) interviewed immigrant teens about their experiences in coming to the United States and becoming part of American culture and society. Although school experiences were not the central focus of Bode’s interviews - she asked immigrants generally what their lives were like since coming to the United States - most of her participants had something to say about the schools they attended. Each of the immigrants had a special story to tell. For Tito, a Mexican, "Where I go now, I think it’s a good school, even though it has a bad reputation. What I like is that the teachers don’t care what our culture is. They help us all" (Bode, 1989, p. 69). For Sook, a Korean, "I want to live here and I want to speak this language. I like English. It sounds soft and romantic" (p. 81).

Others have interviewed students to see what characterized their experiences in schools, if not specifically in classrooms. Nieto’s (1994) interviews portrayed students who were successful in school in spite of the obstacles - or discrimination - they faced. Zanger (1994) interviewed students who talked about why they
failed or at the least why they felt alienated from school. Donaldson (1994) interviewed ethnolinguistically diverse students about their thoughts on racism in the schools, finding that racism negatively affected their performance in the schools, causing students to give up, to drop out. Similarly, Semons (1991) talked to students about their views of their school’s attempts to desegregate classrooms - most did not think it was effective or necessary - but this study provided a look at the school’s social context of learning.

Having discussed the importance of the school as the social context for what goes on in the classroom, and looked briefly at related studies, I will turn my attention now to research studies on language minority students, particularly their experiences in mainstream English or language arts classrooms. To my knowledge, not many studies - quantitative or qualitative - have been done related to the language minority or LEP student (once again, I use the terms synonymously). While there are related articles and books, few studies exist about the experiences of LEP students in mainstream English classes.

Quantitative Studies on Limited 
English Proficient Students

Recent quantitative studies have focused on such topics as the preparation of mainstream teachers of L.E.P. students (Mantle-Bromley, 1995); an evaluation of an entire bilingual program in Camden, New Jersey (Green-Brown,
1995); the effects of year round education on L.E.P. high school students (Miranda, 1993); factors which impeded Hispanic students from entering mainstream classes - interviews were used as part of the methodology here - (Montoya, 1995); and how teacher perceptions of instructional needs of L.E.P. students affected their instructional practices (Marsnik, 1993). While these studies were about language minority students, the students themselves were not involved as integrally in the research process as they were, for example, in the study reported by Oldfather (1993). In that study students served as co-researchers with their teacher and the researcher.

What Research Has Been Done in Bilingual Education?

Bilingual education is a politically charged issue (see Stewart, 1993, Chapter 13). My purpose here is not to engage in the debate over whether it "works" or not. Though my own bias may be reflected in the following cited research, I looked once again for studies where students were involved in the research, especially if they were interviewed as part of the research methodology. It is more important to me to look at studies about language minority students' experiences in schools and in learning English - the focus of my own study - than it is to debate the complex issues of bilingual education.

In any case, issues of bilingual education are inextricably linked to language minority education.
According to some research, for example, a bilingual program which promotes first language literacy increases the student's ability to learn English (California Department of Education, 1990; Cummins, 1989; Giacchino-Baker, 1992). Language minority students placed in ESL classes (as my former student Jorge was) instead of in bilingual classes are usually not instructed in their native language. Learning English is emphasized in ESL classes rather than increasing native language proficiency. Hence, students' literacy skills in their native language are never fully - or highly - developed. As Cummins (1989) has noted, if language minority students do not have the opportunity to continue to develop native language literacy skills, they will be unable to transfer the "cognitive proficiency" of the first language to develop a set of strategies for learning English. If they are not enrolled in bilingual classes, they will have to rely on the English language to learn the content of their other academic courses. Essentially, if students with poor literacy skills in their native language are enrolled in ESL classes instead of bilingual classes, they will struggle to achieve literacy in either language.

Feuerverger's (1994) study, which included interviews with students, teachers, parents, and administrators in a "methodology of collaboration," portrayed the positive effects of promoting students' first language literacy beginning in the primary and elementary grades - and
continuing throughout the students’ (academic) lives. Thus, current research findings suggest that the better students know their first language the better able they will be to acquire the second language (California State Department of Education, 1990; Hakuta & Moran, 1995).

Feuerverger researched one school district in Toronto, Canada, which had designed a program to include the languages and cultures of the district’s immigrant population. The school library provided bilingual books, and all the languages that students spoke were represented in the school library’s book collection, including Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese, Romanian, Farsi, Arabic, Tagalog, Spanish, and many more. Of the many languages represented in the school, none predominated.

In her study, Feuerverger (1994) stated, "Cultural pluralism is the very essence of Canadian education" (p. 125). Were her remarks her personal belief, or was she speaking assuredly for all Canadian education? In the United States, there is much current interest in, if not whole-hearted enthusiasm for, "English Only." In some cities, such as Lowell, Massachusetts (see Crawford, 1989, Chapter 5), and states such as California, one of the states with the highest language minority population, educators and policy makers cannot say with much assurance that cultural pluralism is the essence of United States’ education. Even though the ethnolinguistic population has
changed continually throughout United States history, schools have historically perpetuated the social, political, and economic standing of the dominant white middle class majority (Gonzalez, 1974; Greer, 1974; Soto, 1992). Is this true currently, or are there real changes towards cultural and linguistic pluralism in the schools and in the nation? Interviewing students, as I have done in this study, may shed some light on these and other related questions.

Research on Language Minority Students in ESL and "Post-ESL" Classes

If language minority students are not enrolled in a bilingual program, they may be enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program. In ESL programs, English is the primary language of instruction. As I mentioned previously, Jorge, one of my former students, was enrolled in an ESL class before he entered a mainstream English class.

In her study of ESL and post-ESL students (students like Jorge, actually, who were "graduated" into mainstream English classes), Giacchino-Baker (1992) researched Mexicans and Mexican-Americans enrolled in an English only high school in California. She interviewed students about their experiences in their English classes, using a semi-structured interview process which included five major questions, including, "How would you describe your past and present English classes?" And "What can you and your
teachers do to help you learn English?" Among her findings, she noted that the basis for students' language problems was the lack of opportunities to use social and academic English both in and out of the classroom. It is important to note here that second language learners can learn conversational English in roughly two years, but it takes them from 5-7 years to learn academic English to a point where they can begin to compare with native English speakers (Cummins, 1989). I will return to this point later on in Chapter 3 when I discuss participant selection in the proposed research methodology for this study.

Giacchino-Baker (1992) also remarked in her study that little research has been done which focuses on the experiences of language minority students. She mentioned a telephone call she had with a researcher (see Olsen, 1988) during which Olsen told her that she had interviewed 360 immigrant students using structured in-depth interviews. Unfortunately, however, nothing had been published from those interviews, other than a few "enlightening quotations" that appear in Crossing the Schoolhouse Border. What insights about language minority students may have been lost with those audio tapes no longer intact?

Research on Whole Language Instruction in the Education of Language Minority Students

Earlier I spoke about the concept of whole language in English language instruction, a concept which we can trace back to some turn of the century literature (see for
example, Thompson, 1920, for his description of language in context). Based on a growing body of research, our current understanding of whole language instruction suggests that

The whole in whole language has multiple meanings: it refers to the notion that reading is learned as a whole process (as opposed to bits and pieces of language), that one must make whole meanings from whole or complete texts, that one must treat the language arts as a whole, with children reading their own writing as well as texts, with writing being generated in response to reading, with oral language instruction underlying integrated work in reading and writing... (Tchudi & Tchudi, 1991, p. 70)

Proponents of whole language instruction often advocate for choice about what students read and write. Further, they argue that the best way to learn the language is to use it in "real" situations. In her description of immigrant women learning how to communicate when they went grocery shopping, Pierce (1994) referred to this as being "invested" in the use of the language. Whole language instruction emphasizes communication rather than mastery of a set of skills (Tchudi & Tchudi, 1991).

Some researchers think that whole language instruction for language minority students shows much promise, while others are not quite so convinced. In her study of Laotian middle and high school students from the same family, Fu (1995) argues strongly for a whole language approach in the English classroom, particularly for language minority students. Reyes (1992), however, challenges the idea of the "one size fits all" approach to teaching an ethnolinguistically diverse population. She feels that the
whole language or process approach was ethnocentric, designed as a model for mainstream students. She reminds educators of each student’s individuality, especially those who are ethnolinguistically different from the majority culture.

Learning another language is an individual experience or achievement with any number of variables, such as first language literacy, intelligence, and motivation (Gardner, 1993). Learning a language also occurs within a social, political, and often an educational context (Cummins, 1989; Gardner, 1993; Nieto, 1992; Zanger, 1994). Reyes’s cautionary note - that maybe one size does not fit all - provides a further rationale for this study in which I interviewed language minority students themselves to see what their views were on learning English as their second (third or fourth) language.

**Students Talk about their Experiences in Mainstream Whole Language Instruction English Classes**

Recent studies by Fu (1995) and Cleary (1991) have focused on language minority students’ experiences learning English in mainstream English classes. Fu (1995) has interviewed four Laotian students, all from the same family, ages 14, 16, 17, and 19. The three eldest attended high school, the youngest was still in middle school. It may as well have been called muddle school for all that the youngest was able to learn. All of them, according to Vu, were at "the edge of the new culture." They had tremendous

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difficulties in learning English. Those who were most successful were enrolled in a classroom where a whole language approach to second language learning was used.

Students in these whole language classes were encouraged, for example, to sketch or draw their experiences. The drawings would then become the "text" or the context from which the students could talk about their experiences. Most of the experiences related to their growing up in Laos, escaping to the refugee camps in Thailand, and after sometimes years of tribulations, finally arriving in the United States.

Fu interviews the students and was also a participant observer in her study. In fact, she became very close to members of the family, often tutoring them and going out to social events with them. Among other things, she learned that if the students were invested, to use Pierce's (1994) phrase, their learning of English would increase dramatically. Students, she discovered, had to have a vested interest in what they were studying, or else little or no learning occurred. She observed students in the classroom, talked with them about their experiences with reading, writing, speaking and listening to the English language. She sought to understand the whys of their limited English proficiency. They could understand and speak basic conversational English, but as might be expected, had more difficulties with reading and the most difficulties with writing.
Among other reasons for the students’ lack of linguistic success, Fu cites the low or narrow expectations of some teachers who view the students as the ones with the problem@ (see Soto, 1992). On the other hand, some teachers find ways for the Laotian students to achieve success in the classroom, but their success had a price. Less time could be spent with other students in the same classroom competing for the teacher’s attention. For the teacher herself, more preparation and evaluation time added to an already demanding schedule.

Learning to write in another language or even in the first language is a different process than learning to comprehend and then speak the language. Using in-depth interviewing in her study of "forty developing writers," Cleary (1991) identified "cognitive overload" as "the most pervasive form of struggle that Jenny and her immigrant peers described" (p. 125). Students said that they had so much to keep in mind when writing in the first language - ideas, spelling, diction, voice, purpose, and so forth - let alone in the second language. And similar to the students Fu interviewed, Cleary’s language minority students struggled with the process of writing. "There were only four times when I heard ESL students excited about writing" (p. 144), twice when students made sense of an important experience, once when the writing was done as part of a group project, and finally when they received positive peer response to the writing.
I see Cleary’s study of students’ writing processes as one piece of the whole English or language arts puzzle. In thinking of the context for my own study, I wanted to know more about all the language learning activities and processes language minority students experience in the English classroom, not just writing. What about reading, listening, speaking, and studying drama, vocabulary, and grammar?

A Brief Summary of Research on Language Minority Students’ Experiences in Schools and in Learning English

In this review of literature, I have looked at studies about the experiences of L.E.P. students learning English in a variety of social, school, and English or Language Arts contexts. To sum up briefly, Donaldson (1994) discusses the impact of racism on students’ involvement in school. Zanger (1994) shows how language minority or ethnic minority students are marginalized by a non-supportive faculty and administration. Lucas, Henze, and Donato (1990), in contrast to Zanger, describe the characteristics of those schools where language minority students succeed both socially and academically.

Further, I have noted research studies about students in primary and elementary schools (Feuerverger 1994), in middle and high schools (Cleary, 1993; Fu, 1995), and in adult education (Pierce, 1994). The majority of students in all of these studies were language minority students,
with Cleary's (1993) the notable exception. In Chapter 6, "Second Language Blues," she interviews language minority students from various backgrounds, including those who are literate in their first language, two Vietnamese students who are barely literate in their first language - Chinese, not Vietnamese - and two Puerto Rican students who enter kindergarten in the United States, but speak a "low-status dialect" (p. 119) in their eleventh-grade year. Cleary recommends a curriculum that is based on both language acquisition - "through extensive exposure to language" - and on learning - "through rule-based instruction" (Cleary, 1993, p. 143).

I have also referred to studies where those interviewed were from many different ethnolinguistic backgrounds, as in the case in Feuerverger's (1994) study of biliteracy in Toronto elementary schools. Additionally, I have noted studies from a more homogeneous student population (Giacchino-Baker, 1992). In short, I have looked at studies of language minority students inclusively, from their early childhood education through their adult education, in an attempt to gain perspective on their language learning experiences from young children to adults.

Questions Based on the Research

The research has raised a number of questions related to the experiences of language minority students. What do
they want or need from the English teacher? What can
English teachers offer? Who is failing in efforts to
educate language minority students - students? teachers?
schools? Or, rather than ascribing blame, how best can we
share responsibility and power among all participants in
the education of language minority students? How does
school policy compare and contrast with the students’
actual experiences? Is cultural and linguistic pluralism a
possibility, an actuality or simply a major goal in United
States schools? Where do schools and school districts
position themselves regarding cultural and linguistic
pluralism? How effective are whole language - or other -
methods of English language instruction? What can language
minority students tell us about their experiences and what
sense do they make of those experiences that will inform
what English teachers do?

Further, what would motivate L.E.P. students to want
to learn more about English than the usual vague promises
of more economic opportunity? A real enough issue, surely,
but is the promise of more economic opportunity enough of a
"carrot" to hold out to Isis, Tito, Ho, Abdul, and Sook?
What kinds of language instruction do they actually get in
the English classroom? What do they want? What do they
need? What motivates them? These are some of the
questions I reflected upon as I interviewed language
minority students about their experiences in schools and in
English classrooms for this study.
Implications for Research

Generally, there is a good deal of literature about L.E.P. students in United States schools, as I have mentioned. There are not, however, many studies - quantitative or qualitative - about the experiences of L.E.P. students in English classrooms. By their experiences in English classrooms I mean their experiences with reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, vocabulary, and drama (providing a rich opportunity for the language minority student: see Heath, 1991) - all those elements of language which comprise English or Language Arts curricula. Precious few of those studies are in the students' own words.

This study, therefore, builds upon and expands the work of Fu (1995) and Giacchino-Baker (1992) particularly, with respect and gratitude for their insightful work. The study also fills a research gap about L.E.P. students' experiences in mainstream English classrooms where the L.E.P. students' own words provide the major source of data about those experiences. As Elsa, in an interview with Zanger (1994, p. 182) said, "You can learn a lot from us, and we can learn a lot from you. Try to learn from us, 'cause we can teach you a lot." I believe we educators can learn a lot from the Elsas and Titos in our schools - and they can learn a lot from us. In the next chapter on research methodology I will discuss how and why I propose
to "learn a lot" about the experiences of language minority students.
CHAPTER 3

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AS METHODOLOGY

Introduction

One of the main purposes of this study was to explore the meaning students made of their experiences and thereby bring their voices into the heart of the research and the discussion of teaching and learning. What students think, feel, and say - their voices - have noticeably and historically been absent from educational research literature. In-depth phenomenological interviewing is one way to bring their stories, their narratives (Egan & McEwan, 1995) into the larger discussion of educational theory, practice, and reform. As Cleary (1991), Fu (1995), Giacchino-Baker (1992), and Nieto (1994) have shown in interviews with language minority students about their classroom experiences, students’ voices add texture, diversity, depth, and balance to educational discourse. By providing the opportunities for students to speak for themselves (Knupfer, 1995), as genuine collaborators in the educational process, and by examining how they reconstruct and make sense of their experiences, we as educators and researchers add an essential voice to educational research and discussion.
Interviewing as Methodology: Why Interviewing?

My six-year-old son, Graham, always asks me to read him a story, or he implores, "Let’s tell the ‘Baby Bear’ story." The Baby Bear story ostensibly is about a group of young scalawags who make mischief and mayhem in the adult world of Papa Bear. Of course, while Baby Bear is a make-believe character, much of what he does in the story closely resembles Graham’s thoughts and actions, a fact not lost on him. Often at the end of the story, he will note that he is really Baby Bear and I am really Papa Bear, the gentle dupe in the story. What endless joy he finds in weaving the imaginative tales, overwhelming the Papa Bear and his cronies with strength, guile, and persistence. Story is an important part of Graham’s young life, and he is often engaged in the reading, writing, and telling of stories. In entering stories as a reader, or creating stories as a writer or teller, Graham participates in a revered tradition of telling and creating stories that transcends culture, ethnicity, and age. We all know a story and we all have one to tell.

Through stories we make meaning of our lives (Seidman, 1991).

The story form, then, is not a trivial thing meriting attention only if we are discussing fiction. It is a reflection of some fundamental mental structure. It is a basic intellectual tool we use in making sense of the world and experience. (Egan, 1985, p. 399)

When Jorge, whom I have talked about earlier, told me his story about his experiences of growing up and going to
school in El Salvador, both of us began to understand more fully how his previous experiences had influenced him, had hurt his chances to succeed academically in a mainstream English classroom. While I did not interview Jorge in any formal or structured way, I did ask him questions - part of my teacher methodology - to find out what his story was.

**Pilot Work**

While enrolled in a course on "Interviewing as Qualitative Research," I conducted a pilot study in which I interviewed two high school English teachers. For one of my comprehensive examination papers (Gabriel, 1995a), I interviewed two language minority students, Orlando and Pedro. Even though I had been a middle and high school English teacher, I had never really sat down and talked with my colleagues or my students for more than 15 or 30 minutes at most. Through interviewing, however, I got to know teachers and students in a way I had never known them before, even in all my years as a secondary English teacher. Heartened by the positive experiences of those four interviews, I used in-depth phenomenological interviewing for this study.

**Choice of Data Collection Methodology**

But I still have not thoroughly addressed the question "Why Interviewing?" Why use interviewing instead of participant or non-participant observation, or ethnography,
or document analysis? Why use interviewing instead of quantitative methods of research? First, interviewing brings me face to face with another person. We talk, reconstruct experiences, make meaning. We listen to and look at each other. The participants know their own stories as well as anyone knows them. As subjective as their experiences are, they are the tellers' truths. "Truth is always an experienced truth for the existent self" (Tiryakian, 1965, p. 679).

Subjective understanding and objective cognizance differ (Tiryakian, 1965). Academics have accepted, if not embraced, qualitative research more and more over the last twenty years, and interviewing as a qualitative research methodology has increasingly gained a place in academic research (see Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, for discussions of the distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, and the merits of the latter). The move away from objective or positivist methodologies has resulted in part from the perceived limitations of quantitative research applied to human subjects. Human behavior, located within a social, cultural, political, and economic context is not so easily or neatly objectified by quantitative studies (Johnson, 1975; Nieto, 1992; see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Many different kinds of interviews exist, for example survey interviews, structured interviews, in-depth interviews. Not all interviews are necessarily qualitative
- some even yield quantitative data (Chu, 1993, p. 3). For this study I used phenomenological in-depth interviewing. Characterized by mutual trust and caring, this interview style "recognizes the inherent humanness of both participants" (Massarik, 1981, p. 204; also, Rowan, 1981, p. 113).

Interviewing is a decidedly human act, with interviewer and participant mutually engaged in creating meaning from the narratives elicited from the interview. From the ageless story form, people express and create meaning (see Mishler, 1986 pp. 67-68; Seidman, 1991). Interviewing is a way to understand the participant's world, her/his truth (Massarik, 1981).

The debate about what stands for knowledge or truth or ways of knowing has been around for a long time and promises to continue indefinitely (see, for example, Kessels & Korthagen, 1996, for a discussion of Platonic episteme - scientific understanding, and Aristotelian phronesis - practical wisdom). This is not the place to engage in that debate. Suffice to say here that interviewing as qualitative research has found a fully legitimate place in the broader pantheon of educational research.

Phenomenological interviewing, concerned with joint construction of meaning and built upon mutual trust and caring (Massarik, 1989), has the potential to empower all who participate in the research process. For in spite of
the possible difficulties with interviewing participants who differ in age, gender, ethnicity, or class from the interviewer, the participants still speak their mind, their truth. And it was the subjective truth of the participant I sought, realizing that subjective truth was one way of knowing, though certainly not the only way.

Gaining Access to Students

Gaining access to students was not difficult, though it required careful planning and coordination. Teachers and administrators I knew at the school sites where I interviewed graciously paved the way. At Brockton High School, the English department chairman contacted faculty members of the English department who in turn contacted students. I met students outside the classroom and explained the nature of my research by reviewing the consent form with them. I answered any questions they had and we agreed to meet in the following few days to make final arrangements for the interviews. I then contacted them in the school shortly thereafter, once they had obtained permission from their parent(s) and signed the consent form, and interviews began immediately.

For interviews at Fall River High School, I contacted the Deputy Superintendent of the school district, Dr. Mary Shaughnessy, who put me in touch with the bilingual education director, Megan Beardsley. From a computer data base of students' schedules and her knowledge of almost all
the language minority students, Mrs. Beardsley was able to
determine who would be the most likely participants for my
study. Working with another teacher, Mrs. Swan, who
conducted tutorial programs for language minority students,
the two were able to arrange meetings with three students
who agreed to participate in the study. I explained the
subject of my research to both Mrs. Beardsley and Mrs.
Swan, who then briefed prospective participants. Once I
met the prospective participants, I was able to further
clarify aspects of the research or answer any questions
they still had.

Finally, at Chicopee High School, an English teacher I
knew, Mrs. Billings, contacted students from her own
English classes and introduced me to them. As it turned
out, three of the four students, while all native Spanish
speakers, were born in the United States, the fourth,
Violetta, was born in Puerto Rico. All other participants
in the study were immigrants to this country.

**Description of the Schools**

I interviewed participants from five New England high
schools. Four of the five high schools were located in old
New England mill towns, which had seen their best days a
century or more ago when leather, textile, or paper mills
had flourished. Fall River and Brockton had many
similarities as cities. Located just down the river from
each other, they were economically depressed, blue-collar
cities, with populations of roughly 90,000. Approximately 3,000 students attended each of the schools.

In its philosophy statement in the student handbook, Brockton High School proclaimed that it was "the product of immigrant dreams and Yankee commitment . . ." Some of the entries in the handbook were written in four languages, English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Lao, reflecting the school's ethnolinguistic diversity. Fall River, in its philosophy statement in the faculty handbook, also noted that it was "an immigrant city, [and] the school reflect[ed] the ongoing fluctuation of its mobile population." The majority populations in both schools were Spanish-speaking - Dominican and Puerto Rican mainly - and Southeast Asian, while Euro, and African Americans comprised roughly 15% of the total student population.

The city of Chicopee, about half the size of Fall River and Brockton, had Spanish-speaking - mainly Puerto Rican - and Irish American populations, each comprising roughly 45% of the city's residents. Approximately 5 to 10% French-Canadians also resided in the city. One lifelong resident I spoke to described Chicopee as a city of "have some, and have nots." Two high schools co-exist in Chicopee, a comprehensive or academic high school, named after the city itself, and Gage Vocational High School. Three of the participants attended Chicopee and one attended Gage.
One student, Orlando, came from Sable Regional High School, a more middle to upper-middle class high school, located in a state university town of approximately 12,000 residents. The school has an ethnically diverse student population of roughly 60% Anglo and European American and 40% African, Asian, and Hispanic American. Nine out of ten students who graduate from Sable attend two to four year colleges.

Participant Selection: Language Minority Students

Thirteen of the sixteen participants were under eighteen years old. Both they and their parents or guardians signed the consent form. Three of the participants were eighteen years or older and therefore signed the consent form themselves. The participants were eager to take part in the study and several of them reiterated their enthusiasm for the research during the interviews. Soo-Kim, for example, had this to say:

I think it’s very good interview. Foreign students [have] many problems in English, you know, but I saw the people who’s been here in America couldn’t understand how hard it is to learn English. . . . It [learning English] was very hard and I don’t know how I’m going to do better than this, and you’re doing very good research. I wish you can help some other foreign students, some other people, like ESL students. People should think about how we can help them . . . to make them improve. I appreciate it.

For this study, I interviewed language minority students because they were an integral part of my own teaching experience. Further, I wanted to affirm language
minority students by including them in a fundamental way in the research process, as Corbett & Wilson (1995) have pointed out, "to make a difference with, not for students" (from the title of the article, p. 12) [emphasis mine]; to provide language minority students with an opportunity to speak with me, instead of my speaking for them (Knupfer, 1995). Students' perspectives on the issues that affected them the most were usually lacking altogether from educational research and writing (Nieto, 1994). In fact, in some studies where language minority students had been interviewed as part of the study, what they actually said was noticeably - ironically - absent from the discussion (see, for example, Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Freeman, 1994). The authors talked about and for the students, but the students' remarks were missing from the text.

I selected students who had not been in mainstream English classes for more than seven years. Second language learners may learn conversational English in as short a time as two years. In contrast, it takes them approximately five to seven years to learn "academic" English to the point where they can read, write, and speak English in other academic subjects on a par with native English speakers (Cummins, 1989). More by chance than design, I had selected participants who had been mainstreamed from one to six years. Thus, I was able to view their experiences from a broad range of developmental perspectives.
Characteristics of Participants

I interviewed sixteen students ranging in age from 15 to 20 years old. Eleven of the sixteen participants were Spanish-speaking, three males and two females born in Puerto Rico, two males and one female born in the Dominican Republic, and one male and two females born in the United States. One male and two female Vietnamese and one female Korean comprised the Asian participants, and one Arabic male rounded out the sixteen. Spanish-speaking and Asian students are the fastest growing language minority populations in the schools (Stanford Working Group, 1993) so my interviews focused mainly on those students who will most greatly affect the nation’s - particularly the major cities’ - schools.

To ensure participants’ confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms for all their names, and likewise all other persons who appear in the study. The names of the cities I have used are actual cities, similar to those cities where I conducted the interviews or which participants mentioned during the interviews. By providing real names, my intention was to give some semblance of the locale where students actually lived and attended school.

The Interviews

I interviewed students at their schools, which seemed the most logical or the fairest place to interview. While I chose the rules of the game for the interviews, we
"played" the game on their turf. With the exceptions of Orlando and Pedro, I interviewed all the students in their respective school libraries. I interviewed Pedro in one of his school’s classrooms and Orlando at the university I attended during the time of this study. The interviews had a decided social aspect to them, replete with the normal school chatter and bang - ringing bells, clicking Scantron machines, door alarms, vacuum cleaners, and student and teacher dialogues both hushed and heightened.

Interviewing students at their school sites meant that their - and the schools’ - schedules governed the times I could talk with them. The intended one hour interviews I had originally conceived as part of the in-depth interviewing methodology were actually closer to fifty minutes, roughly the length of a school period, punctuated with the usual vicissitudes of the school day. I asked students to return to talk for an extra ten or fifteen minutes at other times during the day if we felt we had more to discuss from a previous interview. Scheduling three one-hour interviews conflicted with the reality of the school day, broken into so many fifty-minute periods.

I interviewed all the participants at the end of the school year, in late May and early June. Four were graduating seniors. Two of them spoke with me on the morning of their high school graduation.

The first interview focused on the life experiences of the participants. I asked them to tell me about where they
were born and how they were raised, especially as it related to their learning English as a second language and their subsequent entry into mainstream English classes (Seidman, 1991). The first interview in one sense related the beginning of a story. It set the scene and the context for what followed - an exploration and exposition of the past leading up to an exploration of the present. So, for example, I asked what the participants’ school experiences were like when they were growing up. I asked them, "What schools did you attend and what were some of your school experiences like? What were the language classes like where you went to school?"

The second interview explored the participants’ present experiences in a mainstream high school English classroom. What was it like to be a student in a mainstream English class? What were some of your grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, drama, and listening lessons like? What was a "typical" day in your English class, or in school, like for you?

In the third interview I asked the participants to reflect on what their experiences meant to them (Seidman, 1991). What sense did they make of their experiences (see Rowan, 1981, Chapter 10)? This may be related to the end of a story in that it represented a denouement, a working out or tying together or concluding the story - and the interview. I also asked participants to look ahead. What were some of their goals? And how did those goals relate
to their processes of language and their proficiency in English? What would they like to be doing in 5, 10, 25 years?

In sifting through all the interview data, I was tempted to choose excerpts from transcripts where a participant had talked at length or had spoken in specific details about their experiences. Indeed, some of the participants, Soo-Kim, for example, were much more talkative than others and needed little prompting to speak at great length about a particular topic. Others, including Violetta and David, required considerably more prompting or encouragement to talk more expansively. The variations in the length and depth of the participants' responses were not surprising. During the interviews some of the participants had talked about how shy or embarrassed they were in speaking the English language, especially in school when they first began learning it. I understood the unequal power relationship between them and me. Here was a fellow from "the university," an English teacher himself, a researcher and a writer, older, different ethnically..., all of which might easily have contributed to a certain reticence on the part of some of the participants. I acknowledged this with the participants and through the in-depth interviews strove in every case to build mutual trust and respect.
Special Considerations for Interviewing Adolescents

As empathetic and as in-depth as phenomenological interviewing is (Massarik, 1981), it is of course not without issues as a research methodology. During the interviews I was always conscious about issues related to age, gender, ethnicity, culture, and language differences between the participants and me. On the one hand, I knew that adolescents might not be amenable to my probing their world; on the other hand, they might have accepted unquestioningly my attitudes or opinions. As an interviewer I was careful not to reveal my own predilections so as not to overtly influence the participants' responses (Yarrow, 1960).

Also, as I interviewed the participants, I kept in mind issues of power, confidentiality, and ethics. Parker (1984, p. 25) has discussed the "a priori power arrangement, that of adult over child," reminding the interviewer of the adolescent's vulnerability. In addition, since parents signed the consent form, they might have felt the need to know what their son or daughter said, or what I asked, so again, the participant was in a potentially vulnerable position (Parker, 1984, p. 26). I made a number of telephone calls to participants' homes during the course of the interviews, explicitly to remind them of interview times and places, and circumspectly to assure their parents, whom I often spoke with during the
phone calls, that I was genuinely grateful for the opportunity to talk with their child.

Further, if the monolingual/monocultural adolescent had to negotiate or survive in both the adolescent’s and the adult’s world, then the bicultural/bilingual adolescent had to negotiate in four worlds, the adolescent’s and the adult’s and the second adolescent and second adult cultures (Tammivaara & Enright, 1986). As part of my task, I noted assumptions related to age, ethnicity, language, and culture, and attended to how those assumptions played themselves out in the data analysis.

Analyzing the Data

After several readings of the transcriptions, I began to see general topics emerge from the data. For example, participants described some of their early childhood experiences, including memories of schools they had attended in their countries of birth. They spoke of the geography and the culture of their homelands, friends and family members left behind but not forgotten. Other topics included JOURNEYS OR MIGRATIONS, NEW LIFE IN AMERICA, AMERICAN CULTURE, HOME LIFE AND LANGUAGE, CULTURAL IDENTITY, FIRST AMERICAN SCHOOL EXPERIENCES, SCHOOL CULTURE, and the largest topic of all, the central focus of the study, LEARNING ENGLISH. Topics arose partly from the in-depth interviewing methodology itself. I asked participants, for example, during the first interview to
reconstruct their lives as far back as possible (within the one-hour framework) up to the present time. Hence, topics such as their early childhood experiences and their journeys to the United States were embedded within or elicited from the questions I asked during the first interview.

Further, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1983) has noted, each immigrant has a story to tell, including tales about daily life and historical circumstances in the country of origin, the voyage, the first few years, and the cultural life, to name just a few. Through interviewing the immigrant or the migrant, I asked them to reconstruct an experience they had in common with millions of other people who have immigrated to the United States. The major difference, however, was that I sought to highlight participants' experiences that would shed light on their school lives, especially how they learned the English language and how their learning evolved as they went from English as a Second Language classrooms to the mainstream English classroom. As I told the participants, one of my major goals in eliciting their stories was to inform English teachers in ways that would make English teachers better listeners of their students, if not better teachers:

I taught English in Los Angeles for a number of years and I had many students whose first language was not English who were coming into my classroom. I always wanted to know who the students were, where they came from, what their early experiences were, both with their family and friends growing up, and also in the schools. What kind of experiences did you have in schools?
What kind of experiences did you have in ESL classes or bilingual classes, and finally when we get to the English classroom, what is that experience like for you? What are some of the things you did in English class with reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary and so forth. I wanted to know because I wanted to be a better teacher and I felt that asking students directly - my hope was that they would tell me, so that’s part of what my research is involved in. You share your stories with me for the purpose of making better English teachers out of those people who teach English [and who teach prospective English teachers].

Of course, not all the participants’ experiences connected to each other. Not all of them, for instance, spoke about physical abuse during their early school years but enough of them did - and with clear memory and much detail - to warrant my talking about it in terms of a "theme" or motif in those early childhood experiences. Not unexpectedly, no single theme predominated across the participants’ stories. With the possible exception of "grammar" which most participants mentioned as having little or no value in their learning English, no one theme struck a unanimous chord with all of them. One or two students even ranked "grammar" higher in the scheme of things - liking it, considering it valuable to learning English - than the majority of their peers. In my data analysis, I have attempted through successive readings and "winnowings" (Seidman, 1991) to present only the most salient of all the motifs or themes which arose during the interviews. And of those themes, I chose those which closely connected or echoed across the participants’ multiple stories.
Making Meaning or Making Sense of the Experiences Elicited by the Interviews

Together, the participants and I created a discourse (Chu, 1993; Mishler, 1986). But the act of making meaning went beyond the two people involved in the interview. Making meaning or making sense of experiences was a "complex act of negotiation" (Brown, 1994). Participants made meaning of their experiences as they told their stories, not so much metacognitively, but through the actual telling of their stories. They did, however, have a difficult time looking back at the stories they had just told and making meaning of that, as Soo-Kim has described:

If I try to pick up the points of my life, that would be very hard. I can't say. So far, I'm too young. I'm only going to be nineteen and I don't know what's going to be. I have to live a little bit longer than this and [then] I can tell. So far, I don't know. I'm still so young. I don't think the time's come yet, so I have to wait to see what's the point of my life.

I, too, made meaning when selecting and presenting in print segments of the taped and transcribed interviews. Furthermore, readers make meaning when they read the final product (Rosenblatt, 1983). Add to that the complexities related to how language and culture link inextricably together in ways both subtle and profound (Cummins, 1989; Feuerverger, 1994; Nieto, 1992). The expression and the meaning of a word as apparently simple as "Mama," for example, varied greatly from one culture to another (Walsh, 1991). And finally, Donmoyer (1996, p. 23) wondered yet, "whose stories get told?"
With respect to all the variables in making meaning of what the participants said, the final interpretations or meaning makings obviously belong to me. In editing the transcripts, I attempted to preserve the original spirit, if not the letter, of the language as spoken by the participants. I wondered, for instance, if I should leave out what seemed like superfluous remarks, such as "you know"? Or, pauses where the participant filled the space with so many "likes," "you knows," or "ums"? Devault (1990) and Paget (1983) have argued that editing actual talk suppresses emotion: "... Features of speech like pauses and emphasis provide clues to emotion and meaning, and these in turn are building blocks for the analysis [of the transcripts]" (Devault, 1990, p. 109). When a participant said "you know," she was in effect asking me to take part in clarifying what she was trying to say (Devault, 1990). I have in all excerpts tried to achieve a balance: to give as accurate and as fair a representation of the participants' spoken usage of the English language as possible, yet make it a "readable" text, unencumbered by too many awkward phrasings or other syntactical ambiguities. I have indicated with brackets those places where I have inserted words or phrases to clarify participants' own words.
Trustworthiness: Peer Debriefers

I enlisted the support of two peer debriefers who served as critical respondents, checking my biases and talking about ideas or problems I had with data analysis. One of the peer debriefers also served as a transcriber, so she was able to hear the participants' voices, not just read the transcript or listen to ideas as I had presented them.

The other peer debriefer, Sonia, a Puerto Rican woman who had taught in public schools for many years, read portions of Elena’s transcripts and noted what she thought was salient. We then compared and discussed our selections. I asked Sonia originally to see if she would highlight portions of the interview that I had overlooked. I wondered, since she and Elena were both Puerto Rican women, if her view of what was compelling or significant would differ markedly from mine? As it turned out, we had noted similar excerpts, particularly those related to the discontinuities in participants' education as they moved so often back and forth from Puerto Rico to the United States.

Closing Thoughts

In an earlier paper (Gabriel, 1995a), I had included verbatim participant responses and my edited versions of the same. In that way, I made explicit my own process of editing - selecting out - and presented the reader with the implicit option of agreeing or disagreeing with what I had
done. For a few select passages, I followed that procedure for this study as well. In light of the multiple meanings created throughout the interview process, including the meaning participants make of their experiences, the meaning the interviewer makes in editing, analyzing, and interpreting the data, and the meaning the readers make of the completed product, I see this meaning making aspect of in-depth phenomenological interviewing as the most problematic - and intriguing - part of the whole process.

In spite of the perceived and real problems with interviewing as a research methodology, I want to return to the description of phenomenological interviewing characterized by mutual trust and caring and to the joint construction of meaning (Massarik, 1981). In my years as a middle and high school teacher in Los Angeles, I taught students of many languages, cultures, ethnicities, and classes from all over the world. I loved teaching there. I taught English language and literature. Literature in any language is the home of the story. I strove to build mutual trust and caring and to make meaning with the students who were enrolled in my classroom. I am no stranger to the complexities of talking to, teaching, and learning from students, no matter who they are or where they come from. In spite of my and other researchers' concerns about interviewing, and I do not take those concerns lightly, interviewing language minority students for this study was a positive and rewarding experience.
In interviewing language minority students, I heard America, to paraphrase Walt Whitman. Multivocal, they all had a story to tell, if not a song to sing. Throughout the process, my message to them reflected Whitman (in Miller Jr., Ed., p. 120) once again:

We receive you with free sense at last, and are insatiate henceforward, Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold yourselves from us, We use you, and do not cast you aside - we plant you permanently within us, We fathom you not - we love you - there is perfection in you also, You furnish your parts toward eternity, Great or small you furnish your parts toward the soul.
CHAPTER 4

THE JOURNEY TO THE MAINSTREAM ENGLISH CLASS: SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND EDUCATIONAL ANTECEDENTS OF PARTICIPANTS PRIOR TO THEIR IMMIGRATING TO THE UNITED STATES

Introduction

Thirteen of the sixteen participants immigrated to the United States from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Korea, and Israel. In this chapter I present the social, cultural, and educational histories of those who immigrated here, going back to their early childhood experiences, especially in the schools, and then I continue with their journey to America. The first interview in the in-depth interviewing methodology enables me to present parts of students' biographies, so rich in detail and vital to understanding their needs, abilities, goals, and expectations. The three participants who were born in the United States obviously had antecedent experiences which influenced their school performance, and I will note those in subsequent chapters. In this chapter, though, I focus on those experiences particular to the immigrant.

Part I: Growing Up and Attending School in their Native Countries: Physical Abuse and Repression

Many of the participants who were immigrants to the United States talked about how hard their lives were in the countries where they were born and raised. Some recalled the physical beauty of their countries: Ling of Vietnam;
Orlando of the Dominican Republic; Dora, Juan, and Elena of Puerto Rico. Others spoke about a simplicity of life not found in the United States. David, for example, talked about fashioning kites from the leaves and branches of the cocoa plant. What stood out in the minds of many, however, was the hardship of life, both in and out of school.

Physical Abuse in Schools

At least half of the participants spoke of physical abuse in the schools they attended before they came to the United States. Ling, a graduating, college-bound, twenty year old senior at the time of our interviews, was born and raised in Vietnam. She came here when she was fifteen years old. She spoke about her life in Vietnam and her memories of school:

Oh, it’s very hard you know. My family was poor. That why I studied. I had nothing. And I shared the things with my friends. I do [not] have crayons but I share with them. They share with me because they are rich and there’s no problem with that, you know? I didn’t have anything.... [Some of] my class[es] [were in] Chinese language and another class in English. And I learn.... Chinese language is very hard for me. We have to prove to them [teachers] we are not bad. We are good.... We have to study a lot and keep the class clean. The table is long like this one and the chair is like a bench.

And teachers are very harsh in Vietnam. They can hit you. They can yell. I was hit by a teacher. And sometimes they pull my hair, too. They say I’m not study, you know? In Vietnam I’m poor and I have not enough things to study, and nobody help me. And they hit me. I remember, I was hit by a lot of them. The ruler is kind of a rectangle - is thick like that. They put all together and they hit me. And sometime they [the teachers] never hit a student but they took a
student to security and then the security can hit the student. They lie on the table and they hit. Sometimes they hit until the ruler breaks....

In Vietnam I cannot learn. I mean I learn nothing. I came here. I learned a lot. Better live here, you know?

With little or no choice in the selection of courses and the constant threat and reality of physical abuse, Ling made it clear how much she appreciated the freedoms she had in the United States schools. Also, as a student in Vietnam she had studied not only her native language (Vietnamese) but three, including Chinese and English - three different languages, all with different alphabets. From what she said, Chinese was accorded a greater priority in the schools than either Vietnamese or English.

Her studying - or shifting around among the three languages - without attaining mastery or proficiency in any one of them effectively curtailed her literacy in all of the languages. If she struggled with achieving literacy in the main language(s), Chinese or Vietnamese, she would certainly struggle in acquiring the secondary languages, including English. Further, learning a second or third language in school is complex under any circumstances, but Ling routinely faced the added threat of physical abuse.

As other students told their stories, it became clear that physical abuse knew neither geographical nor gender boundaries. Born and raised in the Dominican Republic before coming to New York City, Conrado told me about his
own "challenge." A sixteen-year-old eleventh grader when I interviewed him, he told me:

School was like a big deal for me. I used to go to school from 8 o’clock to 4:30 [in the] afternoon because my mother always had us studying, studying, studying. School was fun but sometimes I [was] always thinking, "Why [do] I study?" I don’t even know what I was thinking about in that time but there was a time that came that I realize that I had to be somebody in the future....

[One time] I had a challenge with the superintendent of the school. She was... how can I say it? She was big. I wasn’t [a] bad boy. She like[d] nobody to talk in her class. In my country they used to hit you just for nothing in class. So one time she hit me and I didn’t like that. From there, I hate that woman. And now, I hate her because she used to hit you for nothing. [With] a ruler, whatever she had in her hands. Sometimes the chalk she used to throw it. There was a time that I got tired of that, so I told my mother. She went to school. She talk to her. I was always going to my house crying about that [being hit] because I didn’t like it. So they took her from there.... She lost her place.

Prodded in part by his mother, Conrado recognized the importance of getting a good education. Unfortunately, he had to contend with the superintendent who hit the students apparently with little cause – and without much concern. Granted, Conrado may not have been the perfect angel – from his own accounts he was certainly not – as the expression goes – a choir boy, but the license the superintendent took in hitting students indiscriminately, and the fact that she eventually lost her job, showed that the abuse was real enough.

Just how much those early school experiences shaped or informed the students’ behaviors as they progressed through
school, I can only surmise. But pain and public humiliation are not so soon or quickly forgotten. I used to ask middle and high school students to write about early childhood memories and students often recounted their most painful or traumatic experiences in those papers. Surely, being hit with a ruler until it broke qualified as an experience both to remember and forget, if that were possible. Throughout the interviews, I sought to understand how participants' experiences, especially the harsh ones, predisposed them to schools, schooling, and teachers as they journeyed from one country and culture and entered United States public schools. Clearly, they embraced the new-found and in some cases hard-to-come-by freedoms granted to them in the United States. Not only freedoms of speech, press, and so forth, but decidedly freedoms from the painful experiences of the past.

School as a Form of Repression

Not all abuse was physical. In her native South Korea, for example, Soo-Kim talked about the travail of the entire school experience, how as a junior high school student she attended school all day long and into the evening. She also attended school regularly on Saturdays and often on Sundays. While she did not face the threat of physical punishment as wantonly as Ling and Conrado had, she confronted other kinds of repression and conformity.
Born and raised in South Korea, Soo-Kim came to the United States when she was fifteen years old. Nearly nineteen years old when I interviewed her, a graduating senior, she told me that in Korea she had spent most of her waking hours either in school or traveling to and from school, as she recalled in the following passage:

School was really really work. When I was going to junior high it was [an] all girls private school. No boys, no clothes like now. We always had to cut hair really short. The school was really strict. And the time you stay in the school was more than you will stay at home. Usually [I] go to school about eight or eight-thirty and stay there until five or six. I also have to go to an academic school after that and stay about three hours and [then I] used to go to library and come home about eleven or twelve o’clock at night. And have dinner at twelve o’clock and [then] do homework. Sometimes I study and go to sleep about two or three o’clock in the morning. Have to wake up early too. It took me about one-and-a-half hours to go to school and I was always taking bus. It drove me really tired. It was hard for me. It’s like four and a half hours and I have to change the bus twice. The bus was really crowded, can’t even get a seat....

We also go to [school on] Saturday, too, but stay until one o’clock, one thirty. Sunday we don’t [usually] go to school but sometimes we have academic school, too, so [I] also [went] to school on Sunday for a couple hours.... In Korea you have to study at the same time geometry, algebra, they don’t give you choice to take a subject. You have to take it and you got no choice....

Soo-Kim’s recollection of her school days underscored her country’s educational policies: classes seven days a week, often until near midnight; conformity - hair cut short, uniforms; and the school—or the state-mandated curriculum. While she did not talk about physical abuse in
the same way as Ling and Conrado, Soo-Kim’s description of her school life in South Korea showed that she had little or no social or even family life for all the demands of her school life. On the one hand, the government’s educational policy emphasized the major role that education played in the lives of the South Koreans; on the other hand, the rigorous demands placed upon such young children seemed more repressive than educational. Little wonder that Soo-Kim stated often in our interviews: "I love America!"

Physical Abuse Within the School and Conflict Outside the Schoolhouse Doors: An Arab Living in Israel During the Intifadeh

Whereas Ling, Conrado, and Soo-Kim had faced physical and psychological harassment within their respective schools, Abdul’s major concern was more global. Born in Puerto Rico to Arabic parents, Abdul and part of his family left Puerto Rico when he was four years old and went to live in Israel.

School occupied his time and his thoughts much less than the "war," as he recounted in the following excerpt. I asked him what he remembered most from his growing up in Israel/Palestine:

The most I remember is the "war." When the war started, that messed up my whole life. I couldn’t do a whole lot ‘cause my father was down here [in the United States] and we didn’t have a car. They took my father’s car instead of taxes ‘cause he couldn’t pay taxes.... I didn’t really do a whole lot down there [in Israel]. So, we [didn’t] go to school for a whole year, just sit at home and do whatever, you know, maybe help out my grandparents with the backyard or whatever.
That was about it. We couldn’t do a whole lot. We used [to] go down there to play sports, like maybe volleyball or soccer with my friends - a bunch of us just go somewhere to play sports. But we couldn’t stay out after dark. We couldn’t stay after that cause if soldiers come by and see us playing, we wouldn’t be able to stay outside for too long....

I was too young to do anything, just stay out of trouble....There was a lot of stuff going on in the city that I lived in. My own friend got shot. One of ’em got killed and the other one got shot and killed. That was it. That’s when my mom became real strict about me hanging out with certain people. And going certain places. So I couldn’t really go anywhere to do anything.

And school was like real strict. We had to go to school almost everyday. If we didn’t go to school, they had to know where we were [and not] be out there on the streets doing booze or throwing rocks at soldiers or whatever, you know? The whole thing was strict, and I didn’t really like it that strict. I like to be free, you know. And the soldiers come almost every single day. And every time they come down, trouble started. It wasn’t just from their side, it was from our side too, but it started somehow and that’s when we couldn’t do nothing. We had to go back home. Like, you couldn’t be outside. If you got caught outside, you go to jail, or they’ll beat you down, or whatever, you know.

The "war" was the Palestinian uprisings on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the late 1980s and early 1990s. By June, 1990, roughly 750 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli soldiers during the uprisings. Another 250 Palestinians had been killed by the Palestinians themselves for collaboration with Israel. Many young men, not much older than Abdul, were involved in the conflict with Israel. A sense of doom hung over their young lives. "Sooner or later you will die, so there is nothing to be afraid of. They [the Israelis] took our land, they killed
our brothers, they arrested my friends. Our life is not so good that we can regret losing it" (in Morrow, 1990, p. 49).

In the midst of the "war," the conflict between Palestinian citizens and Israeli soldiers, Abdul returned to school where he faced violence of another kind:

It was strict, it was really strict. Teachers had the right to hit people.... Let's say you didn’t do your homework. They used to hit people for not doing homework. If you go without clipping your nails they could hit you. You couldn’t be rude to the teacher. They just smack you, kick you, like they didn’t really care. Especially elementary school. They gave you homework and you have to memorize it and if not they could hit you. You couldn’t talk to anyone. They could kick you..., hit you with whips.... I didn’t like it but I had no choice. The parents thought teachers hit you for a good reason.... And they [parents] passed by the school, and will tell 'em [teachers], "Keep an eye on my kid. Hit 'em if he needs to be hit." And that’s what they did.... All I know is that I didn’t like school at all.... The way I see it is if I want to go school, I want to be free to be able to do whatever I want to do. I don’t want to be hit by a teacher or be disrespected by a teacher.

Physical violence and abuse prevailed in Abdul’s life, from the close confines of the family, within the schools, and in the "war" in the greater world around him. He saw his own friends get shot and die in the streets. In the schools he attended, teachers hit students with abandon and without reason, much as they did to Ling and Conrado. In the face of it all Abdul longed for freedom. As he had said earlier, Abdul enjoyed the freedom from the privations brought on by the war and the indiscriminate physical abuse wrought by his teachers and condoned by his parents. "I
"want to be free," he stated throughout our interviews. As with Ling, Conrado, and Soo-Kim, schoolchildren also harassed, abused, and repressed, Abdul gained much of the freedom he sought when he arrived in the United States as a seventh grader.

While I have presented the cases of four participants who were physically abused or repressed, several others spoke of similar experiences. Juan, for example, had been grabbed by the ears and hit on the head. The two other Vietnamese participants, Phuong and Thuyen, talked about getting hit in Vietnamese schools.

Participants Who were not Physically Abused or Repressed

A few of the other participants spoke about how kind their teachers had been, how loving even. Elena, for example, spoke fondly of her favorite teacher in Puerto Rico:

I had a very good teacher, a very, very good teacher.... She was great. She sat me down and she teach me step by step, everything. If I didn’t know [any]thing, she won’t scream at me, you know. It was something new that I had to learn. But I wasn’t pushed. And I guess that’s how I learned a lot. When you’re a little child, you’re not supposed to push the child to do things that you want them to do. That’s the right way.... [My teacher] was very friendly. She was real open. That’s the main thing I liked about her. She was real open. Teachers in the United States don’t have a real close relationship with the students. My teachers in Puerto Rico would actually go to your house, talk to your parents, have a close relationship with the students. Here they don’t do that....
In marked contrast to most of the other participants, kindness and close support marked Elena's early school experiences. In spite of all the other difficulties in migrating to the United States, learning a new culture and language, she had enjoyed her early school experiences. If anything, Elena found her experiences in American schools or with American teachers less rewarding than what she had left behind. Whereas Ling, Conrado, Soo-Kim, Abdul, Juan, Phuong, and Thuyen, who had endured physical abuse and repression in their schools, found a haven in American society and schools.

So much of what goes on in students' lives remains unseen and unheard. Knowing participants' stories of physical abuse and repression provided me with some insight into their emotional needs and their psychological frame of mind as they entered United States schools. Without the fear of violence perpetrated in their former schools students felt freer to pursue the business of learning.

Physical Abuse and Repression in the United States

I would be remiss not to point out here that physical abuse or the more euphemistic "corporal punishment" is practiced not only in other countries. According to various reports, corporal punishment here in the United States is still legal in public schools in 38 states and prohibited in schools in only 12 states (Rancifer, 1995). Other reports (Richardson & Evans, 1994) indicate that only

In any case, Ryan (1994, p. 71) has noted:

A historical overview of disciplinary practices used in American classrooms indicates that episodes of teacher violence have been a consistent and conspicuous part of American schooling since the very beginning.

I point this out here to show that physical abuse and repression are not restricted to foreign countries. On the contrary, roughly half of the states in the United States still legalize the practice of corporal punishment, as I have noted. And though many of the participants spoke so affirmatively of the freedoms they enjoyed in America compared to where they came from, they might well have expressed similar sentiments had they come from Tennessee. In Nashville in 1987, teachers hit 9,000 students enrolled in the schools almost 19,000 times, or 215 percent of the students, including 176 percent of the handicapped (Ryan, 1994, p. 71). Fortunately, corporal punishment was illegal in the state where participants I interviewed attended school.

Beyond Freedom

Only one participant, Phuong, thought that Americans had too much freedom. Most of the others clearly enjoyed the freedoms they found in the United States and freedoms from the often harsh past of social and economic deprivation and physical abuse meted out in the schools.
What they really wanted beyond those freedoms was a teacher who cared about, respected, and showed patience with them. "Respect the child...," said Emerson in his essay 'Education,' "adopt the pace of Nature. Her secret is patience.... Say little; do not chide; but govern by the eye. See what they need, and that the right thing is done."

Reflecting the Emersonian perspective, Ling had this suggestion for teachers:

I would tell them about my feelings. I say, sir, I don’t understand it. Maybe you talk slowly. Sometimes my pronounce is wrong. You have to tell me and please give attention to me because you know my language no good and then you have to listen to me and I tell you to talk slowly....

And Abdul, too, echoed similar sentiments when he said:

I’d say first of all they have to... it doesn’t really matter what you teach them, they got to be more patient with the students and not give up on them....

Part II: The Journey to America

In the first half of this chapter I recounted participants’ experiences of growing up and attending schools in their native countries. The harsh realities left an indelible mark upon their young lives. They carried the memories with them and eventually shared them with a stranger - me - after many months or years and many miles apart from the land of those memories. Leaving their countries was usually a bittersweet experience, as many left family and friends behind and headed to a new life in
America. With Elena and Patricia the notable exceptions, participants had more affirming experiences in United States schools than they had in schools in their native countries.

In the second half of this chapter, I trace the participants' journeys as they made their way from one country, culture, and language(s) to another, to the United States, and to their respective cities and schools. I highlight their journeys to show how difficult the rites of passage were as they moved from one country to another. I also want to show the discontinuities they encountered in their personal and familial lives and in their education as a result of all their moving. And yes, to show how heroic the young travelers were as well.

As I stated earlier, all but three of the participants were immigrants to the United States. The three who were not immigrants were first generation, their parents having immigrated to this country. Only one of the participants lived in the same city where she was born and now attended school. All the others had moved from one country or city to the city and the schools they currently attended. For those who came from Vietnam, Korea, and Palestine, generally the Far East and the Middle East, while they might return to visit, the journey was a one-way journey. Once they left their countries of birth, they realized that they would not return to live. Phuong, from Saigon, Vietnam, was the only one to even return for a visit,
shortly after we had concluded our interviews. For those participants born in Caribbean countries, either Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic, moving to the United States at one point in their lives did not necessarily mean that they would remain here. These participants were migrants to and from the United States and their countries of birth.

The Journey from Vietnam, by way of the Philippines, to the United States: "Does This Sky Look Like in America?"

Of all the participants, the journeys of the Vietnamese were the most arduous. Never certain that they would actually make it to the United States, they went forth anyway. They often stopped at refugee holding camps in Thailand or in the Philippines where their fates were in the hands of local officials, who might be helpful or who might be rapacious. Ling remembered vividly her journey from Vietnam to the United States, from beginning to end:

In the car I went into the airplane [in] the morning. And I don’t have friends go to me, I just alone you know. That’s OK ... and I feel not very bad you know. That’s how we live fifteen years. But we very happy, very happy [to be leaving]. On Thursday my father, my neighbors, my uncle, aunties, and my sister’s friends they talk together and they cook something to eat, you know. And I remember this day, rain day. It had rain. And I sit on the door, look at the sky. I think does this sky look like in America? And do they have sky, do they have sky like that? Do they have different or same thing? I just think about it. And I think, is it better or is it worse? And I don’t care about it. I just don’t care about it. Just come here. When I left country, friends, you know, it’s the first time I sit on the airplane. I worry about that. And when I come to Thailand, I was in Thailand five days. And Thailand is very hot, hotter than Vietnam. And each day we
have three meals, each meal we have two eggs. And a little bit kind of a vegetable like that. But my mother say, You cannot eat a lot of eggs because eggs can make your health no good....

And we take a shower together. I feel uncomfortable when I take shower. They say the security over there, if they saw us take shower inside [where we were not supposed to], they will be mean. They will [detain] us [for] a week, a year. When we take shower we very scared about that.

All the things are strange to me. Like airport was strange. On the airplane I go to Thailand [then to] Sweden. And from Sweden go to France. I like France. When I go to airport on France you know, when we go on the elevator, I don’t know how to say it, I was fall down you know, I was embarrassed. We don’t know how to [go on]. And we hold together you know. And go on. And we stay over there [at the airport] a long time. We have to wait [at the] airport. And then I go [to] the market to buy stuff. Oh, it’s very nice, very beautiful. Kind of smell things good, candy, and some strange man is very tall. On France to New York, I was vomit, you know vomit means...?

I cannot stand up when I came down to New York. My father hold my hand. I say to him, I think I cannot go any more. I am sick. My father said, "No, you have one more, one more air to carry you to Boston." Then, OK, OK, go on to Boston. And I cannot smell like, smell good, I feel it no good for me. I feel heavy, and I take a kind of oil. And American look at me. And at this time very hot in America. But we wear jackets. I was sick. And to Boston I go out, I saw my sister. We go on .... From Boston we go to my sister’s house. Take a walk 45 minutes. I want to die now.

When I go [to my sister’s] home I saw the house beautiful because in Vietnam I never see one like that. And when I go upstairs and I go in the house I sit on the sofa. In Vietnam I never sit on the sofa. And my sister give me some drink - I don’t know how to say it, but then I drink it and my sister say, "You have to go to sleep." And I say, "Where is it?" because it strange to me and she showed me the way how to go the bathroom. [My sister’s house] have sofa and TV because in Vietnam I didn’t have a big TV like
here, and I didn’t have VCR, and like the sink, the toilet, something like that, and when I go into the bathroom, wow, it’s nice to me because in Vietnam I never have a room for myself, you know....

And then in the morning, I wake up early and I sit in the window and look outside. It’s beautiful, have trees, have cars, and I saw a woman. That’s the first person in my whole neighborhood. She started the engine, she go to work, I think like that. And then I go downstairs. I look because last night I never see anything. Now I look everything in the house. Then I go in the kitchen. I’m hungry. The sun shines through in the window. I feel it warm now because July. Then I feel tired, I feel really peaceful, you know. And I think, now is my new life.

A journey and a rite of passage. Though happy to leave her country, she left behind several of her siblings in a family of ten. Resigned to her fate, fifteen year-old Ling, leaning on her father’s strong arm and sturdy will, finally reached her destination, her sister’s loving embrace and warm home in Brockton. I have read Ling’s account over and over again and I am struck by her courage and her poetic nature. Her story reminded me how easy it is to dismiss students’ stories or what they have to say in class because of the way they speak the language. Through my own teaching and learning with second language learners, and reinforced strongly by Ling’s and other’s stories, I have learned never to mistake a student’s language abilities for their intelligence or their wisdom.
Migrations of the Puerto Rican and Dominican Republic Students: "You Have Moved a Lot!"

Participants from Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic often moved back and forth to the United States, some of them three and four times. Just moving from one house to another in the same neighborhood, city, or state can be a disruptive experience, especially for middle and high school students whose relations with peers become increasingly important to them. Students I interviewed faced a different language and culture each time they moved. With their family ties severed, many of the students left their homes with one parent, sister or brother, aunt or uncle and left other members of the family behind. Continual migration interrupted students' literacy learning, in whatever language they studied. So, upon entering the ESL class or the mainstream English class, they might have poor literacy in their first language, making second language acquisition even more difficult (Cummins, 1989).

I have seen this in my own experiences as an English teacher in Los Angeles. A student would come from El Salvador, for example, where they had little or no education to begin with. Perhaps they could read and write, though many could not. They could speak their native language but not participate academically on a par with those who had received a more comprehensive education. The student's family, once again, not the entire family, but certain members only, would migrate to the United
States. The students would be enrolled in a bilingual or ESL class and begin to learn English as a second language. After a few months or a few years, they would migrate back to their native country where once again they might or might not return to school there. Then, they would come back to the United States, older now, but not much more literate than when they left. Because of their age, they would be enrolled in a higher grade where they would fall yet further behind.... And the cycle would continue. As well, they not only struggled academically, but also socially, economically, and emotionally - remember, they had left behind mother, father, brother, sister, family - their roots, identity.

So I recognized many of my former students' stories in the stories of the current participants. Elena, whose father had died when she was a young girl of 14 years old, was a veteran migrant, but the moves were "hard" and painful. A seventeen-year-old junior at the time of the interviews, she recounted her experiences moving from one place to another:

I have traveled a lot of places and that has been difficult for me to learn anything. I was born Santa Domingo, Dominican Republic. I came to... I went to Puerto Rico, so I was raised in Puerto Rico. I went to Puerto Rico when I was around five and from Puerto Rico I came to the United States. I lived in New Haven.... Um, it was very, very hard. It was, God, it was very bad [be]cause since you don't know how to talk to people, you don't know, I didn't know. It was a big change, a big change. Then I went back to Puerto Rico.... In Puerto Rico, I went to kindergarten and first grade and I took second
grade too, and I came over here for the third grade.... I was in New Haven for six years....

I did eighth grade in Brockton. I finished [eighth grade] in Brockton. And then I went back to New Haven. And did my ninth, and half of tenth, and then I came over here to Brockton, and did my half of tenth, did my tenth grade, and now I’m a junior....

J: At what time did you go back to Puerto Rico, when you said you had that wonderful English [teacher]?

E: Oh, that was fourth grade.

J: So I’m trying to get this straight. Born in the Dominican Republic, moved to Puerto Rico...

E: Puerto Rico. New Haven. Puerto Rico, again. Back to New Haven and then to Brockton... and then from Brockton back to New Haven. And then from New Haven back to Brockton.

J: You moved a lot.

E: Yes. yes.

J: You’ve moved a lot!

Elena acknowledged some of the difficulties about making so many changes:

Every time I move I had to do differently, because over there in New Haven you gotta know how to speak in a different way. In New Haven, in order for you to be part of the people, you gotta act somewhat stronger, or you speak differently. Here, you could actually talk with a person, without having to be bad or something like that. It’s different.... You wanted to be part of a particular culture or part of the society that you were growing up in. English speaking, mainly white and black people living in New Haven. There were many other Hispanic, but you’re definitely in the minority there.

Other stories were similar. Dora, for example, had moved from Puerto Rico to the United States three times before she finally arrived at Brockton High School. A sixteen-year-old eleventh grader when I interviewed her,
she recalled all the moves she had made over the last several years:

So I was born in Puerto Rico and I went to school there for I think four years. I came here to Cleveland and I was there for I think [grades] four to seven. I was there to let me see fifth grade I think and I went back to Puerto Rico and went to sixth and seventh grade and then I came back. I went to Starbuck School, then went back [to Puerto Rico] and [then] I came back [to the United States].

She qualified the timetable for each move by saying, "I think." Apparently, the number of moves blurred her memory of the experiences. Later on, in fact, when I asked her if she minded doing all the traveling, she responded:

I don’t mind. Well, I do ‘cuz I do have friends and then I have to go to Puerto Rico, make some friends, then come back. That’s hard. I’m tired thinking of it. I don’t like.... So, it’s hard. I don’t know.

When I exclaimed that she had traveled a lot, Dora corrected me, saying, "Not me, my mother." Dora seemed weary when thinking and talking about it. The migrations had taken their toll.

Another of the participants, David, had an even more complex story about his travels and travails:

I was born in the Dominican Republic and after about three months I went to another place with my Mom and my step father. The place is Curacao, around Aruba. I stayed there ‘till I was nine years old, then I know the language and everything. And after nine years old, I left to [return to] the Dominican Republic, and lived three years there. After that my parents came over here and had an apartment and everything. I came here to live in Brockton, and I went to the Abington School from sixth to eighth grade. From there I came here [to Brockton High School].
There's more to his story, however. David's mother spoke Spanish and his step-father spoke Papiamento, a native language of Curacao. Spanish was his first language and Papiamento his second. He moved to Curacao and entered the schools where the language of instruction was Dutch. When I asked him how he did in school, he replied tersely, "It was very difficult. Failed twice."

Failure, neither uncommon nor unexpected for second language learners, leaves its mark. David did poorly throughout the early grades, again not surprisingly, since Dutch was his third language and school was the only place he had a chance to practice or work with the language. Finally, at the tender age of twelve, he arrived in the United States. The migrations from one country to another were enough to promote failure. The fact that the school language - Dutch - in Curacao differed from the other two languages David spoke at home contributed to his failure in the early grades.

Apart from the fact that they had moved back and forth so often, what was notable about Elena, Dora, and David, was just how resilient they were after all their migrations. Perhaps all the traveling had shaped their resilient characters. They all told me how committed they were to finishing high school and going on to college.
From Puerto Rico to the United States, Then Back to Stay in Puerto Rico: "It's a Tough Change"

Finally, during my third interview with Violetta, she told me that her family planned to return to Puerto Rico, after she had been in the United States since she was five years old. Now sixteen, and with only her senior year to complete before she graduated from high school, Violetta spoke of her family’s decision - mainly her father’s - about returning to the land of her birth:

I was born in Puerto Rico and my parents are Puerto Rican. I was raised over here [in the United States]. At the age of five we came over here to begin school.... I’m going this summer to Puerto Rico. To stay over there. To live there.

J: And are you excited about that?

V: Not really because the schools over here are easier for me, the English classes. When I go over there, my Spanish is not like it used to be. You know, it makes it a little bit harder for me....

J: May I ask why you’re going back?

V: Um, because of the weather over here. We don’t like the weather. My father has asthma so that’s one of the reasons. And another reason is because my grandparents [in Puerto Rico] are ready to die any moment and it’s really bad for my father....

I’m going to miss a lot of things. I really wanted to graduate over here. But maybe... I don’t know. I’m getting sad and the church is like my family. I consider them my family because they have been with me since I was a little girl. I’m going to miss a lot of things. The English, I’m going to miss because it’s easier for me to be in English class than to have all the subjects in Spanish. It’s better to take them in English, it’s easier. Over here schools are really different because we get to pick our subjects or whatever we want for the classes and over there they don’t let you pick anything. You just have science and Spanish, social studies, and all
those main subjects and you have to take it. I’m going to miss this school a lot.

J: It’s a tough change.

V: Yeah, it really is.

Violetta succeeded well enough in English that she grew anxious about returning to study in her native language once she got back to Puerto Rico. She preferred to attend a private school, if that were possible, where English was the main language of instruction. She told me that her grandmother was inquiring about the private schools, where Violetta could finish her last year of high school. In returning to the country of her birth she would ironically become an immigrant to that country, having to learn the language, if not the culture, all over again.

Closing Thoughts: Learning as Much as possible about Students

I have presented excerpts from participants’ experiences prior to their entering the schools to provide some context for the school experience itself. From my own experience as an English teacher of second language learners, I always wanted to know: "Who are these students? Where are they from? And, to paraphrase O’Brien (1990), "What did they carry?" It is vital to understand students’ backgrounds in as much depth and going back as far as possible in order to gain a deeper understanding of their academic and cultural needs, potential, or limitations (Macias, 1990; 1993).
Those who teach twelfth grade students, for example, may see their students too narrowly or only as twelfth graders, with little regard for what had constituted the students’ lives before they had arrived in the twelfth grade classroom. In identifying students as twelfth graders only, perforce, we view them ahistorically. Though they occupy twelfth grade space and time, as it were, that constitutes only a small part of the students’ whole life. Knowing more of the whole student enriches the school experience for both teacher and student.

It is difficult to find out a great deal about each individual student given all the constraints in school teaching. Teachers work with 100-200 students each day. (Many student behaviors labeled as aberrant are merely students’ attempts to be heard or known). In-depth interviewing enabled me to go beyond the limitations imposed by daily school routines, to gain a deeper, historical view of those students whose stories would otherwise be dimmed or lost altogether in the blur of 50 minute class periods so common in school curricula.

In this chapter, I have explored participants’ social, cultural, and educational antecedents prior to their coming to the United States. In the first half of the chapter I looked at their school experiences and noted particularly the harsh or repressive measures to which students were subjected. In the second part of the chapter, I recounted some of the journeys and migrations students made to the
United States. Much as their immigrant forebears of years past, the immigrants of today sought the many freedoms denied in their native countries and offered in the United States, still "The Promised Land." In so recalling their antecedent experiences, I have attempted to give access to students' histories they often lack as they pass through the various grades in schools and to show the strength of their character. In understanding more who they are as individuals, we get a glimpse of who our students are and who we all are as Americans.

Having provided some of their social, cultural, and educational history, and through their own words shed light on their lives and identities beyond their limited roles as twelfth or ninth or seventh grade students, I will proceed to the next phase of the students' journey, "the next few steps along the way." In the next chapter, I will continue to tell the participants' stories as they begin to learn English, acculturate themselves to American society, and enter the public schools.
CHAPTER 5

THE NEXT FEW STEPS ALONG THE WAY: ARRIVING IN THE UNITED STATES: THE JOURNEY’S EFFECTS ON FAMILY LIFE

In the preceding chapter I highlighted participants’ social, cultural, and educational antecedents from their native lands. In this chapter I portray the beginnings of their social, cultural, and educational - mainly linguistic - acculturation in their newly adopted land, America. I look at the participants’ experiences as they first arrive in this country, including the journey’s effects on their family lives, and their beginning to learn the English language both out of school and in bilingual and ESL classes in the schools.

Journey Effects on Family Life

With bags in hand and memories of their native countries in their minds, the participants arrived in the United States. While they had sufficient resources to make the trip here from their native countries, they were not from wealthy families. The majority were working-class people whose families immigrated here to secure decent jobs, to lift them from the poor or unstable economic conditions in their native countries. They moved to the United States for a chance at the proverbial better life, as Abdul stated when I asked him why he wanted to stay in America:
I just thought it was like [a] totally different place and [a] much, much, better place and I have an opportunity to be somebody here, to get a good job, get a good education. [When] I get out of school, [I can] get a good job. And that’s what it is here, I mean it’s much better than what I [had]. And I had a better chance to succeed here than to go back there.

Pedro, a fifteen-year-old tenth grader, also spoke of the opportunities in America, as well as the freedom and the cultural diversity:

[America] to me means a better life than I had before. America has more opportunities than Puerto Rico does, more jobs, more wealth than Puerto Rico does. I still consider [Puerto Rico] rich because of its beauty, but not because of its [economic] wealth. That’s why I consider myself an American. It means that I have more freedom than I had in Puerto Rico because the government is different. I can see more. More land, more different states..., more people with different cultures come here. [I can] learn [about] different cultures from other people, besides [my] own.

Moving from one place - country or city - to another often separated the participants from family members. Whether all the moving caused the separation, especially between mothers and fathers, was difficult to determine from the data. Fathers often moved to find steady work. Juan’s father, for example, once the family had arrived in the United States, went from New Haven to Washington, DC, to work because as Juan pointed out, the pay was better there, "about six or seven dollars an hour."

Separation from Family and Loss of Friends

When Orlando and his family moved to the United States from the Dominican Republic, his father remained behind to
keep his job as a university professor. By choice, Orlando, also a fifteen year old tenth grader, lived apart from his family in A Better Chance (ABC) house. The ABC program enables inner city students to attend quality academic schools outside the nation’s largest cities and sub-standard school districts. The rest of his family of seven lived some two hundred miles away in Queens, New York. Separated not only from his family, but also his close friends, as he remarked:

I’ve lost a lot of friends from New York since I’ve moved here. A lot of them say I’ve changed and that my attitude is different, and I said to them, ‘I’m still the same person,’ and they in a way say that I act [as though] I’m leaving the Spanish race or I’m turning my back on the Hispanics. I tell them that I haven’t changed at all and the only thing that’s different is that I’m receiving a better education than they are. And I’ve lost many a friend.

Having to justify his changing identity as he sought to really make something out of his life compounded Orlando’s loss of his close friends. His separation, however, from both his family and his friends seemed to strengthen him as an individual and gave him a clear sense of his educational and life goals.

Other participants "lost" friends and left family behind in the journey’s wake. David, for example, at one time lived with both parents in Curacao. His parents, however, sent him back to the Dominican Republic, his birthplace, where he lived with his grandmother for two years. At eleven years old, he immigrated with his mother to the United States. At the time of the interviews, David
lived with his mother and her boyfriend and his sister and her boyfriend, all in the same house.

Frequent moves within the school system itself adversely affected David’s literacy learning. He entered the public schools as a sixth grader, enrolled in a bilingual program. In the seventh grade he moved to an ESL class, and by eighth grade, the mainstream. Then, he left the middle school and went to Brockton High School where he was placed back in a bilingual program. In tenth grade he was placed in ESL classes, and finally in eleventh grade - when I interviewed him - back in the mainstream! Shifting back and forth between bilingual to ESL to mainstream further complicated his chances to learn English.

In spite of it all, David made no excuses for himself and was actually doing quite well in school. His attitude about himself and about learning corroborated what Larson-Freeman (1991) has noted: attitude, motivation, and personality aided in second language acquisition. David’s positive sense of self made the difference in his ability to learn English and do well in school. While moving so often splintered his family life, David stood resolute among all the changes.

Other participants’ journeys, too, led them hither and yon, far from their roots or established familial and community ties. Dora, her parents separated, went to Cleveland with her mother and her uncle. Soo-Kim, nineteen
years old when I interviewed her, had lived by herself in Fall River, where she had attended school since she was fifteen. Patricia lived with her mother and her sister. Ling lived with her sister and her father. Her mother and several of her eight siblings had remained behind in Vietnam.

A Troubled Marriage and Family Life

While Conrado lived with both his mother and father, theirs was a troubled and troubling marriage, as he explained:

My father was another thing. He was forgetting about us. That was another [problem] we had in the family. My mother was always crying for him because he didn’t want to go home. After work he always go to the party. He never get home early. He would sleep. That was it. I gotta wake up [at] five or five-thirty to go to school at six forty-five. That was a big deal to me because my mother always fight with him from the night, like at two o’clock when he came [home]. I have to wake up because I was sleeping on the [couch] in the living room. And it was hard for me....

The late night and early morning arguments affected Conrado physically and perhaps psychologically. Many mornings he went to school exhausted. Eventually the father left the house to live on his own. Though he returned now and then, he and Conrado’s mother had not reconciled their differences.

Broken or dysfunctional families are of course not the special domain of immigrant families or of any particular culture. Many students, immigrant and native-born alike, come from dysfunctional families. For the immigrant,
however, coming from a broken or separated family only added to their already burdensome lives in having to move here and become acculturated to American society. As Phuong said, when I asked her if she and her family liked it here in America:

Yeah, but [we are] not happy. We live too lonely. Nobody to talk to like [in] Vietnam. At Vietnam you can talk to anybody and over here you can’t trust anybody. Over there they not make money or something. They trust each other, not like here. Nobody can’t trust anybody. At all. I like over there [in Vietnam]. Over here you have a future and over there you got more relatives, more friends to talk to....

The future held promise, but the road there was lonely.

Families that Stayed Together

Finally, the other half of the participants, Carmen, Violetta, Eddie, Abdul, Pedro, Thuyen, and Phuong all lived with both parents. Soo-Kim’s parents lived together, but in South Korea. All the participants, however, as a result of their moving to the United States, were separated from at least one brother or sister. With youthful vigor and adaptability, though, they coped with the separations, inching forward steadily into American society and culture, grappling with all that was foreign or incomprehensible at first, including the English language.
Beginning to Learn English

As I mentioned earlier, I chose participants for this study who had been in mainstream English classes no longer than seven years. Of the sixteen participants, five had been mainstreamed for one year, two for two years, one for three years, three for four years, one for five, one for six, and two for seven. Thus, I was able to look at a range of experiences of second language learners at different stages of their development in acquiring conversational and academic English.

Once participants had arrived in the United States, learning English became an important priority and took considerable time and energy. As Cummins (1989) has suggested, while second language learners may learn conversational English in one or two years, it takes five to seven years for them to learn academic English to the point where they can succeed in school on a par with their native speaking peers. I look generally at how participants first learned to comprehend and speak the language, then how they began to read and write English, especially in school.

I begin with Pedro, who talked about his learning English and why he thought it was so important:

It happened so slowly. I just got used to it. I didn’t realize how good I was in English. I just talked. Slowly, I started figuring out how to get better. I started to talk more English than Spanish. I wasn’t dying to talk in Spanish anymore, just talk in English. You know, TV, my friends, and school.... I need to speak English more than Spanish because we’re in America.
English is going to be the number one [language]. To become successful, have a business, you got to have good English. [If] you go to college, you got to know English. Not just talking it, [but writing] sentences, all that stuff.

Patient with his own progress, Pedro understood the links between learning English well and economic and academic success in the United States. On the other hand, he did not relinquish his own cultural and linguistic identity, as he stated:

At home I speak Spanish. My Mom and Dad are Puerto Rican and so am I. We still keep the culture in our house. We never take our culture from the house. In our house we eat Spanish foods, we see Spanish shows. We still do that.

Pedro (and many of the other participants) lived and interacted in two different worlds. Darder (1991, p. 80) has described that in-between place as "within/the complex borders/of my double vision/of my two worldness,/of my twin beings,/of this place where/I am never who/I appear to be."

His home life contrasted markedly with his school life. His story reminded me of the sociocultural contexts of learning and the dissonances which arise when the Pedros in our classrooms leave their home life, language, and culture behind and head off to school (Heath, 1983). As they cross the tracks or the borders from one world to another, second language learners contend with a different language, culture, and discourse in the life of the school. Teachers must recognize the dissonances and work to promote academic literacy as language minority students negotiate their way in the school world.
Variability in Language Acquisition

Participants learned the English language in a variety of different ways. They learned from friends and relatives; from television; and of course, in school. Many participants recalled specifically their first encounters learning the language. Elena, for example, had this to say:

Well, when I first came in [to] the class, you would see all the students there and the teacher. [The class] was not all English. I was, of course, [with a] Spanish teacher. But she would teach me. On the board she would write English. She was my ESL teacher. And I wouldn’t know nothing. I would see her lips moving and I would just stare at her lips. I think that’s the way I learned, you know. I learned a little bit, just not to hear her voice, [but also] to see how she moves her lips. I would do the same movement she did with her lips and then the sound of it comes out. That’s how I think I learned.

Participants noted how important it was for them to hear their teachers pronounce the words. Indeed, going back to the turn of the century at least, second language educators have recognized the importance of sounding out words (see, for example, Wade, 1903). Elena’s story put a little twist on that aspect of language learning. Hearing the voice made a difference, but she also indicated that the teacher’s lip movement, the shape of the mouth and lips when enunciating a word or a sentence, also contributed to her learning English. Deaf people, after all, read lips to comprehend the language. Learning a language means putting as many of the variables as possible together in a way that gives meaning to the utterances. Facial cues and gestures.
play a part: how expressive and telling the hands, eyes, eyebrows, shoulders, mouth, and lips in communicating the meaning of the language. Elena’s story shows the multiple ways people acquire language. What may work well for one student may not work well for another.

One Participant’s Initial Fears of Leaving a Bilingual Class

Other factors, clearly less tangible than reading lips, affected participants’ learning English. For example, the specter of ethnic discrimination at first thwarted Conrado, as he recalled:

In junior high school I have [some] bilingual class[es]. I took ESL math and English - part of my class in English and half in Spanish. Then in high school they want me to change [to] regular class, but I didn’t want to because I was always saying that I would be with white people that were going to be bad with me I think. I didn’t want to go so I stayed in that bilingual class.... I thought it was going to be hard for me to be with white people, but I realize that they have the good feelings. I take class with them and sometimes they are like, well, more pleasurable than other[s], the Spanish one[s].

I did not ask Conrado if he had told his teachers what he had told me, namely that he did not want to go into the mainstream because he feared white people. How, then, to take into account what essentially remains invisible when assessing the second language learner’s abilities or needs? What other hidden or unspoken agenda do students carry that stymie their second language acquisition or indeed their general educational growth and development? And how to loosen Conrado’s fears and his tongue enough to enable him
to say what’s on his mind, to best address his concerns and others like him? His remarks and his initial fears about entering the mainstream raise many questions for educators about what lies unspoken, unheard, and unseen in our students’ lives.

From Bilingual to ESL to Mainstream by Grade Four

I turn my attention now to two young men who had no qualms about entering mainstream English classes, having "graduated" from ESL at the tender age of nine years old. Orlando and Pedro, tenth graders when I interviewed them, had been in mainstream English classes for seven years, longer than any of the other participants. They had both attended bilingual and ESL classes until the fourth grade, when they were placed in the mainstream. Orlando, a fifteen-year-old sophomore when I interviewed him, recounted his experiences in coming to the United States and first learning English:

I was born in the Dominican Republic and my native language is Spanish. I came to the United States when I was about four years old and started kindergarten and pre-school. The first three years of school I didn’t speak English and then after a while I got adapted and I was placed in ESL, which is English as a second language, and then after the third grade I don’t recall having any problems in school because of difficulties with English. My parents both speak English and at home we speak both languages....

I picked up English in about two years which I think is pretty well because there are people I know who have been here for fifteen years and can’t complete a sentence. I think that the ESL program did help, but there were times where they’d speak to me and I wouldn’t understand what
they were saying to me and they'd point and try to show me what they were talking about and I still wouldn't get what they were talking about. So, it’s hard coming here at first but then... the longer you live here the more adapted you become. I think it’s easier for you....

After the third grade I was taken out of ESL.... I had friend[s] named Pauline and Rhoda and they were bilingual and they would help me along in school. If the teacher gave an explanation about something and I didn’t understand what they were talking about... Sometimes I was lost but I can get the basic meaning of what they were trying to say. But sometimes they’d speak so fast and I wouldn’t be able to catch it all. I’d just get lost, so they’d [Pauline and Rhoda] help me get back on track....

I think I learned most of my English from television. I loved Sesame Street and Mr. Rogers and my cousin and I who are both the same age spend [sic] after school watching these programs. It [learning English] also came in part from school and my friends who were bilingual themselves. I think also reading had a lot to do with it. I’ve always been into reading and the minute I learned the basics of English, I was reading children’s books. So I think those were the main contributors to the language barriers disappearing....

Orlando spoke confidently of his abilities to speak English. While he acknowledged that "it’s hard coming here at first," he seemed to move effortlessly from the ESL class to the mainstream at an early age, and consequently from Spanish to English. He spoke more dispassionately about his experience than others who had more recently arrived in the United States and were still very much involved in acquiring the English language and learning American ways. But then, he had been speaking English fluently for several years already. Also, both parents spoke English. Unlike Pedro, whose parents spoke only
Spanish at home, Orlando had the option to speak English at home with his parents and some of his siblings.

Orlando’s account of his learning English showed the multiple ways he acquired the language, from friends, television, reading, and school instruction, all mutually reinforcing in language acquisition. Of course, all these elements may be conjoined in the English language classroom easily enough, even - or especially - friends. We cannot underestimate the value of talking in the classroom, particularly for the language minority student. Once teachers overcome the diehard notion that a quiet classroom means a "good" classroom, talking may be viewed as a legitimate, even a redoubtable pedagogical tool in language acquisition.

Pedro had immigrated from his native Puerto Rico to the United States when he was four years old. He had begun school in an ESL classroom and, as Orlando had, entered the mainstream as a third grader. In the following account of his first experiences in American schools, he noted not only the language difficulties he had but also the cultural adjustments he had to make:

I was born in Puerto Rico and lived there for four years. My Mom moved from Puerto Rico to the United States and I started school here, kindergarten up. [I] started in bilingual classes until the fourth [grade], [then] they moved me up to mainstream class. Then there were regular classes....

[At first] it was kind of confusing because they didn’t recognize you and their culture is different from mine. As you live here for a while, you get adjusted to the culture....
remember that it was difficult understanding the teacher, but I knew what they were saying....

[First] they taught me letters, alphabet, the words first. Most of it I learned by my friends in the neighborhood. They taught me some words and I kept on learning the words and that’s how I finally understand how to speak English.... First it was kind of hard, all English, and it was starting to get harder. I started [to] learn more. My friends helped me a lot, too, with my studies. They tell me some words, some extra words after class. We talk... and words come up, new words that I haven’t learned yet. They tell me the meaning....

I started watching TV and that... gave me some other words... Kids’ shows like Sesame Street, Reading Rainbow, Conjunction Junction, like that. And some cartoons... X-Man. Action adventure cartoon. It was good. Had a lot of action in it. Had a lot of complicated words. I didn’t understand them, so I started learning them. It was fun....

Pedro, much like Orlando, acquired English in multiple ways: school, friends, and television. At the outset, Pedro focused primarily on learning the words, the building blocks of the language. Reading played a less prominent role in his language acquisition, at least when he first began. Words mattered the most, as he indicated throughout his story. Many of the other participants also spoke of the importance of vocabulary instruction in their language learning. Words provided a foundation on which to build.

**The Language of the Street**

As Orlando and Pedro said, friends and relatives played key roles in participants’ first learning the English language. Juan, too, relied on his cousin and his friends a great deal, as he noted:
Well, when I got there [New Haven], my cousin ..., I didn’t know my cousin because I’d never seen him, but I went [to] meet him and everything. He had a lot of friends, you know. We used to always get together, and used to be always hanging out. I used to always be with him and [his] friend. He used to talk English, but I didn’t understand. He used to laugh because I would talk. He used to tell me, ‘I’m going to show you some words and everything,’ and I was like, ‘great.’ But he used to tell me the bad language first. So he kept telling me a word, and I was like, ‘What’s that...?’ I started laughing. He say, ‘this word means this, this word means this.’ That’s where I learned first bad languages.

Then I went to school and I learned, and we used to always be together, but I think he used to talk a lot of English over Spanish, you know.... I learned with my friends, mostly.... Not on the streets, you know, hanging outside, I used to be right there [at] my house outside [where] my cousin, my friends [were] talking. I used to see them talking English. I’d be looking around. ‘What are you talking about?’ He was like, ‘I’m going to tell you what we’re talking about.’ And school and everything, that’s how [I] learn[ed] some English....

English language instruction Juan received in school no doubt aided and abetted his second language acquisition, but his cousin got him rolling and proffered the spice. Ling also mentioned that "bad words" counted among the first words she learned in English. In trying to understand why they learned profane words early on, I decided that it probably had less to do with the learners’ proclivities towards learning street language, than the frequency with which the words were used in general by all language users.

Also, many of the participants noted how videos and films enhanced or complemented their language learning.
With so many popular films and video laced with expletives, and much comprehensible input to bolster understanding, little wonder that participants learned "bad words" first, with little effort. The leap from scat to scatology was easy enough to make for anyone whose ears were pressed even slightly towards everyday talk or Hollywood cinema.

**Vietnamese Participants' Difficulties Learning English**

Generally, the Vietnamese speakers had the most difficulty in speaking the English language, that is, articulating the words themselves and grasping some of the general principles of the language itself. For example, subject-verb agreement ("and the teacher always speak"); verb tenses ("in Vietnamese, they don't have past tense and future,"); lack of articles ("we usually watch movie"); use of prepositions ("I have to look on the dictionary"); and negation ("sometimes I not understand").

Enrolled in a United States school for the first time as a seventh grader, Phuong attended both bilingual and ESL classes. When I interviewed her, she was just completing her junior year at Fall River High School. I asked her about her first experiences in the ESL class:

J: When you took ESL classes, you weren't speaking any English at all?

P: No, not even A, B, C.

J: You come to class... first day of class, first weeks of class. How did they begin to teach you English?
P: She [the teacher] speak English but in ESL she tells me how to say A, B, C. Sometimes the teacher taught me how to read, like one word by one word they teach you, so I got a chance to learn.... When I go home I read it by myself. Sometimes my father helped me but he don’t have a lot of time. He have to work. And not even my Mom. She doesn’t speak English. I go to school and people read. I have to follow. Teacher don’t have time to talk to you... so I have to read it and she call me and I have to read. I have to put myself in it, read the words and start learn....

[I don’t] speak [much] outside of class except [when I] go to work [and] meet some friends. I [also] speak in Miss Swan’s class. Sometimes I’m all quiet, get in there and teacher teach. Just listen and not talk. Sometimes talk in Vietnamese to some friends but go home and not speak English. [At home] nobody speak[s] English so you can’t talk. My sisters we all speak all the languages [Chinese, Lao, Vietnamese]. Sometimes speak English. But go to work speak English.... When I study, I watch [television]. I keep my eye on it. Every time hold the book and watch television and I understand it....

J: What do you think helped you the most?

P: Well, like going to school [and] talk[ing]. Just learn every word, every time and go home have to learn A, B, C, that’s all, and read. We not talk much in class sometimes and my teacher like[s] me to read. She point at me and tell me to read and I read....

Sometimes, [there was] some writing, like a story, tell about how I am, stuff like that and write some poems, just little writing but not much. But we are working on vocab[ulary] and grammar and read the book.... We have short story in one book.... [We] read [it] in English and remember that word, what that [word] means. Sometimes I’m lazy, not look at the dictionary. I remember English, but sometimes I’m not understand in English, have to look on the dictionary for Vietnamese.... I have lunch [and at] that time I don’t much speak English. The teacher come here, [points to the milk, [and asks], "What is that called?" I don’t know. I don’t say anything, just sit there and teacher tell me, "That’s milk," and every time she come back to me, point at what that called - "milk" -
and I remember it. Sometimes she come and show me how to read and how to call [things]....

Phuong’s ESL teachers instructed and guided her both in and out of class. The ESL teachers knew the importance of comprehensible input (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), for example, pointing at and saying the word for milk in the lunchroom. Too, the ESL teachers apparently recognized the value of comprehensible output (Swain, 1985), allowing students - simply enough - to talk, to try out what they knew. While it was obviously important for Phuong to pronounce the words, comprehensible output played much less a role in acquiring new vocabulary words than comprehensible input. Reading facilitated much greater vocabulary acquisition than talking (Krashen, 1989).

Learning English did not come easy for Phuong, even with the strong support of ESL teachers and staff, the use of television and video, her father’s tutelage, and her own self-motivation. As we will see later on, when she arrived at the threshold of the mainstream English class, no longer buttressed by the ESL teacher, who "tell[s] you everything and you follow step by step," she had tremendous difficulty walking through the door, entering the mainstream English class.

The Non-Remembrance of Things Past: Participants Who Remembered Little of how They First Began to Learn English or How Teachers Taught Them

Another of the participants, Violette, had moved from Puerto Rico to the United States when she was four years
old, the same age as Orlando and Pedro when they had moved. She had attended bilingual classes from kindergarten through the third grade and ESL classes from fourth through the eighth grade. She had spent roughly two-thirds of her K-12 school life in the United States in either bilingual or ESL classes. Nonetheless, Violetta, a seventeen-year-old eleventh grader, had difficulty remembering the details of when and where she first started learning English:

English? It’s hard to tell. It was maybe in fourth grade [or] third. I don’t remember too much about it....

J: Do you remember how you started?

V: No. It’s like starting how to write, I don’t know when I started to write.... Well, [sixth grade was] no difference than fifth grade; it was just that I didn’t have the Spanish class, so it was just in English.... We did grammar and write and we did correct ourselves... yeah. The words that we wrote wrong, we used to correct them....

J: Do you remember the kinds of things you wrote in ESL class?

V: Um...oh, no I don’t remember.

J: Or do you remember any stories that you read?

V: Not from 5th grade, no.

J: What’s the first story that you remember reading in an English class?

V: First story?

J: Or one of the first ones.

V: I don’t know. I don’t remember.

I tried to make sense out of what she did not say or remember as well as what she said. Many questions arose as I read and analyzed Violett’a’s story. Had she been so long
in ESL classes that she could not clearly separate one event from another, that after so many years lines blurred between one activity and the next? Her responses showed that she still had difficulty with basic English syntax ("like easy words she start"), usage ("more better"), and agreement ("the words she gave us is not a noun"). Had her learning English become fossilized in an interlanguage state (Larsen-Freeman 1991), reached a certain point which she was unable - or unwilling - to go beyond?

She also stated that she "can’t have Spanish class at all," which I interpreted differently from "I don’t have Spanish class...." "Can’t" implied that somehow the choice was not hers. Did she still want to lean on what she knew - Spanish - rather than cross the border into the new language? Again, had she spent so much time in the bilingual and ESL classroom that effectively she was less prepared psychologically and linguistically to enter mainstream English classes?

Eddie, like Violetta, also mainstreamed in the eighth grade, had little recollection of how he first learned the language, or how his teachers had taught him:

J: In any one of grades 5, 6, 7, or even 8, how did they teach you? Do you remember how they started teaching you English?

E: No. It was fun. A lot of reading....

J: Do you remember what you did with vocabulary?

E: English. Reading. And I don’t really remember.
In reviewing the transcript of Eddie’s story, I noticed that I had asked him how his teachers had taught him English, rather than how he had learned, as I had asked Violetta and others. Essentially, I had asked Eddie what his experiences in the schools were like, more than his general experiences learning English. A seventeen year old eleventh grader, he was the most disconnected from school and schooling of all the participants. Since he was absent frequently, held back in school due to poor attendance and grades, I was not surprised that Eddie’s most vivid memories lie elsewhere than in school. He was the most skittish of all the participants and difficult to contact to complete the scheduled interviews. All the more reason I wanted to sit down with Eddie for an extended time to enable him to tell his story.

One of the other participants, Patricia, mainstreamed in the fifth grade, recounted that she had learned English primarily at home. She also said that she could not remember about her experiences in fifth, sixth, and seventh grades.

Though puzzled by some participants who responded that they could not remember, while others had vivid recollections of their second language learning experiences, I have acknowledged participants’ differences in how they acquired the language. How they first began to comprehend, speak, read, and write, and how their teachers taught them. I am also intrigued by their selective
memories of those experiences, the connections between language acquisition and second language learners' memories of language acquisition.

In an ERIC documents search, I found little at all related to "Memory and Second Language Learners." Some of participants' early experiences I had asked them to reconstruct took place at a time in their lives when they spoke no English. I had asked them, therefore, to tell me a story in English they had experienced in another language. How would that experience translate into a language they were, in most cases, still struggling with?

All of these thoughts about memory became all the more sobering when I reflected on Doris Lessing's (1994, p. 12) question, "How do you know that what you remember is more important than what you don't?" She acknowledged, further, just how tricky memory ("the landscape") really was. Was her question just a nifty way to rationalize what we know is lost anyway? Or, will the essence, if not the detail, of a person's experience come out sooner or later - by the end of the third interview, in the case of the second language learners - regardless of what they cannot remember? Thelen offered the following perspective of memory as social construct:

Instead of visualizing memory as a full-blown representation of an objective reality that people retrieve from some storehouse in their minds, memory becomes an active new construction of a story from isolated associations, recognitions, and recollections. Instead of being driven by a concern with how accurately the memory depicts an earlier occurrence, the new
approach emphasizes the needs in the present that lead a person to construct the recollection in a particular way. People, in this view, fix their audiences very clearly in mind as they decide which elements to recollect, how to organize and interpret those elements, and how to make the memory public. They shape, omit, distort, recall, and reorganize a memory to fit changing contexts. (1981, p. B1)

In thinking about Eddie, a young man on the fringe of school and society, I can see clearly why he chose not to remember. Who was I? Why should he tell me his story? I represented school or school authority, no friend or confidante of Eddie’s, surely. Who exactly was Eddie’s audience? With so much to sort out in his mind, little wonder that memory "failed" him. Issues of trust had not been established sufficiently enough for Eddie to come full force with his story. Lack of memory was a buffer zone between his story, the audio-tape recorder that sought to capture that story, and me, who tried to prod memory and evoke a telling tale.

With the advent of technology, especially computer technology, we may have come to rely too heavily upon the analogy of the computer and the mind. Memory is something to be retrieved at the push of a button. As Thelen has noted, it is much more complex - and subjective - than that. It would be too paradoxical to expect that in using in-depth interviewing which seeks participants’ subjective understandings of events, we could at the same time extract memories objectively from a pool of memories that lie within the brain.
Finally, it is important for me to acknowledge my own role as interviewer in eliciting (or not) students' responses. In reviewing the transcripts, I realized that in many instances I had asked participants if they could "remember," not "reconstruct" a particular experience. The distinction is a critical one, as Seidman (1991) has suggested. Asking participants to remember an event may get in the way of their telling it. "Reconstruction is based partially on memory and partially on what the participant now senses is important about the past event" (Seidman, p. 67).

Entering the Mainstream Directly, With no Prior Bilingual or ESL Classes

Of all sixteen participants, only one, Abdul, had not enrolled in either a bilingual or ESL class prior to his entering the mainstream. A native Arabic speaker, he came to the United States as a seventh grader. As soon as we had begun the interview, he told me the following:

I might want to tell you something before we begin. I was never in an ESL class. I didn't know English when I came here in seventh grade. I had a tutor, it wasn't ESL class... Back in Palestine [Israel] they taught us English. They taught us [to] read a little, like the alphabets. They taught maybe a few words like cats, dogs, people, not even anything like sentences.... I knew very little. When I [came] to [Brockton for] the seventh grade, they spoke English. It was real tough. I couldn't talk to people. I had to ask my cousin to ask the teacher.... If I wanted to go to the bathroom, I had to ask slow[ly] [for] permission from the teacher if I could go to the bathroom or whatever. It was real tough. Homework. I [knew] very little. And at the same time, I had to learn a lot.... The teacher, the two of them down there help[ed] me a
lot [with] my homework. She used to help me do my spelling. Explain the meanings of the words. Help me do sentences. Help me create my own sentences and try to work out with me, just explain everything to me, like science or whatever. I don’t know. I didn’t understand English and I didn’t understand the lesson. [And the teacher] explain[ed] [what the] paragraph means.

J: And how would she do that?

A: She spoke Arabic. She translated it [English into Arabic]. And she like told me what the words meant. And she translated things I didn’t know and she try to help me out as much as she could and I think she did a good job.... She taught me all the alphabets [and] how to write. The writing is like totally different - Arabic writing from English writing. We start from right to left. And English is from left to right, so that was totally different. And the words and everything, alphabets, it’s totally different.... It’s too difficult. I thought about giving up and just go back to Palestine, but I was like, ‘no, this is what I want to do, this is what I want to be and I got to watch out.’ And I just read the book, study the books that I had.... [Also], television, radio. They kinda help me a lot too, I think.

As I had pointed out earlier, Abdul cherished the freedoms he had in the United States and he was not about to give up so easily. He believed that education was a way to better his position in life, and in America he understood that learning English was an essential part of his education. Proud and spirited, he worked tenaciously to succeed in school and in the society. He echoed many of the other participants’ accounts of how difficult it was when first learning the language, though he alone of all of them was immersed in a mainstream English class from the outset.
In language acquisition, learners progress from first hearing and comprehending the language, then speaking, reading, and writing it. All the literacy activities interconnect and interrelate. I talk about them discretely only to gain some perspective of how they function individually in the broader classroom discourse. In this chapter I have focused mainly on how participants first learn to comprehend and speak English, to underscore both the variability of their experiences and the difficulty of their task. Further, since I have used in-depth interviewing as the methodology, the spoken language is the text, the discourse, and the basis for analysis.

Reading and writing, of course, play an important part in further strengthening and deepening the learners' knowledge of the English language. I turn next to a brief discussion about participants' first experiences with reading aloud and with writing in their new language.

Reading Aloud

While many of the participants, including Eddie and Phuong, expressed their reluctance or their embarrassment at reading aloud, the majority of them clearly felt that it was helpful to their learning English. Juan, speaking for the majority, had this to say about reading aloud when I asked him the following question:

J: Do you think it's a good thing when an English teacher asks you to read aloud? All of a sudden
the English teacher's just going around the room and saying, "Juan, I'd like you to read."

JUAN: Read? Yeah. Before, I was hiding in the corner. I was real quiet and I was like, oh, I don't want the teacher to call me to read, you know? So my friends used to go, "Why?" Because (I didn't tell them), I get shy and I get real red. [And they say], "Oh, look at him because probably I'll get myself [stuck] on a word or something. But now, the teacher's like who wants to read and I'll be, "Me, I'll read, I'll read." First, you get shy. Now I don't get so shy reading in front of the people. That was good, yeah.

In spite of his initial shyness or embarrassment, Juan - and other participants - affirmed the positive results from reading aloud. Reading aloud gradually built their self-confidence in using the language and speaking publicly. It also enabled or "force[d] learners to move from semantic to syntactic processing" (Larsen-Freeman, 1991, p. 321), as they began to grasp how words connected to each other in sentences.

Requiring or coercing students to read aloud, however, may not always be appropriate. When I taught in public school, I had some students who adamantly refused to even speak in class, let alone read aloud. And Cope (1997, p. 21), based on interviews with students, has reported - at least for mainstream English students - that "... the most intensely personal negative experience for students was being forced to read aloud in class."

What prompts or motivates a second language learner, though, may be quite different from what motivates a native speaker. Second language learners, as Pedro had recalled, viewed their learning of the language as a passport to
higher ground, to social, economic, and educational opportunities. Reading aloud, among other learning activities, provided them the opportunity to move forward in their learning English. The native speaker may be more governed by peer pressure or just general antipathy towards playing the academic game after so many years. The task for mainstream English teachers who have both native speakers and language minority students becomes more complex in trying to decide who and how much should be read aloud. But reading aloud and thinking aloud should be a fundamental part of the English language classroom. All learners profit from reading aloud. Through inflection, cadence, and emotion, the human voice enhances the meaning of the language.

Writing in the ESL Classroom

For those I interviewed, journal writing was a staple in the ESL classroom. Participants preferred the journal writing because they could write about what interested them and about their feelings. As Ling stated:

Sometime[s] I like writing, too, but not write very well, you know. I think writing is what I feel and mean. Journal I love the best. Just writing out what I feel. But you cannot give me a lot in my journal. How can I write a lot in my journal, you know? And if I write, I don’t know what I’m writing, I just put it down, and make it look like a sentence, but I don’t know if it’s wrong, the grammar - I don’t know if it’s wrong or right. I like to write. Journal is the [best place] I can write. Sometimes I can make a poem. I like to write a love poem. That’s good for me.... I don’t know if it’s a poem or not, I just talk it. I just write.... My friends say,
"Oh you can't make a poem." I say, "Aha, but I make that poem!"

Ling's journal writing captured feelings in a way that her speech could not. If she struggled to articulate English when she spoke the language, or felt embarrassed by the way she talked, the writing afforded her the chance to express her inner emotional life. If speech was ephemeral - and difficult at best for her - writing enabled her to fiddle around with the language until she captured the emotion just so. Writing gave Ling the confidence to explore uncharted territory. It guided her towards a deeper understanding of the language, and she persisted in spite of her friends' reproofs.

Other participants, too, saw the journal as a place to explore personal thoughts and feelings. Soo-Kim, for example, said:

Sometimes we went [on] a field trip to the museums near the school and we see the sort of stuff [art exhibits, paintings] and when we come back, we write things about that, like how we feel about it, how we thought about it, stuff like that.

Soo-Kim called her first ESL class a "living English" class. As much as possible her teacher tried to connect language to the students' lives. Field trips were an important part of the curriculum. Students ventured out into the community to use the language and then returned to the classroom to write about their experiences.
While Abdul’s teacher provided the writing prompt for the students, most of the participants preferred choosing their own, as both Phuong and Thuyen stated:

Phuong: It’s hard to write. Like, you don’t know how to write. [Does] the verb go after the pronouns or something? It’s hard to write. You have to read and understand so you can write it down. If not, you can’t write it.... I don’t like writing.... I like [to] choose my own [topic], [so] I know how to write about [it]. If the teacher give it [the topic] to me, maybe it=s hard for me, so I don’t know how to write [about] it. The topic I can choose myself so I can choose an easy topic, easy for me to write.... I can write about myself or something, where I come from, the future, what I like to do, or [a] story that I like....

Thuyen: [In ESL] classes, they give us a lot of writing to do. We change the sentences, write a summary, a paragraph.... They give us some subject and you had to [write about it].... I like it more [when] you make your own topic. [It’s] easier for me to write than [when] the teacher gives us a topic....

Teachers often asked students to write summaries of stories or to answer textbook questions related to stories. They were rarely asked to voice their thoughts or opinions of what they had read. So the journal became the place for them to write about the personal and the familiar. Having choices further enabled the fledgling English writers to explore the language from a place they knew best: their own storehouse of thoughts and feelings, with words they knew best to express those thoughts and feelings.

Closing Thoughts

In this chapter, I have presented some of the participants’ stories of how, when, and where they began to
learn English as their second [third or fourth] language. The process of learning a second language was neither simple nor linear (Kellerman, 1985), with both similarities and variations among the participants’ language acquisition. Participants spoke of the multiple ways they learned English: reading lips, talking to friends or relatives, working with a tutor, watching television, and of course the instruction they received in the schools. All ways enhanced their language acquisition, with varying efficacy.

Not only did participants learn in multiple ways, but teachers taught them in multiple ways. In ESL classrooms in schools, they experienced a variety of approaches to second language acquisition. Pedro and Phuong began with the letters of the alphabet, proceeded to words, and then to longer passages in books, a parts to whole approach. Violetta and Eddie remembered little about their initial experiences. Orlando and Soo-Kim talked more of a "whole language" approach to their learning. Abdul learned with a tutor who translated English into Abdul’s native Arabic.

Participants talked about the difficulties of learning English: "it was hard," many of them avowed. They overcame the initial embarrassment of reading or speaking aloud, and gradually became more self-confident in expressing themselves through listening, speaking, reading, and writing English.
While there were common links among their experiences, no consistent or identifiable pattern emerged from either the way they learned English or the ways they were taught English, except perhaps most generally that they began with listening, and proceeded to talking, reading, and writing. Even there, once they got beyond the initial phases of those first ESL classes, many of the reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities were interwoven with each other.

Those participants who had opportunities to speak English in their homes, especially with their parents, progressed more rapidly and spoke more fluently. Patricia and Orlando, who were mainstreamed longer than all the other participants except Pedro, arguably were the most fluent English speakers. They never struggled with finding the right English word or paused to think in one language and then translate into English. Both spoke English at home with parents and siblings. Orlando was enrolled in "honors" courses and Patricia in "regular" academic courses, neither remedial nor honors.

Pedro, a student at Gage Vocational High School, spoke much more haltingly. While he had been in the mainstream for the same time as Orlando, Pedro spoke only Spanish at home with his parents and siblings. If his language abilities differed from those who had spent a comparable time in mainstream English classes, his goals were no less
ambitious than Orlando’s or Patricia’s, or any of the other participants:

[I want] to work for a company or own a business. Not own it, but [be a] manager, something high..., a supervisor or... making parts for cars, like Ford. Making parts for NASA.... I have to study more, like four years in college to do that. Get a bachelor’s degree or a Masters. Try to take a course in English or some other subject while I’m in college....

Participants’ success in first learning to speak English and then continuing to read and write it in the classroom depended on several factors. How literate were they in their own language? Did their parents, brothers or sisters speak English? Patricia’s and Orlando’s parents both spoke English and they were among the most fluent of all the participants. Elena’s father had died when she was a young girl and her mother spoke no English. She was less fluent, yet no less motivated to learn and succeed in school.

What were participants’ individual attitudes, motivations, intellectual abilities? David and Patricia said that nothing would stand in their way to linguistic and academic success. How important a role did a tutor have? Abdul first learned English with a tutor and was now doing quite well as an eleventh grader. How old were they when they first began to learn English? In what grade did they enter the mainstream? Violetta and Eddie took eight years to finally reach the mainstream. Pedro and Orlando took three years. Eddie was on the verge of dropping out
of school. Violetta was about to return to Puerto Rico. Pedro and Orlando were entering the twelfth grade.

So many variables comprised the experiences of participants, either enhancing or diminishing their abilities to learn the language and to succeed in school. What stands out the most is the determination of the participants' to "make it" in spite of many obstacles.

We have seen, then, the participants move from one country or city to another in the United States and then into bilingual or ESL classrooms, before reaching the mainstream English classroom. They faced many obstacles along the way. "It was hard," as many of them have stated. But participants generally brought strong spirit, humor, and grit with them to aid in their own language acquisition and acculturation into the society. In the next chapter, we shall continue to follow their footsteps as they enter - graduate - into mainstream English classes.
CHAPTER 6

THE TRANSITION FROM ESL TO THE MAINSTREAM

In the previous chapter, I recounted how participants first acquired the English language, those first few words on the street, many of them scatological or profane, the rhythmic letter and word games on Sesame Street, and the A, B, C's in the ESL classroom. From there the participants graduated to more words, sentences, paragraphs, stories, and so on. In ESL classrooms, they listened, talked, read aloud, and wrote primarily in journals on their way to ever greater English language proficiency. The ESL class launched them on their way to the mainstream.

In this chapter, I look at participants' experiences as they first enter mainstream English classes. What was the transition from ESL to the mainstream like for them? I also explore their experiences with vocabulary and reading. How did participants continue to learn English? And how did their teachers teach them?

On First Entering the Mainstream: Another Tough Change

On first entering the mainstream English classroom, second language learners faced a new set of difficulties. Again, as they had done previously in leaving their native countries for the United States, they would once more leave the world of the familiar, the ESL classroom this time, for
the world of the unfamiliar, the mainstream classroom. As
Clegg has stated:

There is good evidence, for example, for the view
of the withdrawal [ESL] class as ‘haven’: the
place in the school which acts as a buffer to
culture shock, refuge from racist abuse, and
comprehensible language environment; and the ESL
teacher as preserver of cultural and linguistic
identities; support for self-esteem, and source
of high expectations. In this view, it is in the
mainstream school where damage can be done.
(1996, p. 9)

Participants spoke fondly of their ESL classes and
their ESL teachers, indeed depended on them greatly for
their success in school and in society. Soo-Kim spoke
about one of her ESL teachers:

The people from all different kind of
nationalities feel very shy and they have a
really hard time. They have [a] hard time
speaking. Most of my ESL teachers tried to
understand the individual student first. If they
know this student is not very active [or is] very
shy, [or] don’t want to do this first, she always
[says], ‘Oh, don’t worry.’ The teachers console
the students, [tell them], ‘Don’t worry, you will
do fine. It’s nothing. It’s going to be OK....’
ESL teacher[s] talk to [each other], share their
opinion about the students. That’s what they do.
Very nice.... The teachers [are] always
concerned about individual students.

Participants were not likely to find that kind of
support in the mainstream. For the most part, mainstream
classes were much larger. Teachers did not have or take the
time to talk to students the way ESL teachers did. Most
mainstream classes were also half as long as ESL classes,
which further reduced the time that mainstream teachers
could devote to individual students.
Also, for the first time participants were together with their native-speaking peers. Most likely, the mainstream teachers spoke only English, too. Though I did not ask that question directly, some of the participants told me that their teachers spoke only English and I knew personally that some of the teachers spoke English only.

Participants spoke of their confusion about idioms and the multiple meanings or usages of many English words. While some of the second language learners had studied idioms in their last year of ESL class before entering the mainstream, they were often baffled by some expressions and usage of the language. As Ling recalled:

I hope the word in American [has] one word, one meaning. That is good because [it] is not [as] confus[ing] [as] one word, two meanings. Sometimes we don’t know what this one [means]. And idiom. Idiom is confus[ing]. Sometimes I don’t know how to do it. I just write it but teacher say it’s wrong. What’s wrong? I just write [what] I think [it] mean[s]. I just write enough [for the teacher] to say "It’s wrong, it’s wrong."

Ling had spoken earlier of the difficulties she had with English because some words had multiple usages, for example, "place," which could be either noun or verb, depending on the context. While she could ascribe a meaning to a particular word, based more on the literal meaning of the word, she struggled with the syntactical meanings. For example, she might have difficulty with, "Let’s go to my place, where I may place the package." She may only recognize the meaning of "place" as it is used as a noun.
Don’t Fence Me Out

One of Ling’s primary motivations or goals in learning English was "so I can go to college." Elena, on the other hand, "wanted to know what they [her classmates and peers] were talking about," so that she would feel a part of what was going on in school and in the society:

Um, when I came, oh, that’s the big one, that’s very bad. I had learned a lot of English so they put me to a normal level where students knew English already. So, it was different. It was bad. Because, yes, I knew English, but I wasn’t like the rest. I wasn’t [an] all English student so I felt different. People felt different from me too. In New Haven most of the people, you could say 90%, were White and African. I don’t know, just way less Hispanics, so everybody just talk and talk English. I just stare at them. What are they saying? Are they talking about me? It was bad, it was bad. I actually got into a fight because of this. People would talk behind my back. This person is talking about me and they would keep talking and talking. By the way that they moved, that’s how you know they talked about me. But after that, I thought, after the fight, I said, if they’re talking about me then I don’t care. And that actually make me learn more English. It gave me more of the knowledge. I just wanted to learn more English because I wanted to be part of the people. I wanted to know what they were talking about....

Being an outsider was painful for Elena. Already alienated culturally because Hispanics were clearly in the minority in her school, Elena also remained on the outside because she could not speak the language as well as her peers. She was determined to learn English to change her marginal status, to move from without to within.
Failed Transitions

Several of those I interviewed, including David, Elena, Carmen, and Patricia, failed in their first year in the mainstream. Patricia described her first year in the following way:

I was in bilingual classes up to the fifth grade. When I was in fifth grade, that’s when they put me in all English classes. I had really good grades from kindergarten to fourth grade. When I was in fifth grade I had "F"s and everything but my fifth grade teacher told me that was normal for kids going from bilingual to all English and she said that was normal so not to worry, that it will get better.

David noted much more tersely that he had "failed twice." He had failed when enrolled in elementary school in Curacao where Dutch was the primary language of instruction. And when he went from a bilingual class to the mainstream in junior high school, he failed again.

While she did not "fail," Carmen spoke of the difficulties in her first year in the mainstream:

It was hard, but then I started to do the work.... I got [bad grades]. We usually do things like vocabulary, but the vocabulary was harder, really hard. We define them and we’ll talk about the word. They’ll teach us what’s a verb and subject.... I never had a "D" before. I was a little bit upset and then I try my hardest to bring it up.

Failure need not be measured exclusively in terms of a grade, though both Patricia and David got failing grades when they first entered mainstream English classes. Carmen avoided a failing grade, but a "D" could not have provided much consolation.
Added to the rebuff of a failing grade, Patricia’s teacher expected her to fail in that first year in the mainstream. As Patricia recalled, "...my fifth grade teacher told me that [failing] was normal for kids going from bilingual to all English and she said not to worry, that it will get better."

The question remains, though, "who is failing?" While the learners’ and the teachers’ abilities must be accounted for, what Clegg (1996) has called the 'facilitating environment,' extends beyond the classroom. What other supports do second language learners have to facilitate their transition from ESL to the mainstream? Does the school generally support the second language learners, or simply allow them to fend for themselves once they entered the mainstream?

In two of the schools where I interviewed students, Fall River and Brockton, I saw excellent support systems for participants once they had left the ESL program. At Brockton, Ling met regularly with a Vietnamese tutor in the library. Other bilingual teachers conferred with students in the library and assisted with homework. At Fall River, participants had access to a program, led by Mrs. Swan, which provided tutoring in all subjects to ESL students. All three participants I interviewed at Fall River spoke of the wonderful support they had received in Mrs. Swan’s program.
How Mainstream English Teachers Taught and How Language Minority Students Learned Vocabulary and Reading

Recent research in both first and second language development shows the interrelatedness of reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Nurss & Hough, 1992). While I turn my attention next to participants' experiences with vocabulary and reading in mainstream English classrooms, I wanted to note that their experiences with language lie within a broader literacy context, interconnecting speaking, listening, reading and writing. Each skill influences or enhances students' overall literacy in the English language. In talking to participants, I asked them to talk discretely about reading, writing, speaking, and grammar. I might have asked them if they saw any connections between or among the various literacy components, but I did not. Without that information from them, it is of course up to me to make sense of their overall language acquisition and literacy experiences.

I had a good idea of what went on in English classes from my own teaching experiences and from many observations of English teachers as a supervisor of student teachers. But I wanted to know what the experience was like from the second language learner's point of view. Now that participants had moved beyond the initial stages of learning to comprehend and speak the English language, how did the mainstream teachers teach vocabulary and reading? What worked or did not work for participants in their continuing English language development?
Vocabulary

Participants spoke more about vocabulary lessons or activities in mainstream English classes than any other component of the curriculum. Several thought it was the most important of all the components in the curriculum. Though students spoke a good deal about vocabulary lessons, I was not able to determine how much time in class their teachers actually spent teaching vocabulary. Most vocabulary assignments required students to do the work outside of class, and then come to class prepared to take a vocabulary quiz or exam. In fact, Graves (1987) has suggested that secondary teachers spend less time teaching vocabulary than their elementary counterparts, who devote very little time as it is.

Words, Words, Words

Nevertheless, many participants regarded vocabulary as the essential building blocks of the language, corroborating Ellis’s (1994, p. 24) assertion that second language learners "attach considerable importance to vocabulary...." Pedro, for example, had this to say:

We did vocabulary and read, [studied] grammar, all the stuff in the books. Mostly what helped me was the definitions. The vocabulary we had. Words. Understand what they’re saying.

And Juan, too, said he liked vocabulary.

When I was a freshman, I liked English, you know, new student. And vocabulary, I liked it. I used to go study at home, get definition and everything, and so when I come back to class for the test or something, I liked it. Sometimes I
used to forget it, you know. I have to study again because I forget a word or something like that real fast. I was studying real fast and then I get them, when they give me a paper, I started doing it and I like it. But the only thing I don’t like is homework, that’s what.... Yeah, when they give me the words to look in the dictionary, I like it. Real fast, and you look for them, write them down, to learn. Yeah, I like it because of that, too, you could look at the dictionary.

Abdul even identified vocabulary as its own subject in the English curriculum:

[Vocabulary] was a big part of my seventh grade. I didn’t really do very well in vocabulary. But my cousin try to help me out sometimes. He help[ed] me out most of the times, actually.... And that’s how I did it. Vocabulary was hard for me. It’s not really hard any more.... Like right now, I get a good grade. It’s really one of my best subjects. I don’t even really study that much but I have a good memory. I just remember words.... We had a book for vocabulary. The teacher types up the vocabulary words every week. We had to write definitions [and] sentences for the vocabs and we’d have a test every week on vocabs.

Teachers taught vocabulary in a variety of ways. Some used vocabulary books and placed lists of twenty to thirty words weekly on the board. They required students to get dictionary definitions and write a sentence using the new vocabulary word. The vocabulary words often were separate from the context of a story, play, or poem. Elena had marched proudly through many of the words in the dictionary, as she noted, though she still had a ways to go:

Oh, God. We’ve done almost the whole dictionary. All of them. We’re up to "C" now. Yeah. Every week, two lessons in a week.... Those that he will know that we don’t understand, he would put
in [the lesson]. And we would have to find the meaning and synonym or anything like that....

Most participants' teachers taught vocabulary intentionally, that is, presenting students with a list of words, asking students to find and memorize definitions for those words. Indeed, my questions to the participants related much more to how their teachers taught them, not more generally how they might have acquired English vocabulary incidentally, either through reading, talking, or listening (see Ellis, 1994, for his definitions of and distinctions between intentional and incidental vocabulary instruction).

Ellis (1994) has stated that second language learners acquire most of their vocabulary incidentally, through oral input. He has further suggested (p. 24) that, "Learning a word involves a gradual process of adding depth to an initial, shallow representation." A student who encounters a new word in the context of a sentence may comprehend the word in the context of the sentence without learning what the word actually means. So, acquiring a new vocabulary word differs from learning it, which can take considerably more time.

Meanwhile, Krashen (1989) has asserted that second language learners acquire much of their vocabulary incidentally through reading. Nagy and Herman (1987) have recognized the value or the validity of both oral and written texts as comprehensible inputs, as it were, sufficient and necessary to vocabulary acquisition and
learning. And while many researchers agree (see Sternberg, 1987) that vocabulary is best learned in context, clearly the majority of participants’ teachers, even if they knew that, taught vocabulary out of context. Teaching vocabulary intentionally and out of context may, in fact, make students less fluent and get in the way of their reading comprehension (Anderson & Roit, 1996).

Vocabulary in Words and Pictures and in Context

Some teachers, however, recognized the value of teaching vocabulary in context, as we shall see from Violetta’s story which follows. Violetta began her discussion of mainstream English classes by talking about vocabulary. Her teacher, moreso than other participants’, proved more inventive in her approach to studying vocabulary:

We do vocabulary. We do sentences for the vocabulary. We read a book. Miss C. gives a lot of work but I think it’s very helpful for us because the words that she gave, that she gives us come out in SAT, like vocabulary. She gives a lot of vocabulary. I got to study for them, but when I get the SATs it was like the same vocabulary that she gives, so it’s really helpful in her class.... We do sentences. We find the meaning of them. We draw word pictures, and then we have a test on Fridays.... We draw it [the picture corresponding to the vocabulary word] on the board and then we have to tell the students out loud what I drew and what is the meaning.... That is really helpful, so we can have it in mind. Like sloth. I drew a person sleeping and he has do his homework and he didn’t do it so it’s like sloth[ful]....

Violetta (and Rosa’s) teacher, Miss Cohen, provided multiple ways for her students to acquire and learn new
vocabulary words. Not only did she take words from stories that students were currently reading, but she also encouraged them to draw pictures of the words and "present" the word to the class. Providing ways for students to learn beyond the traditional linear ways of reading and writing, such as drawing, encourages students to explore other ways of learning, other "intelligences" which might better suit their needs. Fu (1995) had considerable success in teaching English to native Laotian speakers by encouraging them to first draw their stories, then talk and write about them.

Vocabulary Words: Nuggets for Some, Peanuts for Others

During the interviews I spoke to a man born in Colombia, currently employed as a substitute teacher in the Brockton schools. I told him how many of the students had noted how important vocabulary study was to them. He pointed out that he, too, had placed great emphasis on vocabulary study as he learned the English language. He suggested that learning the words increased the learner’s self-esteem or self-confidence, as they built up a storehouse of words in the new language. To some participants, vocabulary words were the nuggets of the language.

Not all participants, though, were as taken with vocabulary study. Some saw it as an empty exercise which teachers assigned habitually, with passing routine quizzes
or tests the main reason to study vocabulary lists in the first place. Patricia shared the following:

[We did] a lot of vocabulary, and then every Friday we have a vocabulary test. It’s just like here [at my present school]. I think it’s just like everywhere else... to go to English class, have vocabulary at the end of the week. But yet it’s not because we learn the vocabulary. It’s for the week, then we’ll know it better, then forget all about it and we won’t remember that word. And yet if there’s a certain word that stands out, that you’ve read in a book somewhere, and you never knew what it meant, so that’s good.... I suppose I would read a book and [say], "What does this mean?" Then, it would come up there, and I would be like, "Oh, that’s what it means." Other than that, the words would just drift away, although a lot of them stay in your head, you remember them....

Participants viewed vocabulary as vital to their learning to speak, read, and write English fluently. Their teachers presented vocabulary in a number of different ways, some of those ways more likely to help students remember the words and integrate them into their developing understanding and usage of the language. Mrs. Cohen, for example, took her vocabulary words from stories students read in class and she asked her students to draw pictures of the words. She made the words both contextual and concrete, enabling students to grasp more fully their meaning. Students who were given lists of words to define and memorize without a specific context struggled to make sense of the word meanings and their possible usages in sentences.
Abstract Words in Vocabulary Instruction

One final note about vocabulary. Anderson and Roit (1996, p. 298) have noted that many teachers of language minority students stress "high-frequency nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and standard conversational components" in their vocabulary instruction. They teach much less of the more "basic, generic, and conceptual type of vocabulary that carries much of the logic of the language." For example, conjunctions, negatives, and especially prepositions. I recall several instances in the interviews when participants had a difficult time with prepositions, for example, Phuong's looking "on the dictionary" for the meaning of a word she did not know.

Mainstream English teachers might do much better to teach vocabulary from one paragraph of a short story, identifying key concrete and abstract words, providing students with strategies for figuring out word meanings in context, and then giving over the time usually spent on intentional vocabulary teaching to either reading or talking. The old, still venerated way of teaching vocabulary, the list of twenty words per week on the board, look up the definitions, quiz on Friday, still lives on, however.

Reading Enjoyment and Reading Comprehension

Many participants ranked reading as one of the most important activities in their continuing English language
development, even if they did not particularly enjoy it. Most participants, though, enjoyed reading. Many spoke about favorite stories they had read - and remembered! Ling spoke of her reading enjoyment:

Now I do like reading because I understand a lot, you know. In reading, usually I read two times, because the first time I didn’t understand it. The second time, I know what it means. And I like to read to learn mystery, love stories, and like that. When I read I feel great, you know, now it feels great.... But if you take too long another book, I don’t know, I just pick too short because I know that’s the main [part] of the story. That’s why I take short one. Now I like to read story.

Finding out what students actually enjoy reading is a step in the right direction towards improving their reading comprehension. The more they enjoy what they read, the more they will read - theoretically - and thus increase their vocabulary acquisition (Krashen, 1989) and comprehension.

In the following excerpts, Juan first spoke disdainfully of reading, especially longer works, such as the novel:

I don’t like to read. If you’re coming to read in class, I’ll read. But to get a book, like [to] do a book report or something, see, I don’t like that but I got to do it, you know, to get a grade. Last time I got a B on one of them, but I don’t like reading, you know. I rarely finish reading, but I read half of it, and I just like to read those books with the class, you know, if we read, that’s how I understand it. Reading all that, like 200 pages or 300 pages, I forget the beginning what happened....

At first, Juan stated that he did not like reading. He felt overwhelmed and perhaps incompetent when faced with
reading a 200-300 page book. Later in the interview, however, he contradicted himself:

I do reading [in the] literature book and we do those stories or something. That’s what we read. Sometimes when they need people to read, I always raise my hand, but sometimes the words are kind of hard and it’s hard to spell them and I just say "Miss, I’ll read." Sometimes you get nervous - the people laugh. Well I know everybody there, I know them already, so [I say] "Miss what’s that word there?" I like to read so I can learn. I can learn the words there. Hard words. It’s good, definitely it’s good to read. You can learn the hard words and everything.

Juan had moved beyond his fear of failure and his peers’ ridicule. In contrast to Phuong, who did not read aloud in her English classes, reading aloud aided Juan measurably in his learning the English language and in building his self-esteem. Reading became a public performance and contributed to Juan’s budding desire to act and direct - as he told me later in the interview. Reading held promise for him as a ticket to the stage and the screen.

Culturally Relevant Reading and Reading Comprehension

When I taught high school, at the start of each semester I always asked students to complete reading and writing surveys. What kinds of reading and writing did they like? What was their favorite book or story in their last English or ESL class, and why was it their favorite? What was their least favorite kind of reading and why? I designed the questions to find out what students liked and
wanted. Since they wrote their responses, I was also able to begin to assess their writing. This early assessment of students’ interests and backgrounds was critical to their enjoyment and success with reading.

I often went to California State University, Northridge, three miles down the road from my high school, to check out books for my students based on reading inventories I administered at the beginning of each semester. Thus, I brought back sackfuls of books: Central American Women authors, Mexican-American or Korean-American writers, Filipino and Israeli short stories, and African poetry, to mention just a few. The book selections further enhanced students’ reading comprehension by providing them with culturally relevant texts (Rigg, 1986), even with the texts translated into English.

From what I gathered in my interviews, students had little choice of what they read. Teachers seemed to follow a curriculum with a prescribed number and selection of books, many of those from the more traditional canon. Soo-Kim, for example, recalled that in her senior year, her second year in the mainstream:

... We didn’t really do much things, but we always kept reading the book. That was the [most] time I read a real English book, like [The] Great Gatsby. I didn’t know that Gatsby was [a] big story in America because I never read that book in Korea. We [also] read Catcher in the Rye, those kind of books. [The] first time I could [not] really understand. Every chapter I had to write the summary and I had to read and sometimes I read twice and three times to understand for one chapter. I have to write my own summaries. That helped me a lot. Sometimes
[we’d] watch the movie about the story and I try to understand what’s going on with that book....

Several of the other participants, including Phuong and Juan, talked about their reading *Huckleberry Finn*. They also mentioned how difficult the book was to read.

I realize that these works have established literary merit and have held their place, if not a stranglehold, on the high school English curriculum, particularly in American literature courses. They have been taught in schools for a long time. However, they range far indeed from the experiences of the participants who differed ethnically, linguistically, culturally, economically, and socially. The protagonist in *The Great Gatsby* is an upper-class, white male, while the protagonists in the other two works are young adolescent white males. That the protagonists are all male makes it more difficult for the women to identify with the characters or their stories. And while the books speak eloquently to the nature of the American character, they exclude the experiences of so many other Americans. To paraphrase Rich (1986, p. 199; cited also in Takaki, 1993, p. 16), "What if you opened a book and found that you weren’t there?" The experience would create "... a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing."

I am not arguing that we scrap the great works. But in thinking of ways to improve second language learners’ reading comprehension, mainstream teachers need to
supplement these works with additional works which enable them to build upon students' linguistic, conceptual, and formal background knowledge to enhance language acquisition. Teachers should select stories together with students. The stories should have words and ideas students understand and with a predictable narrative structure (Carrell, 1987). Selecting linguistically and culturally appropriate stories provide the scaffolding to enable readers to reach for the next cognitive and academic level.

Reading Aloud: Once More to the Voice

Reading aloud enhances language acquisition; it enables students to connect the spoken and the written word. Second language learners can benefit greatly from listening to stories read aloud. If teachers allow students to talk about the story as it is read aloud, students will also have the chance to practice newly acquired vocabulary (Ernst & Richard, 1994/95).

Furthermore, if students and teachers read parts of a story or a poem together, students would be able to practice the language in a "low-anxiety environment," free from threat or the fear of failure. Reading aloud enables the reader to give further meaning to a text through extralinguistic cues - body movements, facial gestures - which add to students' understanding of the meaning of language (McCauley & McCauley, 1992).
While the majority of participants had opportunities to read aloud in class, some did not. Thuyen’s mainstream teachers did not read aloud in class, as he recalled:

J: What else did you do in your English class? You read the plays and then, like you say, you come in, and Miss Gordon ... would say write about what you read last night. Then what would happen, what would you do next?

T: Just after that, we continue to read the play [for about] half an hour.... We read on our own, we had to read and we have to write ... and summarize it and turn it in to her. After that, we have a test....

J: Did you read aloud in class?

T: In mainstream class, we usually don’t read out loud in class, just like reading our own. We have to read [on] our own.

J: Did it help you to read out loud?

T: Yeah, when the student read out loud so I can hear more and I can understand.... [When I] read by myself, it’s hard for me to understand, [be]cause it’s not usually interesting to read by myself.

Phuong, too, felt left out or left behind when she first entered the mainstream. Her description of what happened still rings in my ears:

In mainstream, [we] get into class, teachers say what page we have to do and in mainstream they [did] not read the book with me. In ESL they do. In mainstream we have to read the book by ourselves. And in ESL we have to read the book with the teacher. And she explains what that mean[s] and have to sometime we watch video and also like sometime we watch and she stop the video and she tell us what that mean[s] and what happen[s]. But in mainstream we just watch the movie until the end, that’s all, and the book have to read it and after that he give out the test, we do it. But not like ESL [where] it’s easier to understand.
The sound of the English language was Phuong's lifeline to understanding it - the rhythms, the pronunciations, the sound of the human voice - and without hearing the language, she felt stranded. As Cook (1996, p. 50) has noted, "Sometimes neglected in secondary classrooms, teacher read-alouds provide powerful models for language learners."

Thuyen corroborated Phuong's account of just how important reading aloud was to their English language acquisition. Soo-Kim, too, mentioned that her mainstream teachers rarely, if ever, read aloud in class. Several of the participants felt that they had to fend much more for themselves academically and linguistically in the mainstream, far from the nurturance of the ESL teachers and support staff.

Granted, English language instruction in the mainstream secondary classroom differs from the instruction in an ESL classroom. Mainstream English teachers assume that students already know the language proficiently enough to read books on their own. They may not be familiar with ESL pedagogy or feel disinclined to address the various language abilities of incoming second language learners. The curriculum demands that so many books be covered in a semester or in a year and obviously the teacher will not be able to cover all the material if she has to read each one aloud. For the language minority student, however, used to much reading aloud in the ESL class, the sudden loss of
this experience makes the transition from ESL to the mainstream a difficult one. Pedagogically, we need to be mindful of building bridges - to use the oft-cited metaphor - for the language minority students. The human voice carries the elemental sounds, rhythms, and emotional meaning of language, the sudden loss of which creates a gap too wide for second language learners like Phuong to brook.

Participants’ Reading Preferences

First, the short story was the preferred genre among those participants who had most recently entered the mainstream. Students could remember the short story from beginning to the end, a major reason for their preference. As Phuong recalled, when I told her how well she remembered a particular story:

Well, it’s a short story and very easy to remember. A long story like Huckleberry Finn not remember it much, little bit, but not [the whole] story, and sometimes I [do] not understand when I read it but a short story is easy to remember.

Juan, Carmen, Conrado, and Violetta all spoke about favorite short stories they remembered - and shared in the interviews. Participants were able to wrap the short story within their burgeoning second language memories.

Those more English proficient, such as Orlando and Patricia, had no difficulties reading longer works. In fact, Patricia spoke shiveringly of her favorite author, Stephen King:

Not all Stephen King books are violent. Um... like Pet Cemetery. That was really scary and
that’s what I liked. Um, like Misery, that was really violent, but it was like a lady, she’s going crazy and she cuts them and throws things out .... You read the book and the details sound so excruciating, like oh my god, I wouldn’t want to go through that ever but you see the movie and it’s not that much, but the book has more detail.... It’s not, "Oh this one’s violent, I want to read it. It’s just... his imagination is what I like because he comes out with a lot of different things like [Pet Cemetery?] is completely different from what Misery is.

I pressed Patricia on Stephen King’s popularity among young students or high school students. I contended he was violent. She agreed. Was it the violence that she (and legions of other readers) found so attractive? Well, yes, but that was not the whole story. Finally, when she said it was King’s imagination, the light went on in my own mind. His impact - for Patricia anyway - was not related solely to a gratuitous violence or mayhem in his books, but the details in his writing and the scope of his imagination. Patricia reminded me once again how sophisticated and informed students really are and how important for teachers to refrain from facile judgments about students’ abilities or aesthetics.

Shakespeare

A few years ago I interviewed a high school English teacher who taught language minority students (Gabriel, 1995). During the interview I asked her "what worked" in the English classroom. What books, authors, or methods of teaching had she used that were successful with students over the many years she had taught? Among the authors she
cited, Shakespeare led the way. Romeo and Juliet specifically, she said, dramatized the experiences of youth, the angst, better than any other of the plays or any other works. And indeed, participants in my study also cited Shakespeare as a memorable author in their English classes.

I asked myself and the participants, "Why Shakespeare?" Patricia, who had shed light on "Why Stephen King?" had this to say about the Bard:

In his [Shakespeare's] age, I think that people liked stories about happy endings and things that people wanted to hear - everything goes well, but he was the only one, one of the first one[s] to write stories about real life..., tragedies, and stuff like that. Things when the main character doesn't always end up happily at the end. So, it's pretty good because people are, if you read a story and everything goes happy at the end and always goes happy at the end, it gets pretty boring after awhile because you want to see something different and not everything ends up happy at the end so it was realistic for something bad to happen, you know, because life doesn't always go happy at the end, you know? So that’s...pretty much it.

Shakespeare's themes of love, jealousy, honor, retribution, time, and fate, to name just a few, still rang across the ages and across the boundaries of language. Patricia was not alone in her admiration for Shakespeare and in observing how themes in his plays connected to "real life." Pedro said the following about Romeo and Juliet:

I read one, Romeo and Juliet, I read that. It was pretty good. You know, the two [of them] being killed at the end.... Feuding [between] the two different families. They [Capulets and Montagues] didn't know 'cuz they were different in the way they lived. But the son and daughter of them were different. They wanted to let go of
the group, you know like I was saying before. They wanted to expand, so they met each other and that’s how they got involved together. They didn’t know they were two different families that were feuding, so they kept a secret and they got married. Then they died. Sad. But it was a good story....

The feuding, the differences, it was kind of dumb. They fight over differences, that’s the part of it, they fight over differences. They can’t sit together and talk about the differences, so they can know what the differences are. But they shouldn’t fight because they fear what they don’t know. That’s why our society has had a downfall. You know, crime and gangs. Each gang, people come together in a gang and they become powerful ‘cuz they’re [in] a group. They’re strong as a group, not single. That’s why they form gangs. They’re either depressed or confused....

Pedro knew about gangs and their pervasive influence in the city he lived in and the school he attended. The lessons on what happens to the individual when goaded or swept into mob action, so pronounced in the factious rivalries in Romeo and Juliet, were not lost on Pedro. He decried the senselessness of "fighting over differences," too often culminating in loss of identity - or death. Shakespeare brought to life issues close and relevant to Pedro’s young life.

Students talked about how they enacted different roles in the plays, enabling them to assume a different persona from who they really were. In her book, Brice-Heath (1991) talked about the value of drama in second-language acquisition. Acting out a role allowed students to use language in ways less threatening - and more meaningful - than reading aloud or speaking extemporaneously. Free to
...explore character through language, students felt freer to
take risks, make mistakes, try again. Elena, for example,
spoke of her enthusiasm for Shakespeare and playing a part
in his plays:

I’ve learned a lot in this year, learned a lot.
We actually read a book, The Taming of the Shrew
... which is a great book. Loved it. I just had a
test on it. Let me see what I [am] gonna get on
it. Hope it’s a good grade. [When] we read
things [like "Taming"], I say, "Wow, I’m learning
something that is for a genius to learn!" That
book is hard. It has big words. It gives you
more energy to learn....

He would put us [as] different characters. We
would take different characters or whatever. He
put us like Bianca, or Petrucio or Katherine.
Each of us had a part. And we would read it, the
part that we were assigned to, and if we don’t
understand he would say what the words meant.
Um, then that gave sense to the word, the
vocab[ulary] that he was talking about. It was
real nice to read that book.

Elena seemed to like Shakespeare because it was
Shakespeare. His name and his legacy resounded for her.
She noted the difficulty of the language - the "big words"
- and that he was someone for a "genius to learn." Her
exuberance thrilled me. She reminded me that holding high
expectations for students, regardless of their linguistic
abilities, played a key role in shaping their attitudes
about themselves and about learning. Shakespeare provided
the proof and the punch.

Shakespeare "worked" and continues to work through the
ages because of the beauty of his language, the sense he
made out of life, and the enduring and timeless themes he
wrote about which neither time, circumstance, nor
linguistic borders denied. Whether it was Macbeth (Soo-Kim, Phuong, and Patricia), Julius Caesar (Carmen), Romeo and Juliet (Pedro, Conrado, and Violetta), or The Taming of the Shrew (Elena) they read and enacted, second language learners worked through the difficulties of Shakespeare’s Elizabethan English to see his bull’s-eye portrayals of the human heart.

Closing Thoughts

Most of the participants enjoyed reading and recognized its importance in their learning English. As Orlando stated:

I think also reading had a lot to do with it [his acquiring English]. I’ve always been into reading and the minute I learned the basics of English, I was reading children’s books, so I think [reading] was a main contributor to the language barriers disappearing.

After students had read a particular selection, their teachers would often ask them to write a summary of what they had read, including, plot, character, and setting, or answer questions provided in the textbook or on a worksheet. Occasionally teachers engaged students in a discussion related to the readings, though more often than not, teachers required written responses. Writing assignments, so far as I could tell, rarely included questions about themes in the reading selections.

Sometimes students and teacher read texts aloud in class; sometimes they did not. Though participants expressed initial embarrassment at having to read aloud,
most acknowledged the benefits of doing so. Reading aloud or enacting scenes from Shakespeare, more than reading his work silently, might well have contributed to students’ understanding and appreciation of his work. Gutierrez (1995, p. 30) has indicated that the greater the second language learners’ involvement in literacy activities, the more successful they will be in developing "valued literacy outcomes in instructional contexts." If, however, classroom instruction is more teacher-centered, with fewer opportunities for students to read aloud, connect their own experiences to stories being read, raise questions, or talk with peers, the less likely they are to develop the literacy skills needed to succeed in the classroom or in the society.

Participants surely recognized the value of print. They saw clearly, too the connections between success with print and success in life. For Juan, reading well translated to his becoming successful in the theater or in film. For Elena, reading well opened up the world of Shakespeare. For Patricia and Violetta, reading helped them unlock some of the secrets of the parables in the Bible: reading undergirded their faith and morality. As Patricia shared with me:

I go by what the Bible says. I’m going to read the Bible, then I’ll go by it. Everybody has a different interpretation of what the Bible says, so you have to really look into it....

Reading well enabled Patricia to "really look into it."
In closing, I have shown how participants' valued reading. Most of them enjoyed it, especially reading aloud. Reading aloud enabled them to make the crossing from ESL to mainstream easier. The sound of the human voice rang reassuringly in their ear and facilitated their continuing English language acquisition. Much of the selected readings were from the "traditional" canon, authors such as Twain, Hawthorne, Fitzgerald, Salinger, the Brontes, and Shakespeare. I did not find a single citation in the data of a work by an Asian or an Hispanic, let alone a Palestinian author, they had read or discussed in class.

Teacher-centered instruction predominated. Throughout I have suggested ways to bring teachers, instructional methods and materials, and the second language learners themselves in closer harmony to better facilitate English language acquisition and literacy. I have encouraged teachers to find ways for language minority students to see themselves in the mirror of their classroom literacy experiences.
In this chapter I look at participants' experiences with writing and grammar in the mainstream. Generally, they spoke less about writing and grammar than they did about reading and vocabulary. They saw the importance of writing, though they struggled with it. They wrote primarily in journals, which gave them a place to explore their personal thoughts and feelings. Most participants spoke negatively about having to study grammar, with two noteworthy exceptions. The two participants who spoke favorably about studying grammar held that grammar unlocked some of the more perplexing mysteries of the English language, especially the relation of verb tenses to time.

Writing: The Shift from Oral to Written Word

Oral language has been around much longer than writing. In the beginning was the sound, then came the word, and then after a long period of time, writing. Writing tooled oral language into visual language and lasting memory. Writing changed the focus of language itself, how it was given and received, from aural/oral, holistic, listener oriented, to visual, linear, and reader oriented. Language's younger offspring, writing, spread the word pervasively. In the evolution of language,
writing precedes reading. Somebody had to inscribe something before another could read it.

Writing transforms thought into words. The most complex and deliberate of literacy activities, writing cows even the native language user. For second language learners, writing becomes even more daunting. They need to consider all the complexities in another language.

As participants have stated, writing was hard. Writing rules differed from speaking rules. Participants had to learn, for example, where to place and how to use punctuation and how to spell words in English, a language without the phonemic exactitude of Spanish. Spelling was a much different ball game in English than in many other languages. If "stuff" is spelled "s-t-u-f-f," then why isn’t "enough" spelled "e-n-u-f-f"? How to organize words generally so that they mean what we want them to mean? Who am I writing for? For what purpose? What’s the context for my writing? For language minority students, writing presented another high hurdle along the way. Once again, though, their success with writing had major implications for their socioeconomic, cultural, and academic success.

A Brief History of Language Minority Writing Approaches

Research in writing for second language learners has a leaner knowledge base than other areas of ESL or language minority research, such as oral language acquisition and reading. From the data I gathered, writing was not
accorded the time or the attention in the mainstream classroom as reading, identifying nouns, verbs, and split infinitives in grammar books, defining vocabulary words, or even watching videos.

According to Silva (1990), at least four major orientations or approaches to teaching writing to second language learners have emerged since the mid 1940’s: 1) a controlled composition which focused on the lexical and syntactical features of a text and emphasized accuracy and correctness; 2) current-traditional rhetoric, which focused on paragraph and essay writing; 3) a process approach, which held that writing was a complex, recursive, and creative process. With a teacher’s guidance students generated ideas, drafted, revised, and edited papers. The notions of selecting a specific audience and a purpose for writing were also integral to a writing process approach. The approach was borrowed in large measure from whole language or process approaches to writing for native English speakers (for example, Atwell, 1987); 4) English for academic purposes, designed to enable students to orient their writing more for success in the academic world, particularly the college or university.

Participants’ Current Writing Experiences

In classrooms I have observed and in talking with participants in this study, writing instruction in mainstream English classrooms combined elements of all four
approaches. Teachers relied less on controlled composition and English for academic purposes than current-traditional rhetoric and process approaches. Indeed the process approach seemed to be catching on, though it has its critics (Delpit, 1988; Reyes, 1991; Reyes, 1992). For example, Reyes (1991) has noted that Hispanic students have high regard for teachers as authority figures and expect them to provide direct instructional intervention as she has described:

They look for it. In the literature logs and dialogue journals they sought the teacher’s assistance (e.g., ‘Please tell me a little bit about the book’). The absence of direct mediation in reading and writing tasks may have created dissonance for these bilingual students who found themselves in an environment where the role of teacher faded into the background (p. 310).

I noticed with the Vietnamese participants, too, that the teacher was THE TEACHER, highly regarded and respected by them. Cultural differences in how second language learners perceive the teacher and the teacher’s role in the classroom may influence the effectiveness of the process approach to writing, especially when the teacher involves herself much less in direct instruction.

In the mainstream English classroom, the instruction used for native English speakers was perforce the same language instruction for language minority students. Unless teachers modified their instruction considerably to accommodate individual learning differences, participants
received the same kind of instruction as their native speaking peers.

Journal Writing

For participants in this study, the journal prevailed in the mainstream, as it had in their ESL classes, as the most widely used form for students' writing. Almost as much as vocabulary instruction, journal writing emerged as a staple in the English classroom. Students liked journal writing because it enabled them to write about their feelings. As Ling stated:

Sometime[s] I like writing, too, but not write very well, you know. I think writing is what I feel and mean. Journal I love the best. Just writing out what I feel. But you cannot give me a lot in my journal. How can I write a lot in my journal, you know? And if I write, I don’t know what I’m writing, I just put it down, and make it look like a sentence, but I don’t know if it’s wrong, the grammar - I don’t know if it’s wrong or right. I like to write. Journal is the better I can write. [I can write best in the journal]. Sometimes I can make a poem. And in the class of drawing, like drawing the cards, you know, but class, I see over there just think one of these, I just write like the poem, you know. I don’t know if it’s poem or not poem, but I like to write a love poem. That’s good for me.... I don’t know if it’s a poem or not, I just talk it. I just write.... My friends say oh you can’t make a poem. I say, aha, but I make that poem!

Ling’s journal writing captured feelings in a way that her speech could not. If she struggled to articulate English when she spoke the language, or felt embarrassed by the way she talked, the writing afforded her the chance to express her inner emotional life. If speech were ephemeral - and difficult at best for her - writing enabled her to
fiddle around with the language until she captured the emotion just so. Writing gave Ling the confidence to explore uncharted territory, guide her towards a deeper understanding of the language, and she persisted in spite of her friends' reproofs. As Holmes and Moulton (1997) have shown, freedom of choice in journal writing increases second language learners' motivation to write and their growing fluency in the language.

Ironically, writing freed Ling in ways her oral language could not. Since many participants spoke of their embarrassment when speaking in English, writing afforded them a less risky way to express themselves. Native speakers, on the other hand, do not share the same concerns. Since their "accent" is the native accent, they do not face possible public embarrassment when speaking. Writing, therefore, for the native language user may not have the same meaning it does for second language learners.

To return to participants' experiences with mainstream English writing, Juan and Carmen, too, mentioned how they liked journal writing:

Juan: I used to do journals. I liked it, you know because I like writing a lot... In class they'll give you a chance, you know. Some days we talk about other things, we do other stuff in books and everything, so on that day [when] it's time for you to write journals..., everybody's quiet, you'll be writing, you'll be thinking..., writing today about what happened last week during school or last summer or what I'm going to do this summer, and I like it. That's what I like about journals.
Carmen: We used to write everyday for 5 minutes [about] anything that we want.... It was good. There was always something to write about, like things that had happened the day before, working, [or at] school.

Juan and Carmen saw journal writing as an opportunity to reflect on events in their life, and thus emphasized an intrapersonal aspect to their learning. Holmes and Moulton (1997) have further pointed out that spontaneity and frequency in journal writing contributes to writing fluency. Carmen wrote every day in her journal and never seemed at a loss for writing topics.

While the majority of participants appreciated the freedom of choice they had with the journal writing, Dora did not always know what to do with all the freedom, as she recalled:

I like to write. Like poems or something, but in Spanish. I feel more comfortable.

J: Did you like journal writing?

D: I... sometimes, [be]cause you have to, last year you always had to write something every morning and some days I didn’t have nothing to write so I just put something - lying, I was lying. [Be]cause I didn’t know what to write....

Abdul said that he liked writing, but preferred it when the teacher gave the writing assignment:

I might have some difficulties writing but I still like it.... I [don’t] have any spelling difficulties. I’m doing real good in spelling words.... I prefer the teacher giving me the topic [be]cause that way I’d know that that’s what she wants me to write about.

Both Dora and Abdul’s remarks suggest that giving students freedom to write anything they want may not work
for all students. Some students preferred the structure that a writing prompt provided. Their views corroborated what Reyes (1992) has stated, that "one size" - one approach to writing - does not necessarily fit all. As I stated earlier, some students want - depend on - the structure that the teacher provides in classroom instruction. Giving students the choice to write what they want to write about or giving them options from which to choose seems to be a sensible compromise.

In addition, teachers must take into account individual and cultural differences among their students and remain open to modifying teaching methods and curriculum to meet the needs of their students. "If a process approach to literacy is to benefit all students, it must consider each learner's unique needs" (Reyes, 1991, p. 311).

In my study, I learned little about how participants' teachers responded to their (mainly) journal writing. While it seemed that teachers asked students to write often in their journals, how many of the journal assignments related to what they read in the classes? Reyes (1991) has explored the differences between dialogue journals and literature logs and how teachers respond to those particular kinds of writing. She has observed that the quality of the writing improved when students had some choice of the writing topic. They were able to draw upon experiences and language that they knew. Writing quality
declined when topics were imposed and when students found little relevance in the literary activity.

Not all participants saw the journal as the place to engage in personal or emotional writing. When I asked Patricia what she thought of journal writing, she said:

I don't mind journal writing. It's sort of like, you write whatever you want to write and it's not like you have to get into your personal feelings or anything like that, you know....

Other Kinds of Writing in the Mainstream Classroom

Besides journal writing, teachers asked students to write summaries of stories or plays they had read, respond to text questions provided at the end of reading selections, or research and report on a particular topic.

Thuyen, for example, talked about writing in his twelfth grade class:

Writing. You have to write back. Watch [a] movie and we have to summarize it. Or the teachers give us the book and we have to understand what the book [say]s and write back. The teacher give us the topic and we write on the teacher's own topic.

Two of the participants said they did little or no writing at all. Phuong told me that she studied "grammar and reading," but "no writing." David, too, said, "We don't do any writing." None of the participants talked about having to write coherent and unified paragraphs or the well-known five-paragraph essay.
Writing Struggles

Generally, participants really struggled with their writing. As Soo-Kim recalled:

I’m not so good at writing. Writing’s the hardest because [it] requires [you] to have more grammar stuff and I’m not that good at the grammar. Sometimes [I have] no idea about what I’m writing. Even right now I’m not so good at it, you know. [I] think about [my writing] before. It was awful. I could only write a little sentence, not the whole story. I think I need to take a course for writing. I don’t know if it will help me or not.... Writing takes time. Probably I need practice every day, like every day try to write [a] diary. Sometimes I write [in a] diary, try to write in English. Nobody score[s] my diary so I don’t know [if] it’s A or B. I write letter[s] to my friends and I try to write English. That really helps me, I guess.

By her own admission, Soo-Kim may not have been so proficient a writer in English, yet she certainly knew what she needed in order to improve as a writer. She had to write often. She needed responses to her writing. And letter writing to her friends provided her with an audience she could relate to well. In effect, she had named three of the most effective ways for writers to improve.

In spite of the difficulties they faced with writing, participants recognized its importance in their English language development. Of all the participants, however, only Patricia considered writing to be the most important or helpful in learning the language. Patricia’s English language abilities and priorities, however, were much different from the others, as she ranked among the most
fluent of all participants and the longest enrolled in mainstream English classes.

Writing Outside of the Mainstream Classroom

While I focused on participants' experiences with writing in the context of school and in the English classroom, some of them talked about writing they did outside of school, and for different purposes than academic ones. Conrado enjoyed writing in English for a different reason:

I didn’t like to talk English, but I always like to write things about myself in English because I think my mother didn’t understand it. My father, too. Just my sister could understand it. My friends didn’t understand [either]. So I write in English about my life, about what I do in the day. I always like to write because I could satisfy myself writing the things I did in the day. And nobody could know it.

Writing in English for Conrado gave him the privacy a diary afforded, the English language itself, the lock and the key.

As I noted earlier, several of the participants told me that they enjoyed writing poetry and seemed eager to share that information with me. I asked Dora if she would consider bringing in one of her poems so I could read it. She said she would. At our next interview she brought in one of her poems. She had written the original version in Spanish and at my request translated it into English. Following is the original poem in Spanish and Dora’s English translation:
Amigo

Creo en ti amigo mio,
Creo en tu sonrisa,
ventana abierta de tu ser,
Creo firmamente en tu mirada,
espejo de honestidad
Creo en tus lagrimas,
simbolo de compartir de tu alegría
y tristesa
Creo en tus palabras,
expresión de tu consejo de lo que quiero y espero
Creo en ti amigo mio,
así simplemente creo en ti,
Amigo mio hasta de la ocurriencias
y tambien de tu silencio.... creo y penso en ti.

Friend

I believe in you my friend,
I believe in your smile,
An open window of yourself.
I strongly believe in your look,
looking glass of your honesty.
I believe in your tear,
symbol of sharing happiness
and sadness.
I believe in your words,
expression of your advice of what
I want and wait.
I believe in you my friend,
simply as that, I believe in you.
I believe even in your occurrence and
in your silence... I believe and think
on you.

Both Conrado’s and Dora’s writing for themselves,
based on their own needs and interests, showed that
students had an interest in expressing themselves through
their writing apart from strictly academic purposes.
Conrado and Dora wrote for specific reasons and for a
specific audience, Conrado for himself, Dora for a friend
or a beloved. Within the classroom context, teachers need
to explore with students the many different purposes and
potential audiences for their writing. Students need to see the connections between classroom activities and their applications to broader sociocultural contexts.

Closing Thoughts on Writing

While students described in some detail what writing was like for them in mainstream English classes, they provided only a part of the larger picture. In thinking of the broader classroom context where their writing took place, there were aspects of the writing instruction that I was not able to ascertain solely through the interviews with students. For example, I knew who was present during the writing activities: teacher and students. But I did not know if the teacher were monolingual or bilingual or what the overall classroom demographics were. I knew to a certain extent the nature of the writing task - open ended journal writing or journal writing that focused on students’ personal and emotional responses to writing prompts.

Unlike Gutierrez (1992, p. 249), however, I was not able to examine the writing curriculum in its broader context. I did not know what the teachers’ instructional goals and values were, how the instruction was implemented or processed, or why teachers chose a particular writing pedagogy. In her study, Gutierrez (1992) showed that teacher-centered classrooms where recitation instruction was the norm restricted “students’ opportunities to both
speak and write the discourse valued in the classroom@ (p. 254). In classrooms that were more responsive or collaborative, students progressed much more rapidly in their language acquisition skills. They were given more opportunities to experiment with the language, ask questions, talk with native speaking peers, even shape assignments according to their interests and needs.

As with reading and talking and studying vocabulary, participants recognized the value of writing, indeed all the various literacy activities in the classroom. They acknowledged that writing was the most difficult of all the language activities. Yet their stories also showed that they enjoyed writing both in and out of class, and for the most part they liked having the freedom to explore thoughts and feelings in the journal.

Good writing comes from the heart and the mind and the unique language backgrounds and experience students bring with them. The task for educators is to build upon students’ willingness to learn how to write, if not their enthusiasm, by involving students much more proactively in the writing process.

**Grammar**

The castor oil of the English curriculum, grammar still holds its medicinal place in language instruction. Generally speaking, students do not like it at all and yet English teachers persist in teaching it. If a little is
good, then more is even better. Teachers assume that since it was good for them, then it must be good for their students, regardless of how badly it goes down. Patricia spoke for the majority when she said, "I do not like grammar for anything. I do not like grammar at all."

Ling and Juan concurred:

Ling: Writing, so so. And grammar I don’t like it.


Many of the participants said that they never understood grammar as it was taught to them. Carmen, for instance, said:

We did grammar. Find the subject, find the verb and the preposition, and we [also] worked on sentence fragments.... For me it was hard because I still don’t understand it.

And Soo-Kim, when I asked her about grammar, responded:

Very hard to explain. This grammar books he gave to us, certain sections of the grammar book, and he gave us all these practice papers and let us practice on that, like understand the grammar. He tried to teach us, too, and finally talks about one section a week and after a week we going to have a test on it. Before the test he give us the test paper and we do it [on] our own at home. We bring the same paper to school and he’s going to give us same paper [for the test], but we just copy it, [and] he grade[s] it. Mostly it’s very hard for me because every time I have no idea what we’re doing. This one was the hardest grammar ever I had and I always have to get help from Mr. G. in New Horizons. He usually tried to explain to me and finally I can understand from [him].... That was very useful for me but still don’t understand completely, but I learned a lot. I guess I learned.
"Very hard to explain" signified to me that she had a hard time understanding both the grammar assignments themselves and the effect of grammar study on her English language abilities. While Soo-Kim equivocated about the usefulness of grammar, she also stated that she remained puzzled as to what it all meant.

Why Patricia, Ling, Juan, Carmen, Soo-Kim, and Other Participants Can’t Grammar

So, what did it all mean? Why didn’t the participants like grammar? Why did their teachers persist in teaching grammar? Studies have shown that even though students were able to demonstrate grammatical knowledge on quizzes or exams, they were unable to translate that knowledge to conversation or writing (Terrell, 1991). Furthermore, the order in which students acquire morphology (e.g., verb endings, 's' or 'ed', to denote time), and syntax in their language development is little affected by grammar instruction (Pienemann, 1984; Terrell, 1991). And finally, as Glisan and Drescher (1993, p. 30) have noted:

The evidence from this [Glisan and Drescher] study and previous research has clearly shown that textbook grammar has not changed to reflect the philosophy of communicative, contextualized language teaching, and that the nature of grammar rules and explanations offered in textbooks is in many respects far removed from the reality of authentic speech.

As participants described it, their grammar instruction was little more than a hunt and peck for subjects, predicates, prepositional phrases, dependent
clauses, or even more perplexing, object complements, appositives, gerunds and infinitives. In short, teachers asked students most often to identify parts of speech. But identification lies near the bottom in the hierarchy of critical thinking skills. Once students had identified the parts of speech, how could they then apply that knowledge, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate it? Most grammar teaching, borne out in participants' accounts, remained prescriptive, that is, how the language ought to work in its standardized form, not how it actually worked. With so few ways for students to apply what they knew about prescriptive grammar to their own language learning, it was not surprising that most did not like it or were confused about what it all meant.

Part of the dislike and the confusion must be attributed to the way teachers (past and present) taught grammar. Likely using the ubiquitous *Warriner's Grammar Book*, they presented a 'scientific grammar' (Glissan & Drescher, 1993), with rules for formal, written language stemming from a Latin-based tradition (see Postman & Weingartner, 1966, for a brief history of the tradition of grammar teaching in the public schools). Unfortunately, the standard grammar neither matched students' needs or abilities nor aided in their language acquisition.
Why Phuong and Abdul Wanted Grammar

If I had ended participants’ accounts of grammar instruction in the mainstream here, I would have only told half or seven-eighths of their story. In truth, two of the sixteen participants, Phuong and Abdul, said they liked or appreciated the study of grammar. Their story sheds light on other aspects (if you will) of grammar study for language minority students. Their thoughts about the usefulness of grammar to their increased comprehension suggest, that if presented in the right way, grammar instruction might indeed be useful for second language learners’ language acquisition and development. Also, what Phuong and Abdul, respectively Vietnamese and Arabic, have to say as non-Westerners learning English, has important implications for their ESL and mainstream teachers.

Time and Tense in Grammar Instruction

Phuong liked studying grammar because it clarified some important differences for her between English and her native Vietnamese, as she pointed out:

Grammar [instruction was] similar to [that] in the junior high, same thing in ESL and bilingual. We study the verb and pronoun, it was much the same thing, except in junior high I don’t understand. Came here and I understand the verb and pronoun, [and] subject.... Compare verbs, do that independent clause a lot. I remember in junior high the teacher just give out the book and the paper, tell me that page I have to do, but I don’t understand. She just gave it to us like that and we have to do it. Not like here. [In junior high school we had] to explain what the pronoun and the verbs look like, the action verb and the verb [to be] and the past tense and
future. Over here [in high school] it’s easier than junior high. [I] understand more.

J: Did you like grammar?
P: Yeah. I have to.
J: What’d you like about it?
P: Well, like past tense, [and] future [tense]. In Vietnamese they don’t have past tense or future, but in English they have past tense and future. But we have to understand the past and present and future. Also like independent clause and subordinate clause, have to understand it. It’s good for you like what you understand and then you have to do it....

Trying to understand - wrestling with - verb tenses was critical to Phuong’s understanding of how English verbs worked, how they denoted time. The Vietnamese language does not have tenses or aspects. Word order is the sole means of indicating grammatical relations (Nguyen, 1987). Lexical markers, particularly adverbs, play a pivotal role in establishing time and place. A look at almost any excerpt from my interview with Phuong illustrates this point:

Not speak outside of class, except [when I] go to work. Meet some friends and I speak. In Miss Swan’s class sometimes I’m all quiet, get in there and teacher teach. [I] just listen and not talk. Sometimes [I] talk in Vietnamese to some friends, but go home and not speak English. My sisters all speak all the languages [Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao]. Sometimes speak English. But go to work, speak English.

Phuong used the same present simple form of the verb(s) throughout the excerpt, even though she did not differentiate between first person, "I speak," and third person, "[the] teacher teaches." For the most part she
lacked the morphological understanding of verb constructions. She neither added "s" nor "ed" to denote past or present nor apparently knew that "taught" was the "correct" form to indicate past tense for the verb "teach." Instead, she relied heavily on adverbs to place the action of speaking and teaching in time. As Al-Buanain has noted:

The two most salient semantic features of the present simple normally singled out are its uses to convey habitual action (usually in association with a large number of adverbs of frequency), and to convey general truths.... (1992, p. 330)

English has two grammatically encoded tenses, past and present, if tense is regarded as a matter of formal inflection and is associated with the main verb. However, auxiliary verbs may also denote temporal relationships (Al-Buanain, 1992). For Phuong, whose native language differed so markedly from English, this further compounded the problem for her efforts to comprehend how the verb tenses in English refer to time. Thus it was no surprise that she looked to English grammar for some answers. From what she said, some of her teachers along the way had cast a few rays of light for her on this issue.

Abdul, too, noted that he "... did do a lot of grammar [his] sophomore year," and found it quite useful:

I think that was the subject we used to do the most. Lot of sentences, different sentences, the parts of sentences. I did learn a lot from grammar as a matter of fact. It’s not that it wasn’t, I didn’t like, I didn’t mind it. It wasn’t my favorite, but I didn’t really mind it.... It’s not that I liked it so much, it’s just that it taught me so much and that’s why I liked it.
Abdul had fewer problems with verb tenses than Phuong. In the above excerpt, he used the past tense of the verb "teach," while we noted that Phuong had not yet learned the past tense. On the issue of verb tenses, however, native Arabic students have difficulty contrasting the present progressive - He is walking to work - with the present simple - He walks to work. For the native Arabic speaker, the form for these two verb tenses does not generate meaning because in Arabic the two forms are identical (Al-Buanain, 1992).

I realize that in discussing Phuong’s and Abdul’s views on grammar that I have done more linguistic or grammatical analysis than anywhere else in the study. I found the research literature related to grammar and language minority fascinating. Al-Buanain (1992) was particularly lucid and absorbing and Terrell (1991) helped place grammar in a small but important context in the broader English language curriculum.

Phuong’s and Abdul’s accounts serve to illustrate a few more points about the issue of grammar in second language acquisition. First, as Hinkel (1992) has suggested, not every culture has the same conceptions of time. He has noted, for example, that in nonsecular Muslim cultures, days begin at sunset. In Japan, they begin at sunrise. In the United States, or Western societies generally, the new day begins at midnight. Related to language, "Linguistic meanings of tense include the mutual
beliefs and perceptions of a speech community..." (Hinkel, 1992, p. 559), which may not be shared by members of other speech communities.

So, as always we need to be vigilant about making too easy cultural assumptions when teaching. Students' native language and culture shape their world view. The way language works - I am thinking of verb tenses here - is not uniform throughout the world’s languages. Students especially who come from non-Western countries, such as those I interviewed from Korea, Vietnam, and (an Arabic speaker from) Israel, carry cultural and linguistic identities much different from people in Western society.

Teachers may want to precede the teaching of the tense system and its morphology with a more general discussion of English conceptions of time. In addition, a discussion of the lexical time markers, such as "sometimes," "before," "after," and "now" would be useful to talk about in conjunction with explanations of verb endings (Hinkel, 1992).

Secondly, in spite of my obvious bias about teaching grammar, or perhaps my frustration with how teachers continue to teach it, grammar may have a vital if limited place in the mainstream English curriculum. Teachers have to find ways to determine more accurately just what students need in grammar instruction. In a slightly different context, here again is an example of how one size does not fit all. Phuong may have known how to recognize
an adverbial clause without actually using it in her speech or her writing. But what she really needed was instruction on verb tenses.

Finally, researchers, such as those I have mentioned, provide rich and compelling insights related to teaching grammar to second language learners. Bilingual researchers, such as Nguyen (1987) and Al-Buanain (1992), offer pinpoint observations and suggestions when it comes to teaching students who share the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Teachers should read some of this research to see how it might apply to their instruction. Researchers have an obligation to write about these issues so that they can be read by those who actually teach language minority students in the secondary schools. In narrowing the gap between what is known and what is needed, educators may better serve those who deserve it, the students themselves.
CHAPTER 8

PARTICIPANTS’ EXPERIENCES IN THE SCHOOLS AND THEIR EVENTUAL ROLES IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

In this last chapter I will summarize and discuss the main findings of the study, make recommendations for secondary teachers and teacher educators, and write closing comments.

Introduction

For the last 150 years, immigrants have comprised a major part of American city school populations. Their presence in the schools meant an ever changing ethnic and linguistic population. Change was continual, as immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe in the mid-and late-nineteenth century, then Southern and Eastern Europe around the beginning of the twentieth century. Eventually, European immigration diminished considerably. By the 1960s immigrants began to come in greater numbers from the Eastern countries, such as Vietnam and Korea, and from Central and South American countries. They also migrated back and forth from Puerto Rico and Mexico to the United States, more often than they would like to remember.

Thirteen of the sixteen participants in this study were immigrants who became part of the American historical fabric and shared in the greater portrait of this immigrant nation. Part of their story is ours, America’s. The language they use invigorates the language raw and poetic,
as Ling’s account of her journey testifies. Their stories and their telling of those stories reflect America and American English ever changing.

Findings

Participants’ Antecedent Experiences

Seven of sixteen participants experienced physical or psychological abuse or repression in schools they attended in their native countries. In coming to America, they embraced the freedoms from such abuse, even as they struggled with a new language and culture in the United States. Participants stated that they wanted teachers who cared for, respected them, and were patient with their linguistic and academic progress.

Participants came from a life in their native countries with not enough freedom to a life in the United States where they found too much. They struggled without it and with it. When they arrived in the schools, they found a civic decency free from physical, if not psychological, abuse. They sought refuge in the embrace of their ESL teachers or other guidance and support systems, such as Ms. Swan’s tutoring program at Fall River High School. Academics mattered just below being cared for. The participants’ emotional and spiritual lives and well being took precedence over their intellectual ones.

The journey or the migrations of the immigrants to the United States disrupted their sociocultural, familial, and
academic lives. Sociocultural and linguistic differences were greater for those who immigrated from the Middle East and Southeast Asia to the United States, from East to West. Easterners immigrating to the West experienced profound differences in culture, language, and world view. Of the non-Western participants, those from South Vietnam had the most difficult time acquiring the language and arguably the American culture, much more so than their Western immigrant counterparts.

Migrants from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic often went back and forth several times, continually disrupting their lives and their literacy in both Spanish and English. Families were often splintered. Moving so often only seemed to strengthen the participants and their convictions about getting a good education and making it in American society.

How Participants First Learned or Acquired English

Students learned English in multiple ways, in schools, from friends and relatives, from television, and in Abdul’s case, with a tutor. Friends and relatives, especially those who attended the same classes as participants, played a fundamental role in participants’ English language acquisition. They supplemented classroom instruction and filled in gaps when the teacher was otherwise engaged. Those students whose parents spoke English at home were more fluent than those whose parents spoke only the native
language. The more multiple and reinforcing "comprehensible inputs" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), the more readily participants acquired the language.

How Participants' ESL Teachers First Taught Them

Just as participants acquired the language in multiple ways, their ESL teachers taught them in multiple ways. Some teachers presented more of a phonics approach, beginning with the letters of the alphabet, sounding out syllables in words, generally proceeding from part to whole. Others took more of a whole language approach when initially teaching participants. They read stories which reflected students cultural background. They took vocabulary from the stories. Generally, they emphasized "communicative competence" (Terrell, 1991) in their teaching methods.

Most of the teachers read aloud with participants. Many of the teachers also allowed students to talk to each other in class, a conscious pedagogical choice. Vocabulary instruction figured prominently in their instruction. Some teachers taught vocabulary in the context of a story or an experience students had, while others simply put a list of words on the board, unrelated to students' background knowledge or experience. Journal writing predominated in the ESL classroom, more often related to students' personal experiences rather than connected to their reading.
Transition to the Mainstream English Class

Participants found the transition from the ESL classroom to the mainstream a tough one. The gap widened between participants' needs and abilities and teachers' own abilities to address those needs. Mainstream classes were larger than ESL classes. Several of the participants failed in their first year, receiving less individual attention, counseling, and consoling (Soo-Kim) than they had in ESL classes. Oral language input, from reading aloud and talking, fell off noticeably and affected participants' efforts to keep pace with their native speaking peers.

The most salient difference between ESL and mainstream English classes seemed to be the silencing or stilling of students' voices once they entered the mainstream English classrooms. Quieter and more independent study replaced the more verbal and interactive components of ESL instruction. Individual learning took precedence over cooperative learning. Second language learners, reflecting on the receding human voice in the mainstream, felt left at the shore as so many voices - and the language's meaning those voices carried - sailed out of earshot.

Mainstream English Language Instruction

Vocabulary. According to participants' accounts, vocabulary was a staple in the mainstream English curriculum and essential to their continued English
language acquisition. Just how much class time teachers devoted to vocabulary instruction was not clear. Studying vocabulary for most participants meant looking up the definitions of words that their teachers gave to them. Often the words were just lists of words, lacking a specific context, removed from students’ language background. The vocabulary quiz or exam was often the main motivating factor for students to learn the words. Some teachers, however, contextualized vocabulary instruction, taking words from stories, asking students to draw pictures of the word, and then "present" those words orally to the class.

Reading. The majority of participants felt that reading contributed more to their English language acquisition than any other component in the curriculum. Students read longer and more complex works in the mainstream, not unusual, of course, but students had to fend much more for themselves with their comprehension and analysis of the books. They had little choice of any of the reading selections.

Reading aloud seemed to enhance language acquisition. Participants certainly missed the reading aloud as it diminished in the mainstream. Students said that they preferred reading short stories because they could remember them from beginning to end. With novels, as Juan had mentioned, by the time they neared the middle or the end of the book, they had already forgotten what had happened in
the beginning. Finally, more than half of the participants said they enjoyed reading Shakespeare.

Writing. Journal writing predominated in the mainstream English classes. Most students enjoyed the writing because it enabled them to choose their own topics and express themselves in ways consistent with their linguistic and experiential backgrounds. A few students preferred that the teacher provide writing prompts. Two students said they did little writing at all at their current grade level.

Most participants found writing difficult and less important to their language acquisition than either reading or vocabulary. Only Patricia felt that writing was the most important of all the components in the English curriculum. Among the most English fluent of all the participants, Patricia, in her language development, was much ahead of the other participants.

The majority of the other participants, roughly twelve of sixteen, still grappled with speaking and reading the language. Writing for them was the last and most difficult link in the language acquisition chain.

Grammar. With two noteworthy exceptions, Phuong and Abdul, participants spoke negatively about studying grammar. They did not understand why they were studying grammar or where it fit exactly in the larger literacy picture. Most found it plain boring. In most of their grammar instruction, teachers asked students to identify
parts of speech, phrases, clauses, gerunds, and so on. As with vocabulary instruction, teachers did not place the study of grammar in a particular context. Students completed rote activities mainly to prepare them for completing similar rote activities on weekly exams.

Phuong and Abdul appreciated grammar study, noting that it helped to explain key differences between their native language and English. In particular, Phuong talked about learning the English verb tense system, with which she continued to struggle.

Participants’ teachers taught prescriptive grammar, using traditional publications such as Warriner’s Grammar. I suspect that teachers often teach grammar this way to control student behavior and to simplify English language learning and instruction. Asking students to identify parts of speech is neat and clean, with right and wrong answers. But learning and using language well means experimenting, exploring, and trying out myriad ways to use language. Nothing soddens a student’s enthusiasm for language learning and appreciation more than teaching prescriptive grammar.

In the next section I will discuss the participants’ experiences with learning English within the broader context of their status as immigrants to this country. How have they fared in America? How successful were they at mediating sociocultural and ethnolinguistic differences? How has their English language learning enabled them to
"make it" in American schools and society? These are a few of the questions I will address.

Discussion

The Immigrant Experience in American Society

In looking back at how I have presented the participants' stories, I have asked myself: "Have I portrayed too heroically the journeys and travails participants faced as they immigrated to America, learned English, and acculturated into the society?" After all, everybody has a story or two about life's hardships. The immigrants, however, wrestled with and mediated social, cultural, economic, and linguistic differences that their native-born, native-speaking counterparts did not face.

I think back now - once again - to former high school colleagues in Los Angeles who had groaned that "the kids today were just not the same as they were twenty-five years ago." They were right. Twenty-five years ago, middle-class Jewish students comprised roughly 90% of the school population. Most went on to college. In the early 1990s, approximately seven out of ten students were of Hispanic origin. The rest of the population was divided equally among Asian, black, and white. Three out of four students who entered the high school as freshman never graduated, never mind go on to college. As the student body changed, some teachers changed their thinking and their methods to accommodate the change. Others did not, staying wedded to
methods they had used for years, with little regard for the educational needs of the changing populace.

The immigrant experience of coming to America and entering the schools is an essential American experience; part of the nature of our society. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Poles and Italians were the ones who "were not just the same." At the close of the twentieth century, it is the Vietnamese, the Dominican, and the Palestinian, those I had interviewed. In twenty-five or fifty or one hundred years, who will the next immigrants be? How will the schools and the society reflect and adapt to the inevitable changes wrought by the immigrant experience?

This study suggests that not much will change in the schools or in the English classroom. In spite of the changing demographics in the student population, many teachers continue to teach in ways that reflect the teacher's predilections and beliefs much more than the student's. Teachers will cling to what Rilke (in MacIntyre, p. 3) calls, "the gnarled fidelity of an old habit." Though language learning is neither simple nor linear (Kellerman, 1985), students may continue to expect lessons in prescriptive grammar and rote vocabulary drills. This kind of numbing pedagogy pervades the English teaching curriculum and undermines students' abilities to learn the English language more deeply, if not with more joy.
Why is this so? Why will teachers continue to teach what they’ve been teaching for years? Once teachers organize and present content in ways that keep students busy - productive - they have achieved a major goal in teaching: keeping students on task and quiet. Still in place in teachers’ and administrators’ thinking and practice is the unfortunate idea that a quiet and orderly classroom is a "good" classroom where true learning takes place.

Further, grammar and vocabulary exercises have right and wrong answers. They are easy to grade. Since evaluation of student work is the bane of English teachers, teachers seek ways to reduce the amount of time they spend in correcting papers. At one point during the interviews, English teachers came into the library to use a Scantron machine to electronically score their students’ final exams. The clicking sounds on the audio-tapes reminded me how some English teachers have worked towards perfecting a mechanical approach to teaching English. Yet, language learning is not so neat and clean. It is sprawling, complex, contextual, and boundless.

Another reason teachers might stick to their old ways of teaching is to ensure that they themselves will not have to take risks in learning something new. Teachers do not like to admit to students that they don’t know something. They see themselves as moral guardians of the English language, carrying on a venerable tradition of grammar
teaching and rote learning. "If it was good enough for
_______, then it's good enough for my current students."

In his book, Mike Rose (1989, p. 58) says of teachers
who encouraged his intellectual growth, "They liked books
and ideas, and they liked to talk about them in ways that
fostered growth rather than established dominance."
Teachers like to be in control. Those who would mechanize
the study of language by reducing it to rote grammar and
vocabulary exercises establish their dominance over
students by limiting students' language exploration and
expression. They act as gatekeepers to a broader and
richer world of language and in effect to the American
society itself.

People are judged - knowingly or unwittingly - by the
kind of language they use. Knowing how to read, speak,
listen, and write well, while it does not assure automatic
success in life, certainly provides greater opportunities
to make it in America. Those with superior literacy skills
will have more options. They are more likely to qualify
for college and after college get decent-paying jobs.
Generally, they will have more social and economic
opportunities than those restricted by poor literacy
skills.

"Making it" in America is tough enough, even for
native-speaking, native-born citizens. Having sure and
strong language skills acts as a powerful mediator in the
immigrants' quest to succeed in American society. When
participants talked about making it, their main concern was having a good job. They understood that making it in America, a capitalist society, meant earning enough money to get out or stay out of poverty. Many of them came to America to escape the poverty in their native countries. Restricting their opportunities to explore the English language to its fullest, by relying so much on rote language exercises, effectively reduces their potential and ability to succeed linguistically - and economically. English teachers, therefore, knowingly or unwittingly, act as gatekeepers to social class in American society.

Social and Cultural Identity

At the turn of the twentieth century, American schools focused on "the Americanization" of the immigrants. Immigrants were expected to learn what were considered American mores and values, rather than hold on to their native ones. Learning the English language, of course, was an integral part of Americanization.

Much has changed over the last one-hundred years. A more multi-cultural perspective has taken precedence over a melting pot idea of America. Everybody has a slightly different view of what it means to be an American, not to mention a Bostonian, or a Fall River High School student. In daily American social intercourse, we rub shoulders with people from all over the world. How much do we share a
vision of America and its future with each other? How much do the schools reflect or present that shared vision? To what extent does the English language - as teachers present it to students - shape that shared vision?

I think schools and English teachers genuinely try their best to present a shared vision of America. But America is both a promised and divided land. To the immigrants it is and has been historically a promised land. Millions of people have immigrated here and have made better lives for themselves and their families than they had in their native countries.

America is also a divided land. People segregate according to ethnicity and class. They choose not to integrate, in part because integration is often forced or mandated, as with school busing. I remember one tenth-grade English class I taught. I told students they could sit anywhere they chose. Blacks sat with blacks, Asians with Asians, Hispanics with Hispanics, and whites with whites. Even Hispanic women sat with other Hispanic women while the men sat with the men. I asked the class about their segregating themselves. They were not bothered at all by it. They had good reasons to segregate. The Hispanics, for example, could talk in Spanish to each other. I think it’s fair to say that those in the other segregated groups spoke the same language with each other, too. Was this a "bad" thing, especially since they seemed
perfectly comfortable with the arrangement? I don’t know. It reflected the larger society.

Each American defines his or her own vision of what it means to be an American. We share a common language but the language has not shaped a common vision. Americans find it easier to identify with those whose class or ethnicity most closely resembles their own rather than identify with those who share common ideas, interests, or pursuits. Participants’ accounts of their experiences bear this out. Elena, for example, even though she did not want to be left out on the margins of the English language and society, preferred to be with her Spanish-speaking friends rather than with white people. Her view of America differed markedly from her native-speaking peers.

In spite of, and perhaps because of, our size as a nation America remains a provincial country. People have provincial attitudes. The "melting pot" idea of America is in words only. America lacks a national conscience and identity, part of our legacy. We share a common language, taught in similar ways in schools, but it has not transformed an "American experience" into something we can all relate to. I attribute this in part to our selective failure of memory. We are out of touch with our history, as an immigrant nation, as a nation that enslaved blacks from our earliest beginnings, as a nation of oppressed and oppressors. We have forgotten where we came from, how we arose as a nation, and that amnesia is partly what keeps us
separate, segregated. We do not want to deal with the uglier or seamier sides of our history or see it as a collective history. If it has not directly or adversely affected us, we pay only tacit attention to it. In keeping history itself so neatly segregated from our collective experience we have not learned how to empathize truly with our fellow citizens. We stand apart, at either end of the bridge.

We read the stories of Frederick Douglass, Geronimo, Holden Caulfield, and Sally Ride but somehow fail to see the links between their experiences as Americans and our own. Whether we are from Brooklyn or Watts or Peoria we are unable or unwilling to see what those places and those who live there have in common with each other. The language of Brooklyn is not the language of Watts or Peoria. As Americans we accept that. We think it’s alright.

Had the schools "Americanized" - educated - participants sufficiently so that they would succeed in America, regardless if they lived in Brooklyn, Watts, or Peoria? The answer is yes and no. Some teachers, to borrow Rose’s phrases, "fostered growth" by offering reading and writing choices; others "established dominance" by asking students to identify gerunds and objective complements.

Even though most of the participants will graduate from their respective high schools, the larger questions
remain as to just how successful the participants will be as they head to college and the greater American society. Would the participants go on to become lifelong learners, better and better readers and writers, teachers, lawyers, political leaders, and not just cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and house painters? Would participants, who felt as though they were really making it in American schools, go on to make it in American society, for their own and the larger society’s benefit?

Those who will be the most successful are those who would succeed no matter how or what they were taught in school. They will make it by common sense, ingenuity, and persistence. They will find ways to overcome any language barriers imposed by their own abilities or their English teachers’ methods of instruction. Others will not be so fortunate. In spite of their determination to succeed, some will not be able to overcome their limited English abilities or their English teacher’s instruction. The Vietnamese, in particular, because of the way they speak English, will face both language and (no doubt) ethnic discrimination.

I want to be careful here not to lay the problem completely on the English teachers’ doorsteps. Many of them create wonders in the classroom, making no excuses based on the kinds of materials they have or the students they teach. Immigrants to this country, though, are typically marginalized or excluded from the mainstream.
Landing here does not mean fitting in right away. The sacrifice that immigrants to this country make for their children is well-known. No amount of English language instruction, no matter how well presented, will propel the immigrant into mainstream American society months or even years after their arrival, if ever. Many other cultural, economic, and social forces restrict immigrants' acculturation or assimilation into the larger society. Language is a great mediator but not the only one.

The Politics of Naming and Labeling

Throughout this study I have used many different labels to describe participants, including Limited English proficient, language minority, and second language learners. I have also noted throughout participants' social, linguistic, cultural, and to a lesser extent, economic differences in contrast to their teachers, fellow students, and even to me. While interviewing enabled me to elicit subjective experiences, labeling participants as language minority, ESL, LEP, and so forth diminishes the participants' identity and experience. Pedro and Elena became Spanish-speaking, Puerto Rican migrants. Ling and Thuyen became Eastern, third-language speakers. Terms such as immigrant carry such negative connotations these days, (not unlike the post-World War I days when California
Senator James Phelan delivered his inflammatory anti-Japanese proclamations on the floor of the United States Senate.

On the one hand, labeling the participants has enabled me to talk about their experiences with some frames of reference. By talking about language minority students, I have been able to focus on a group of students with particular characteristics in the broader context of the entire student population. Obviously, not all students are the same.

On the other hand, labels can stick. Identifying a student as a language minority student or a special education student might stigmatize that student for his or her entire educational life - and beyond. Once a language minority student, as it were, always a language minority student.

What’s important to keep in mind is that every student is an individual. In Chapter 4 I talked about Ling’s account of her journey from Vietnam to the United States. Her poetic - and painful - story reminded me never to mistake a person’s intelligence for the way they speak, especially when my native language is their second or third language. The image, reflected in how Ling looks or how she speaks is not the reality. Contrary to a popular advertisement, the image is not everything. It is only a small part of a much larger and more complex picture and indeed may misrepresent altogether who the person really
is. The facile name or label will not do. Interviewing participants helped me get beyond the labels to discover who they were as individuals.

Shakespeare: The Language of Play(s)
in the Proximal Zone

Participants in this study have shown that they are eager and smart enough to learn English in all its glory. Shakespeare was one of their favorites. Why Shakespeare? Why would language minority students enjoy reading Shakespeare? Shakespeare's English is Renaissance English, the English language in full flower. And for Shakespeare the play was much the thing. In plays he could reach a broad audience. He wrote for the groundlings as well the aristocrats. He makes sense to language majority and language minority students.

Shakespeare's language challenges students. Participants in this study often read aloud or enacted scenes from his plays, further encouraging them to take risks, an important aspect of language acquisition. Teachers gave participants specific scenes or speeches to prepare for a class presentation. Participants could rehearse the language again and again. And because they were portraying a character who spoke the language, they could practice it at once with low anxiety and high self-esteem. Enacting the language from the play enabled participants to employ a full range of linguistic and extralinguistic cues - gesturing with arms, pacing, raising
the eyebrows - to further give meaning to the language and enhance comprehension.

Many of the most profound lines in Shakespeare are lines filled with one-syllable words. In one-syllable words lie the roots, the heart and soul, of the English language. "To be or not to be...." "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life and thou no breath at all?"

Characters bare all in these speeches, where the rest is Polonius or silence. Participants grasped the language’s - and life’s - meaning in its most elemental form and nature.

Their citing him as one of their favorite authors was their way of saying, "We are smart and capable. Don’t dumb down the curriculum. Don’t mistake our 'accent' for our abilities." With proper guidance from their English teachers, students were able through Shakespeare’s words to reach Vygotsky’s (1986) "proximal zone," the next level in their English language development.

Given the opportunities to excel, as their experiences with Shakespeare attest, students will rise to the occasion. Participants liked Shakespeare because reading his plays aloud enabled them to fully explore human emotion, intellect, and behavior. Why should we ever believe that language written so artfully and meant to be read aloud and performed would fail to enchant, fill with emotions, and reveal human nature in its profundity?

Teaching rote grammar and vocabulary exercises (just as a contrast) evokes none of the ideas or the passions
that Shakespeare's language does. How many sentences truly can one read from a grammar book without beginning to think at some conscious level: this is the English language? Would an English teacher, who has probably gone into English teaching in the first place for the love of language and literature, consciously choose the leaden prose in the grammar book over Shakespeare?

Immigrants are highly motivated to succeed in school and in society. They set high expectations for themselves, part of their surviving here. They prefer Shakespeare to Warriner and will learn more about language and life from reading *Romeo and Juliet* than they will from identifying noun clauses and objective complements (see Rose, 1989, p. 109-111).

**Recommendations**

**Sociocultural Context of Literacy**

Print is everywhere in our lives: public signs, such as road signs, bus or train signs which tell destinations, advertisements, food labels, and of course, newspapers, magazines, books, computers, and even television. Where can we go, in fact, without seeing some form of print that informs what we do or how we interact in the society we live? Skilled readers and writers contribute vitally to the vigor of a democracy. In addition to sounding out letters, phonemes, whole words, and decoding as they first begin to read, and finally creating meaning out of words
and sentences in context, students (and their) teachers need to consider the sociocultural contexts of print (Nurss & Hough, 1992).

Of specific note here is the classroom context. The classrooms where students are taught and how they are taught in those classrooms influence students' notions of literacy and the development of literacy skills (Gutierrez, 1995). Those who have traveled from one country to another know what the term "culture shock" means. While second language learners' may not experience the shock so quickly or dramatically as the traveler, in the mainstream classroom they may certainly experience profound dissonances in culture and language from their native orientation. Schools and schoolteachers need to adopt a more sociocultural and ethnolinguistic perspective of teaching and learning, especially to an immigrant of bilingual, bicultural population. The way schools - schoolteachers - teach language and evaluate literacy might differ considerably from students' ways of learning and using the language of their home communities. The communities students come from and how those communities use language affect students' abilities to succeed in academic settings (Heath, 1983). With immigrants, especially the Vietnamese, who come from the Eastern part of the world and speak English as their second, third, or fourth language, the gap widens even further between their "home" literacy experiences and those in mainstream English
classrooms. How schools and students mediate the differences between home and school literacies affect students' participation in the classroom and the larger society.

Recommendations for Secondary English Teachers

In making my recommendations to secondary English teachers, I keep one eye on the realities of teaching middle or high school English to 100 or 150 students or more. I have taught English in middle and high school and know how demanding that can be. Teaching English to language minority students means passing along language in its richness and complexity to those whose native language differs in most cases from their English - and native English-speaking - teachers. The sense language minority students make of the English language and how they perceive the English-speaking world comes in part from the English teacher. That is a great responsibility for the English teacher. I trust that my recommendations respect the work of English teachers and strike a balance between theory and practice.

Talking and Listening. Teachers are often so busy talking, they do not listen carefully to their students. Participants suggested that teachers talk less and listen more, as in the following excerpt:

I don’t know, the teacher is real good. He came here because the teacher we were going to have had an operation on her leg and she never came [back]. The new teacher is nice with us, but
that class is boring. I don't know. I get there, kind of sleepy, [he] is just talking, talking, talking, never stop talking. [I think to myself], "You rest your voice, you know, give [us] a chance to do a journal or something." He's like, no, he keeps talking, every day, Monday, Tuesday, until Friday, he's always talking, talking, talking....

JG: What does he talk about?

Juan: He talks about a lot of stuff. He talks about the books. He knows Huck Finn, that book, he knows it all, even the pages for the quiz and all. Everything he knows. He's real nice with us but he's always talking, talking. Sometimes my friend goes to sleep and [the teacher] he's like, 'Bruno, wake up!' [Bruno says], 'Alright, alright.' He's like this, real sleepy, looking at him. He was talking, talking. He's good, you know, but he talks a lot....

If teachers talk, they are not listening. More teacher talk means less student talk. Talk is essential to language acquisition and academic achievement. As Ling has stated, "You have to listen to me." Listening enables the teacher to learn more about their students (see Paley, 1990; Delpit, 1988). It also demonstrates to the students that teachers care about them. By listening to students, we may also be able to find out more who they are, where they come from, and what they carry - emotionally, linguistically, culturally, and intellectually.

Teachers generally talk too much, as Juan has indicated: "Nice guy, but... talking, talking, talking...."

Empathy and Caring. Listening promotes empathy. When teachers listen to their students' stories, they lay their assumptions aside and hear how it feels to walk in another's shoes. Perhaps the child - the student - wants...
to talk about something different from a past participle.

What then? As Weinstein and Fantini have noted:

Concerns, wants, interests, fears, anxieties, joys, and other emotions and reactions to the world contain the seeds of 'motivation.' Dealing with the child's inner concerns constitutes recognition of, and respect for, him. By validating his experiences and feelings, we tell the child, in essence, that he *does* know something [original emphasis]. (1970, p. 28)

I am not suggesting that we turn the classroom into a psychotherapy laboratory, listening to every student's every concern or interest. That is not realistic and not the main purpose of schooling. I suggest more of a balance, however, between teacher talking and teacher listening, focusing on students' cognitive as well as emotional needs. Teachers need to view the student as a whole person, with a history, an autobiography, an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual life.

*In the Content Area: Reading and Vocabulary.*

Generally, English teachers need to understand the developmental and contextual nature of language acquisition. They need to integrate an instructional skills and a whole language approach to learning language, not one or the other.

One of the most poignant moments in all the interviews came during the second interview with Phuong. I had asked Phuong to talk about the transition from ESL to the mainstream. She talked about letting go of the close ties she had formed with ESL teachers. She spoke about her friendships with other language minority students,
including her Vietnamese speaking peers. She recalled that her mainstream English teachers read aloud much less than her ESL teachers. The loss of the resonant human voice disoriented Phuong once again. Just when she thought she was getting the hang of things, she had to learn how to proceed without the sound of the human voice. Students derive greater meaning from the language when it is read aloud.

Specifically, English language teachers need to contextualize vocabulary instruction in ways that connect to students' language experience and background. Reading and talking promote language acquisition more than the intentional teaching of vocabulary (Ellis, 1994; Krashen, 1989). Teachers should allow students more time to read and provide works which relate to students' cultural and linguistic experiences. Reading aloud routinely from selected works, including poetry, plays, novels, essays, and newspapers, should be a fundamental part of the English language curriculum. Mainstream teachers should design activities which encourage students to talk to each other, especially language minority students with their native speaking peers. A "noisy" class, where students talk to each other about academic content, not just banter about the day's events, is a productive one. Many of the participants mentioned how important talking was to their language acquisition.
I realize that many participants spoke about the importance of vocabulary and I think it is possible to give them all the vocabulary they want or need in ways which would enhance their learning. Indeed, as Krashen (1989) has suggested, second language learners learn vocabulary more by reading than by direct or intentional instruction. Teachers could provide more culturally and linguistically appropriate reading - books, poetry, trade magazines, newspapers - for students to read and take the vocabulary from those books.

Writing and Grammar. Journal writing seemed to enhance students' motivation and their fluency, an important first step. How then to respond to students' writing in ways which further promote literacy and increase their understanding of literature and themselves? Promising research (Holmes & Moulton, 1997; Reyes, 1991) advocates the use of dialogue journals. Teachers' responses in dialogue journals are one way to model certain aspects of writing, for example, using commas or writing a topic sentence in a paragraph.

Teachers need to understand the developmental nature of language learning and the place of writing in students' development. Some of the participants who had been in mainstream English classes for one year were among other language minority students in the same class who had been mainstreamed for six or seven years. Native speakers also attended these classes. Needless to say, one student's
writing abilities or desires in a class so heterogeneously
grouped should not be the mark of another’s. Writing plays
a vital part in students’ continued academic success and
personal growth and understanding. Teachers need to find
ways to link the various components in the English
curriculum so that writing remains an integral and
integrated part. For example, let a written response to a
question become the "Text" for discussion. Instead of
merely asking students what their opinion was of the film,
Platoon, ask them to write one paragraph about the use of
language in the film and how it added or detracted from the
story. Finally, teachers’ continual assessment of
students’ writing - not every word they write, but selected
pieces - enables teachers to tailor instruction to best
meet students’ developmental needs.

Grammar instruction need not be abandoned altogether.
Like vocabulary instruction, it should be taught within the
context of a play or story or poem that students are
reading. As Koshi (1996) has pointed out, teaching grammar
holistically, through Socratic questioning, enables
students to answer higher order, critical thinking
questions. It gets them beyond merely identifying parts of
speech. They also learn to formulate grammar rules
inductively. Teaching grammar holistically provides
students with tools to discover how English grammar works
and how English grammar compared to their own native
language grammar. Generally, a Socratic approach raises
their "grammar awareness." I am not arguing against grammar-as-content in the English curriculum but rather the method of teaching it. Teaching grammar more Socratically enables students to get off the ground floor in their thinking critically about the language and how it actually works.

Knowing even a little bit of students' native language aids in shaping instruction. I have shown this in relation to two of the participants who, unlike their peers, wanted grammar instruction. Knowing, for example, that the Vietnamese language does not have morphological markers on their verbs to indicate time, gives the teacher specific objectives to pursue when teaching the native speaking Vietnamese students. As Phuong and Abdul have attested, a bit of well-placed and knowledgeable grammar instruction, might spell the difference in a student's deeper understanding and appreciation of the language.

**Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs**

Teacher education programs should encourage and promote student centered learning, where teachers spend less time talking and more time listening to students to better assess students' needs and abilities. As "listening" assignments, students in preservice methods courses could interview language minority students and present their "findings" to the larger class. I have used such interviews in classes I have taught and preservice
and inservice teachers both find the interviews powerful and illuminating.

English methods courses in teacher education programs must devote part of the syllabus to second language learning and pedagogy, if not an even broader prospectus which includes historical and cultural perspectives. With the rising immigrant and language minority student populations in the schools, especially Asian and Hispanic, teacher education programs can no longer send out English teachers unprepared to teach such a population (see Gay, 1993).

In their book, How English Teachers Get Taught, Smagorinsky and Whiting (1995) conducted a survey of roughly 100 syllabi of preservice English methods courses from colleges and universities around the country. A review of representative syllabi and books used in the courses showed scant evidence of addressing language minority issues in preservice English methods courses. I noted that only one book, Language Diversity and Writing Instruction (Farr & Daniels, 1986), listed in a bibliographic section entitled "Sociocultural Perspectives on Learning," referred to language minority students.

The omission of materials - and I am led to believe - the English methods pedagogy in preservice courses nationally, glares. Imagine the language minority students peering into these English methods courses to view their prospective teachers, as if in that mirror once again, and
not see themselves reflected. Teacher educators can no longer ignore the rising tide. Excellent and readable research articles, books, and teaching methods for language minority students abound to support such changes. I have noted many of these throughout this study.

English teacher educators, in presenting more contextual, approaches to teaching English, should at the same time explore with preservice students their beliefs about teaching reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. Teacher educators should question students' beliefs - and their own. Knowing what we know about second language acquisition, about teaching vocabulary and grammar, for instance, why revert to teaching vocabulary out of context or continue to ask students to merely identify parts of speech? Students need to reflect more not only on how they teach English in a particular way but also on why they teach it that way. By examining beliefs and continually reflecting on teaching practices, teacher educators and their students might be able to make some headway in examining or rooting out old, habitual practices. Because habits require little or no thought, looking closely and critically at them will clear the way for new thoughts. The eventual goal, once again, is to "foster growth rather than establish dominance" (Rose, 1989, p. 58).

Caring. Teaching attributes such as caring, (patience and humor, too) depends on the individual. So can caring be taught in teacher education programs? I have asked this
question to several classes of students, both preservice and inservice students. As with so many other educational issues, the answer is yes and no, depending on who I ask or who responds. Some students, for example, stated flatly that caring should never be taught at a workshop. Others felt strongly that unless caring were taught as part of school reform, the reforms would mean little. My own view is that most people who enter teaching in the first place are caring people. Reading articles about and discussing caring in teacher education programs would help raise people's consciousness about the issue. Whether raising consciousness aids in making people more caring is open to question. Some reading and discussion, though, is better than none. More abstract or less "teachable" than specific reading or writing methods, caring, patience, and humor deserve a closer look in teacher education programs.

Other Recommendations: Collaborations Among Teachers and School Personnel

ESL teachers and mainstream English teachers need to talk to each other about students and pedagogy (see Allen & Rigg, 1989). Shared information about students informs planning and instruction. This collaboration may also ease the transition for language minority students as they move from one class to another. Many participants commented on the differences between ESL and mainstream teachers. ESL teachers communicated much more regularly with their
students and with each other, but not with mainstream teachers, so far as I could tell.

With increasing language minority students in the schools, especially in the cities, all the faculty and administration should be involved in collaborative efforts to ensure the social and academic success of this growing minority population (see Clegg, 1996). Other collaborations among students, teachers, teacher educators and researchers have demonstrated the value of caring in collaborative relationships. Mercado (1993) conducted ethnographic research with a sixth-grade school teacher and the sixth-grade students. The students themselves, as part of the ethnographic team, presented their research at national conferences. Mercado noted that the collective activity helped build mutual confidence and self-esteem, helped each other grow, and worked to make a difference in the lives of others.

Implications for Further Research

As I have mentioned all along, thirteen of the sixteen participants were immigrants to the United States. While all participants were second language learners, immigrants' experiences differed in many ways from native-born participants. For example, the United States was homeland to native-born participants, whereas the immigrants had to make it their home.
Further, I had chosen participants from both Eastern and Western cultures. Though I saw the differences among participants as part of the beauty of the study, in future research I would focus on the Asian - perhaps just the Vietnamese - immigrants. The Asian - and Hispanic - populations continue to rise, especially in city schools. That alone is enough reason to continue research with the Vietnamese population.

The Vietnamese (and Korean) participants in this study encouraged me to interview more students. I felt that they understood well just how much their stories meant to me and to those who would teach them. They wanted to be part of the research, as Soo-Kim said in her closing remarks:

[I hope] my interview could help you. I’m not sure. If you interview many students, you [are] going to get what’s the most important for the ESL student, the hard time they have. Then you’re going to get involved in what you should do for ESL students. So keep working on it. That’s all I can say.

They provided invaluable insights into their language and culture that showed that they held keys to their own acculturation and language development. Not that the others did not. But my heart leaned towards the Asians, the Vietnamese. Why?

I have always sought ways to understand and heal within myself and others the deep wounds incurred by America’s war in Vietnam. What balm could I use to soothe that tender part of the national psyche so torn open by the war? In a small way, interviewing the Vietnamese helped
reconcile that bloody chapter in American and Vietnamese history, for them and for me. Vietnam was never home for Americans. Could the Vietnamese find a home here? My interviewing them to learn as much as possible about their antecedent experiences, their culture, language, beliefs, academic abilities and goals - to better teach them in our schools - was one way for us to close the door on a harrowing past and open it for a promising future.

**Closing Comments**

In the preceding four chapters I have detailed the experiences of sixteen language minority high school students, from their early childhood through their current year in high school. I have looked at their early experiences in schools, their journey or migration to the United States, their first beginning to learn English both in and out of school, and finally their experiences in mainstream English classes. I have analyzed and interpreted participants' school experiences particularly, especially how they first began to learn or acquire English in ESL classes and how they built upon that knowledge as they entered and participated in mainstream English classes. I have viewed the interviewing process with students as both an empowering and enabling experience. When was the last time anyone requested of the participants that they sit down for three hours and tell their side of the story about their lives and schooling?
I wanted readers to know how it felt to journey from Vietnam to Brockton as Ling had, uttering those first few letters and syllables of a new language as Pedro had, failing that first year in the mainstream as Patricia and David had, delighting in the reading of *Romeo and Juliet*, as so many of the participants had, and finally graduating from high school and heading to college as Ling, Juan, Soo-Kim, and Thuyen had.

Using in-depth interviewing as a methodology, I spoke to each participant roughly three hours. Three hours obviously does not an in-depth biography make of anybody’s life. I felt fortunate to elicit brief biographical sketches of their individual lives, intimations of their larger, greater selves.

Throughout the interviews, I always wondered about the elusive role of memory. Memories, even as or even if they evoke the filtered truths of one’s life elude even the most pursed, devoted, and ardent whistler attempting to hail memories from the past. As we went along, I knew they wanted to talk to me just as much as I wanted to hear what they had to say. I also felt that they knew I wanted to hear what they had to say just as much as they wanted to talk.

Inasmuch as I had asked them to make sense of their own stories, I have taken on that task myself as analyzer, interpreter, and writer of their experiences. "Every word is a microcosm of human consciousness," Vygotsky (1986, p. 217.
256) has stated. If that is true - or at least an acceptable hypothesis - then each word participants shared with me reflected the meaning they created of their lives, or the stories of their lives, even as the words came out of their mouths. Embedded in their brief sketches lie intimations of who they were, as they grew up in South Vietnam, Korea, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Israel, and New York City, attended schools, journeyed to America, learned English, acculturated, and graduated to the next grade or place in life. If what Vygotsky said is true, then people may mask who they are, but not hide completely.

Human lives do not lend themselves so neatly to systematic analysis. What I have provided here are glimpses of students' experiences, as they had provided me with glimpses of their lives. I have listened, read, and carefully chosen words from their stories which I thought best represented who the participants were, the essence of their experiences. I have tried to present their experiences in a way that best reflected what the participants themselves felt most strongly about reading, writing, talking, vocabulary, grammar, Shakespeare, Stephen King, peers, teachers, school, schooling, their native countries, the United States, goals, life, and themselves. This study is their stories through my eyes and ears and mind. Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data, like teaching itself, combines the best of science and art. In
presenting, analyzing, and interpreting participants’ stories I trust that I have clearly portrayed their views of making it in America: how tough, how tenuous, how English language dependent it is; and, that I have done justice to them as individuals, to their stories, and to science and art.
APPENDIX A

IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES BY DECADE:
1821-30 THROUGH 1981-90
FIGURE 3.1  Immigration to the United States by Decade: 1821-30 through 1981-90

(Fix & Zimmerman, 1993)

Figure A.1  Immigration to the United States by Decade: 1821-1830 through 1981-90
APPENDIX B

IMMIGRANTS ADMITTED BY COUNTRY OF REGION OF BIRTH,
1980 AND 1985
Figure B.1 Immigrants Admitted by Country or Region of Birth, FY 1980

Figure B.2 Immigrants Admitted by Country or Region of Birth, FY 1985
APPENDIX C

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM
Dear Student,

With respect and great interest in your experiences as a student, I am asking you to allow me to conduct three sixty-minute, audiotaped interviews with you as part of my research for my doctoral program in education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The focus of my study is what it is like for students whose first language is not English to be in a mainstream English classroom. I am seeking students who have been in mainstream classes less than seven years. Your experience will help me to understand the complex issues students whose native language is not English face in mainstream English classrooms.

I and one other person will listen to and transcribe the audiotapes. We both understand and will assure the confidential nature of the interviews. Parts of these interviews will be used in my dissertation and shared with my committee. I may also use excerpts from the interviews for publication of articles of books, or for presentations at educational conferences.

There is no payment of money for your participation. Possible risk factors from your participation are no greater than normal daily activity. Your participation is purely voluntary. While I may ask your English teacher for his or her assistance in selecting prospective participants, your participation in the interviews will not affect your grades in your English class or in any of your other classes.

All participants will remain anonymous, and all names of persons, schools, school districts, and cities mentioned will be replaced with pseudonyms in transcripts. You have the right to withdraw from the interviews at any point up to two weeks after the third interview as well as the right to review any portion of the tapes and to request removal of any portion of the tapes that you do not want to share. You also have the right to review the transcripts from the interviews and to request removal of any portion of the transcripts that you do not want to share. If I create a profile of you as a participant, I will share that profile with you to verify the accuracy of the portrayal. This request must be made within two weeks of your review of the transcripts. If for any reason you are not satisfied with the process, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice.

If you are under 18 years of age, please review this consent form with your parent(s) or legal guardian and ask them to sign their consent for your participation. If your parent(s) or legal guardian do not read or understand
English, I will gladly provide a translation of this form in their native language. Also, I will explain any parts of this consent form that you may not clearly understand. Thank you for your consideration and your participation in this study.

My signature indicates that I have read and understood the above information and I have decided to participate in three sixty-minute interviews. If I am under 18 years of age, I have reviewed this form with my parent(s) or legal guardian, and their signature(s) indicate that they have also read and understood this consent form and agree to my participation.

Signature of Participant, Date __________________________

Signature of Participant’s Parent or Legal Guardian, Date __________________________

Signature of Interviewer, Date __________________________

John Gabriel

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